

**MANO RIVER UNION YOUTH TRAINING SEMINAR
ON PEACE BUILDING, CONFLICT RESOLUTION &
CHILDREN RIGHTS**

ORGANIZED BY THE WEST AFRICAN YOUTH NETWORK
(WAYN)

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IN COLLABORATION WITH

**UNITED NATIONS OF YOUTH-SIERRA LEONE NETWORK
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WITH SUPPORT FROM

**THE OPEN SOCIETY INITIATIVE OF WEST AFRICA
(OSIWA)**

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*“ENNOBLING THE MINDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE
FOR
THE BUILDING OF A CULTURE OF PEACE”*

BACKGROUND

The West African Youth Network (WAYN) is a regional youth empowerment organization established by four young people from West Africa in March 2001. WAYN seeks to serve as an advocacy mechanism and Public Policy Voice for the cause of young people in West Africa as well as to empower young people to get involve in practical projects geared toward peace building, human rights, conflict resolution, good governance and HIV/AIDS Prevention.

WAYN acts as Regional Focal Point for the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers. The Coalition Secretariat, which is based in London, focuses on the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers. WAYN is presently developing a Regional Mechanism on Child Soldiers inline with the Coalition and the Child Protection Unit of the Economic Community of West African States

WAYN is also an active member of the African Youth Foundation and UNOY Peace-builders in The Netherlands, the African Network of Young Peace builders established in Franschoek, Cape Town, South Africa in 2001 by youth leaders across the continent of Africa. WAYN is also an affiliate of the Child Protection Unit of the Economic Community of West African States and has been involved in a number of activities aimed at ensuring the involvement of young people in activities designed to ensure their participation in issues affecting their lives.

The United Nations of Youth (UNOY) Sierra Leone Network is an independent non-governmental organization established in 1992 with 106 affiliate youth groups across Sierra Leone; UNOY Sierra Leone is geared toward building a culture of peace through community development programmes and institutional capacity building, conflict transformation training and reconciliation services for potential youth leaders and community based organizations in Sierra Leone.

UNOY-SL Network in consultation with UNOY Foundation in the Netherlands now provides technical and professional support for personal and professional goals of youth leaders committed to intercultural and multicultural peace for sustainability.

INTRODUCTION

The West African Youth Network, in collaboration with the United Nations of Youth (UNOY) Sierra Leone Network, and with support from the Open Society Initiative of West Africa, organized the first Mano River Union Youth Training Seminar on Peace Building and Conflict Resolution in Freetown, Sierra Leone from 27th July-3rd August 2003.

The Seminar brought together about thirty five youth leaders from Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone aged 15-35 years (Community leaders, students, journalists, peace builders, and human rights advocates). It was conducted in the perspective of Peace Building, Leadership and NGO/Project Management and was a West African Youth Initiative for the 2001-2010 - UN International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the children of the world.

The seminar was a multiplying effect of the West African Youth Training Seminar, which was organized by the African Network of Young Peace Builders in November 2002 in Cotonou, Benin. Interestingly, the idea for the seminar was conceived in Calavi, Benin after a hectic training seminar and during a conversation between Emmanuel Roberts of UNOY-Sierra Leone Network and Richelieu Allison of the West African Youth Network, both of whom were roommates.

Conference Objectives:

- A. To Provide a forum for young people from Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone, active in the fields of peace building and human rights, to come together and share their experiences to improve the effectiveness of their work.
- B. To provide training to young people in the Mano River Union in Conflict Resolution and prevention, Human right education, Advocacy, Project Management, Peace Education and innovative methods of preventing HIV/AIDS.
- C. To plan strategies on how young people can improve the effectiveness of their work to promote peace and defend the rights of children.
- D. To develop the Mano River Union Youth Parliament to serve as an effective advocacy tool for youth mobilization, peace and the rights of young people in the sub-region.
- E. To promote peace, love and reconciliation and foster peace amongst member states of the MRU.
- F. To strengthen and empower youth organizations

The seminar was originally scheduled to be held in Monrovia, Liberia. But was transferred to Freetown, Sierra Leone due to security concerns, it is worth mentioning that the organization of the seminar was also marred with lots of constraints due to renewed fighting in Monrovia, Liberia, the Headquarters of the Regional Secretariat of the West African Youth Network .

Owing largely to the incessant fighting in the Liberian Capital, the offices of WAYN were completely vandalized, resulting in the looting of some of the original materials and stationeries purchased for the seminar, as well as the displacement of some of the selected Liberian participants and organizers. Some of the participants were constrained to leave Monrovia for Freetown, Sierra Leone ahead of schedule, to escape the fighting, having received their plane tickets earlier, while others, who have also received their tickets, could not be located up to the time of the seminar, and at some point in time, as they were trapped behind rebel lines.

The MRU Youth Peace Caravan, which commenced with a Youth Peace Mission to Liberia, was also hastily abandoned to the upsurge in fighting. The situation was further compounded with the closure of banking institutions in Monrovia on two separate occasions leading to the constant travel back to Monrovia from Freetown by members of the Organizing Committee to secure funds from the bank for the seminar. It was on one of these occasions that the Coordinator of the Seminar got stranded in Monrovia for about ten days as a result of the intensification in the fighting. It must be noted that at the time of the writing of this report, most members of the Liberian Delegation was still stranded in Sierra Leone while the Regional Secretariat of WAYN has been temporarily transferred to Freetown.

However, despite these constraints and initial setbacks, but owing largely to the commitment of the Organizing Committee, the seminar finally got underway in the beautiful city of Freetown, capital of Sierra Leone, from 27th July-3rd August 2003. The Seminar did meet its principal goal, providing training for young people in the area of peace education, human rights, HIV/AIDS Prevention, conflict resolution, networking and coordination amongst young people in the Mano River Union. Participants laid the ground work for the MRU Youth Parliament and a Sub regional Mechanism on Child Soldiers.

The Parliament has its overarching priority to mobilize young people for sustainable development activities and preventing the recruitment and use of child soldiers by armed forces and groups.

This Report seeks to present a bird-eye view of all activities of the MRU Youth Training Seminar. We expressed the hope that this seminar will serve as a source of inspiration to build peace in the Mano River Union as well as to revitalize the structures of the Mano River Union and ensure the involvement of young people in decision making activities of the MRU.

DAY ONE: SUNDAY, 27th JULY 2003

SESSION: OVERVIEW OF TRAINING CONFERENCE

A formal Opening Session, which was scheduled to be addressed by **Dr. Dennis Bright, Honorable Minister of Youth and Sports, Republic of Sierra Leone**, was cancelled due to the delay in the arrival of participants from Conakry, Guinea.

However, an informal program was held in the evening with introductory statements from various speakers and organizers of the training conference, at which time, participants were given the opportunity to introduce themselves. This session facilitated by **Richelieu M.**

Allison, Regional Director, West African Youth Network (WAYN) and the Coordinator of the Seminar, who give an introduction of the conference proceeding with emphasis on the challenges to build an effective Culture of Peace in the Mano River Union and to further empower young people to serve as catalysts for change in their communities. He further challenged his compatriots to get off the fence and become peace builders as the future of the Mano River Union depending upon young people. He praised the **Open Society Initiative of West Africa** for providing the necessary funds for the seminar as well as the **Child Protection Unit of the Economic Community of West African States**, through its Head, Mr. Ibrahima Diouf, and the Child Protection Unit of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone for providing technical support to the seminar.

The Head of the Guinean Delegation, Mr. Thierno Diallo, lamented the ugly situation in the Mano River Union and stressed the need for young people to harness their energies and resources for the building of a formidable culture of peace in the war stricken region.

Mr. Emmanuel J Roberts, Programme Coordinator, UNOY-SL Network commended the West African Youth Network for initiating the seminar and welcomed the participants from Liberia and Guinea to Sierra Leone on behalf of his organization and the youths of Sierra Leone. He expressed satisfaction in collaborating with the West African Youth Network and said that it was a challenge for young people to initiate positive interventions that will address issues for human rights violations, HIV/AIDS, poverty, and conflict resolution in the Mano River Union. He then explained to the participants the Program Objectives of the United Nations of Youth Foundation in the Netherlands.

A Statement by **Ms. Christiana Clarke, Program Officer for Africa of the International Secretariat of Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers** was read on her behalf by **Ms. Karina Varfley** of Liberia. She regretted her absence, due to commitments in the Great Lakes, but reminded the participants about the gross violations of the rights of child soldiers in the region and called for a collective effort in resolving the problem. She then explained the work of the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers and invited the participants to join the global initiatives of the Coalition.

Handouts from the Coalition, including its Membership form, basics information on Child Soldiers, Newsletters and the Optional Protocols on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, were later distributed to the participants on behalf of the organization.

DAY TWO: MONDAY, 28th JULY 2003

Ground rules and formation of working groups:

Ground Rules were set by the participants with penalties in a form of an 'energizer' for participants who would break the ground rules; working groups for daily tasks to be carried out in the workshop were identified by the participants-Reporting, Fixing the room/welfare committees, time keeping/monitoring etc. Participants volunteered to undertake each of the tasks identified.

Morning Session: *Perception of a Peace Builder*

Objectives:

To enable participants acquire skills in planning a Peace Education Programmes in their respective countries and organizations.

During the session participants was given the opportunity to brainstorm and share experience on their perception of peace builders. Participants were also asked about the kinds of youth interventions that can contribute to peace building processes and how would such intervention be duplicated, replicated and strengthened.

Most participants responded:

- That the MRU Youth Training Seminar was the first step in galvanizing the necessary support amongst youth in the sub region in peace building;
- That the MRU Youth Union Youth Parliament could serve as a catalyst for youth involvement in peace building and that this intervention be supported and strengthened;

This session was summarized by the participants together with the facilitator, Mr. Richelieu Allison and a presentation was made to the large group.

- The moral rules for coexistence: harm no one, cooperate, help each other, respect the laws of your country and be a role model.
- That the basic social and mental needs of all people are: being treated with respect, privacy, social communication, education, and understanding of life.
- A peace-builder should ensure that the physical needs of all people are essentially the same and should not be tempered with at all: continuous source of air, water, food, shelter, space, heat and light.
- That a peace-builder should desire to help every one in the world, believing that everyone should seek to be a “citizen” of the world.
- He/she should ensure that children are not enticed into crime by peers.
- A peace-builder should learn how to control anger as part of a peace-building principle; acquire moral values that enabled citizens to survive; teach people to live without injuring others.
- A peace-builder should be a powerful influence...helps shape the society by their action...by their passivity or participation in the system they can affirm the perpetrator.



Brainstorming session with the participants

Participants were further briefed on the definition of a good peace builder:

- A peace builder should ensure that the physical needs of all people are essentially the same.
- A peace-builder should be a role model in his/her society
- A peace-builder should learn how to control anger as part of a peace-building principle.

Afternoon Session: Introduction to the Concept of Peace Education and Non-Violence Conflict Transformation Approaches to Peace Building and Peace Consolidation:

This Session was facilitated by Mr. Musa Sam, Assistant Coordinator, Community Services, GTZ-International Service, Sierra Leone. Mr. Sam who had worked with the Catholic Mission of Refugees and the German Technical Cooperation (GTZ-IS) in the Republic of Guinea as a Peace Education Facilitator and Micro Education Evaluation; adopted this training to his present Peace programmes with returnees from Liberia and Sierra Leone. Participants were asked to work in small interactive groups in order to share best practices on the approaches to peace-education.

While introducing the concept of peace-building, he gave a brief introduction to programmes initiated by young people in the sub region, with emphasis on the need to strengthen our actions and undertake positive action that bring about lasting peace in the Mano River Union.

Participants were asked to develop a definition of a conflict and its sources considering the following questions:

1. What is conflict?
2. What are the sources of conflicts
3. How do we transform conflict without being violence at all?

Participants went into groups to answer the questions and had the opportunity to explore further the definition of conflict with analysis on the sources of conflict in their countries from the economic, social, political psychological needs. The participants were able to define:

Conflict as:

- a. Clash of interest amongst individuals, groups, organizations and inter-state;
- b. Social interaction where individual/parties perceived threat to its own values, rights cultures and needs, etc.
- c. Disagreement or misunderstanding between two or more parties or communities or countries;
- d. Emotional imbalance;

Causes of conflict in the MRU:

- Bad governance and corrupt practices of political leaders
- Influence of foreign policy/donor guidelines
- Power struggle and political instigation
- selfishness and greed for power by political leaders
- breakdown in communication network (roads, telephone, etc);
- Ethnic and civil conflict
- Military Coups
- Poverty and ignorance
- Lack of educational facilities
- Marginalization of women and youth
- Discrimination and poor management of natural resource
- Cross board invasion
- Poor health facilities
- Increase in the level of drug abuse and smuggling of available resources;

The discussion later developed into approaches to peace building; participants were asked to brainstorm on approaches to peace building at community level. The facilitators then led the discussion on negotiation as powerful tool for non-violent conflict transformation; he gave an input for sustainable reconciliation in the MRU.

Peace Building in the Mano River Union, (The role of Young People)

Objectives:

- a. To familiarize participants on the role of youths in promoting peace in the Mano River Union;
- b. To promote strategies for youth in planning and implementing a Peace education Programmes;
- c. To create a common forum for collaboration and partnership for effective role of young people in conflict management in the MRU;
- d. To distinguish between formal and non formal peace education;
- e. To create interventions for other stake holders on peace education for young people;

The facilitators of this session, Ms. Menamuta Pratt, Head of the Peace Studies department at the University of Sierra Leone, give an overview of the Mano River union from its establishment in 1973 to 1980 when Guinea formally joined the Union. She briefed the participants about the establishment of the Secretariat of the Union in Freetown and its many achievements including the construction of the Mano River Union Bridge and also the harmonization of national policies in a range of fields including health sports, research, education and training.

She then addressed her self to the conflict in the MRU and the role of young people in solving the problems?

Problems within the MRU:

- a. Language barriers
- b. Ethnic conflict;
- c. Instability and cross border attacks;
- d. Era of mistrust, Accusation and counter accusations
- e. Recruitment of child soldiers
- f. Child trafficking and child labor
- g. Violence and Discrimination against women
- h. Marginalization of youth in decision making process and community development
- i. Increase in the number of displaced persons
- j. Separation of families due civil and political conflict
- k. Smuggling of natural resources by armed merchants and business people
- l. Underdevelopment
- m. Corruption and mismanagement of public funds
- n. Drug abuse among youth
- o. Greed for power by selfish political leaders
- p. Sexual abuse and exploitation of women and children
- q. Human right violation (child rights)
- r. Arbitrary killing
- s. Indiscriminate arrest and detention of opposition leaders
- t. Nepotism and tribalism
- u. Bad governance
- v. Unfair labor practices (low wages)
- w. Lack of national consciousness
- x. Poverty and ignorance

- y. High illiteracy rate (poor educational systems)
- z. Frequent military coups

Mrs. Pratt also critically examined Peace Education within the context of young people:

- a. Peace Education is seen as activities that promote the knowledge, skills and attitudes that will allow people of all ages, and at all levels, to develop the behavior changes that can prevent the occurrence of conflict, resolve conflict peacefully, or create the social conditions conducive to peace;
- b. Peace Education activities can take place in formal and non-formal settings;
- c. Peace Education is relevant to every citizen because peace or its absence affects every facet of life;
- d. Peace education is important because it fosters unity, establishes justice and human rights and brings about good governance;

Indicators for establishing a Peace education Programme

- a. There should be a demand for peace education activities;
- b. It should respond to social and cultural realities of the community;
- c. There should be top government commitment and community initiatives;
- d. Conflict Management should be recognized as a factor of life with the advantage to enhance development;
- e. People should be prepared to give up prejudices, discrimination, tribalism, nepotism and marginalization of vulnerable groups;
- f. Community members; individuals and groups should have access and control over available resources;
- g. People should have access to basic education and medical services;
- h. Political leaders should have established a transparent and accountable mechanism;
- i. Community services should be promoted to build community cohesion;
- j. Fundamental human rights should be respected by individuals, groups and social institutions e.g. local authorities;
- k. Advocacy groups should be established at community level;

Role of Youths in Planning a Peace education Program

- a. Publicize the existence of the campaign and commitment already made by UNESCO;
- b. Publish notices and announcement of peace education events;
- c. Cooperate with other Civil Society organization to lobby;
- d. Organize training programs;
- e. Collect Peace Education materials
- f. Involve youth in Conflict Resolution, mediation and negotiation;
- g. Involve in peer group counseling and trauma healing programmes;
- h. Collective responsibility toward community development;
- i. Volunteerism and youth networking;
- j. Youth Participation in policy making, and implementation of programmes relating to youth,
- k. Initiate Peace building and reconciliation programmes.

Mrs. Pratt then divided the participants into three groups to document a successful peace education programmes in the Mano River Union Basin. Below are summary on some of the major issues discussed;

- a. That conflict exist at all levels of social interaction, from personal inner; national conflict to global civil wars and international violence;
- b. That conflict resolution, peace building, civic education techniques provide us with ways to examine a situation; with responses that allow a more peaceful co-existence in communities and societies.
- c. Peace education involves s process of progress and justice
- d. A culture of peace consists of values, attitudes, behavior and way of life based on non violence and respect for fundamental rights and freedom of every person.

After a short break, the participants returned to look more closely at Peace Building and Youth Development. This was again facilitated by Mrs. Pratt of the University of Sierra Leone.

Summary of session:

Young men and women in the MRU constitute over 65% of the population in the Manor River Union. Prior to the war, the needs of youths were neglected; this constitutes one of the major causes of the rebel war in the Mano River Basin. Most combatants committed wild range of atrocities including rape, maiming of children, looting of properties and destruction of homes. Currently, Youth empowerment and advocacy programmes should be initiated and encouraged; the essence of youth development is road map to sustainable peace and development in the MRU's.

DAY THREE: TUESDAY 29th JULY 2003

Morning Session: The Role of Youth in the Mano River Union;

This session was facilitated by Mrs. Memunatu Pratt, Head of the Peace Studies Department, University of Sierra Leone.

Objective:

To highlight some of the challenges for building peace in the Mano River Union;

Who is a Youth?

The UN considers and person between the ages of 18-35 as a youth. A major characteristic of a youth is that of zest and vitality, a youth is energetic and adventurous.

Negative roles of youth in the MRU

- Destroyed lives and properties in rural and urban communities.
- Smuggled arms and ammunitions across borders for civil and political wars fairs.
- Manipulated to destroy communities within the (MRU)
- Amputated limbs of peaceful citizens across the (MRU) borders;
- Trade and trafficking drugs
- Smuggling to minerals and resources

Positive roles of youth in the MRU

- Mediators to stop civil and political wars in the (MRU).

- Peace-making in rural communities within the (MRU).
- Organize cross-cultural sports and tradition programmes.
- Organize community trade fair to promote economic empowerment of youth.
- Share technical expertise and professional skills in community development;
- Promote community cohesion through peace and reconciliation ceremonies/programmes.

What Are the Challenges to Build Peace in (MRU).

- Organize peace education seminars, workshops or programmes at home, in communities, family gatherings and schools.
- Organize youth-to-youth/Peer group counseling.
- Refurbished positive cultural programmes and traditional societies.
- Organize community sensitization programmes on a culture of peace and non-violence in rural community and across the (MRU) borders.
- Mobilize community actor, religious groups, youth organizations and NGOs to create a network of young peace-builders in the (MRU).
- Identify traditional methods in transforming civil and political conflicts.

At the end of this session, Mrs. Memunatu Pratt summarizes the major issues discussed during plenary session.

- That social change requires a highly committed citizens guided by ideals. We need a vision of long-term change in which people will have the chance to develop a culture of peace in the Mano River Union (MRU).

-Youth are gradually providing basic social services especially in community development reconciliation programmes;

-Youths are now organized into groups or organizations for the promotion of democracy and development in the sub region of West Africa;

-Several youth groups are now involved in Peace and Civic Education Programmes as peer educators in schools and at community level;

Impact of war on youths

Negative impact

- Separation and displacement of family members;
- loss of educational opportunities
- loss of dignity
- perpetrators and victims of violence (rape, maiming and killing)
- increase in the level of drug abuse amongst youth
- Psychological imbalance due to protracted stress
- Loss of traditional and cultural values
- Lack of respect of elder and local authorities/institutions
- Low self esteem

Way Forward to peace and sustainable development

- Reform of democratization process;

- Restoration of traditional and cultural values in society;
- Awareness raising on conflict management in local communities;
- Enhanced cohesion for the common good of all;
- Fight against corruption and marginalization of vulnerable groups;
- Respect for human rights and rule of law;
- Involvement of youth in community needs assessment, planning and programme implementation;
- Develop monitoring mechanisms for the control of small arms and light weapons;
- Provision of skills and vocational training institutions in rural communities;
- Campaign for the rights of women and children in armed conflict;
- Promote campaigns on primary health programmes;
- Be a role model for co-existence and promote a positive outlook;
- Be prepared to sacrifice time/resources for the peace building process;
- Established peace building network across youth institutions and rural communities;
- Encourage focus group discussions on issues related to peace, HIV/AIDS prevention and community development;
- Involve the elderly and religious leaders in community sensitization programmes;
- Lobby local businesses for support in promotion youth initiatives;

Afternoon Session: *Basic Human Rights Principles:*

Objective: *To help Participants understand the basic human rights principles in working with community groups and social institutions:*

This session was facilitated by Mr. Richelieu Allison, Regional Director of WAYN.

Objective:

To help participants understand that all people are entitled to their Human Rights.

Human rights derived from recognition of the inherent worth and dignity of all human beings. They assert the entitlement of all people to the fundamental conditions necessary for their freedom and well-being.

Participants performed a short role play which clearly indicated three important human rights abuses, participants were given the opportunity to discuss the role play highlighting a list of other human rights they value.

Looking back through history, we see that people acquired rights through membership of a particular group: a family, a tribe, a religion, or a nation. Members of a particular group (“us”) found security and protection within it. The idea that all human beings have human, or natural, rights simply because they are human did not become widely accepted until the middle of this century. After World War II, the world was horrified to discover that Nazi Germany had systematically murdered more than 6 million Jews. People wanted to ensure that nothing like this would be allowed to happen again. Representatives of the newly formed United Nations drew up a list of rights that all people are entitled to regardless of their sex, race, colour, language, national origin, age, or religious or political beliefs. In 1948

they produced the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It was to serve as “a common standard of achievement for all people and all nations.

Activity:

Participants were divided into three large groups to define the categories of Human Rights that are international recognized for a period of 30 minutes. The later did a presentation on the follow categories of rights.

Group one:

Civil and political rights: the rights are sometime referred to as “first generation” rights. They were the first generation of rights to be formulated more than 200 years ago at the time of the American and French revolution. These are rights that protect individuals against the abuse of state power. They protect the life and dignity of individuals, and guarantee various freedoms involving their thoughts, actions, choices and participation in the political life of their society; freedom of movement, to protection from arbitrary arrest, to a fair trial, and to hold religious or political beliefs.

Group Two:

Social and economic rights:

These rights are sometimes referred to as “second generation” rights. They were formulated in the 19th century by the socialist movement, in reaction to capitalist exploitation of the working classes and colonial peoples. Unlike civil and political rights which protect individuals from the state, these rights depend on the intervention of the state to provide people with social and economic security, and they are concerned with living standards, employment, health and education.

Group Three:

Cultural, Environmental and Development Rights:

These rights sometimes referred to as “third generation” rights, are of very recent origin. The importance of cultural and development rights began to emerge at the time when people were being freed from colonial domination. Concern for environmental issues has emerged in the last two decades.

Poverty as an Element in the UN Declaration 1974

The root causes of poverty as an element in the UN Declaration 1974’ that “every man, woman and child has the rights to be free from hunger and malnutrition in order to develop fully. Essentially, human rights allow human beings to make claims on all other people to uphold their rights.

Participants were asked to reflect on the categories of rights and relate it to the present situation in their respective communities or organization

Group One:

Members of group identified arbitrary arrests by government’s officials as one of the greatest human rights violations in the region. They recommended the strengthening of Youth human right organizations and the formation of youth alliances to serve as extra pressure groups to monitor arbitrary arrests by governments.

Group Two:

Member of this group described the violation of free speech by governments as a serious threat to the protection of human rights and a threat to democracy. They further took cognizant of the fact that though most countries have inscribed in their constitutions the protection of free speech, governments have over the years failed tremendously to protect this right. They recommended the constant holding of public forums by young people to remind governments of their constitutional and statutory responsibilities as enshrined in their constitutions as well as the holding of periodic seminars to sensitize people about the right to free speech.

Group Three:

Interestingly, members of this group identified the failure of governments to provide people with social and economic security with less access to equal and control over the nation's wealth as a violation of human rights in the region. They called for a more holistic approach amongst civil society and youth groups in ensuring that governments undertake sustainable programmes and implement good policies to improve the living standard of their citizens;

The participants were reminded that "true peace was not only the absence of conflict but also the presence of justice" and were therefore urged to serve as true advocates for human rights and social justice in their communities.

Evening Session: Discussion on the Current Situation in Liberia

Participants were briefed on the rebel war in Liberia commencing from the civil crisis in 1989 to the present rebellion. He lamented the fact that most of the combatants were young people who were used to orchestrate some of the most gruesome atrocities even witnessed in the sub region;

Participants were then divided into two groups by the facilitator to brainstorm on the role of young people in quenching the fire in Liberia and to prevent it from again degenerating into a regional conflict.

The participants regretted the situation in Liberia which has resulted into the continuous loss of innocent lives and destruction of properties and called for the immediate deployment of an international peace keeping force as a means of finding an immediate solution to the problem. They also called for the holding of a mediation meeting by the International Community amongst the warring parties and the involvement of the governments of Guinea and Sierra Leone.

They recommended the involvement of young people from Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone in future Peace Meetings and the creation of an Early Warning Youth Mechanism System to identify potential conflicts and formulate peace building strategies to address them. They also called for sensitization programs for young people

DAY FOUR: WEDNESDAY 30th JULY 2003

Morning Session: *Impact armed Conflict on children in the Mano River Union*

This important session was facilitated by Mr. Ibrahima Diouf, Child Protection Advisor to the Executive Secretary of ECOWAS and Mr. Bert Theuermann, Child Protection Technical Advisor for the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone.

Goal:

- a. To highlight the impact of war on children;
- b. To examine the problems of child soldiers in the MRU;

Objectives:

- a. To enable participants acquire skills in protecting the basic rights of children as enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- b. To help develop a sub-regional Mechanism on the protection of youth in armed conflict (Child Soldiers);

Activity:

Participants brainstormed on the definition of the “**Child soldiers**”. The term “**child soldier**” has become widely adopted, and will, therefore, be used to cover any person less than 18 years of age who is part of any kind of regular or irregular armed force or armed group in any capacity other than purely as a family member. It does not, therefore, only refer to those carrying arms, but includes cooks, porters, messengers, and those accompanying such groups, including girls recruited as concubines or for forced marriage.

Participants were asked to divide into five groups’ in order to analyze the following questions:

Group One: Why are children recruited?

- Easily used in battles
- Easily manipulated
- Adventurous
- Quick to learn fighting skills
- No competition for the leadership role
- Less costly
- Pose a moral challenge for enemies

Group Two: How children are recruited, and by who?

The manner in which children are recruited ranges from compulsory to voluntary recruitment, although in practice it is hard to ascertain the reality as they often merge into one another. The most distinct category is compulsory recruitment by conscription. This, by its nature, is a governmental prerogative. Many children, however, are conscripted under age. This may happen even where there is a legal minimum age of 18, because:

- People are simply unaware of their rights;

- The children lack documentation such as birth or identity records;
- They voluntarily enlist for compulsory conscription whilst under age (sometimes a convenient loop-hole to mask conscription of children);
- They are caught up in “quota” enlistment which may be carried out by government agents, village headmen, local militias and so on, who are concerned to make up required numbers and pay little heed to the ages of the conscripts;
- Lack of adequate safeguards and the absence of mechanisms of appeal not allowing people to enforce their rights;
- The conscription system is flawed or outright ignored by the military particularly where there is a perceived need for an enlarged force, or the military is targeting certain groups.

Group Three: Children who are vulnerable to recruitment?

In any situation, however, due to economic, social, political or cultural circumstances, it is important to recognize that certain children will be more vulnerable to under-age recruitment whether voluntary or forced.

Overwhelming majority of child soldiers, in almost every conflict, are drawn from the poorest, least educated and most marginalized sections of society. Those separated from their families or with disrupted family backgrounds, particularly among refugees and the displaced, are especially at risk. They include:

- Children from particular ethnic, racial or religious groups;
- Children living in the conflict zones;
- Children from unstable or disrupted backgrounds;
- Children separated from their families and without the protection that the family can provide to prevent recruitment;
- Unaccompanied children who initially became associated with an armed group for protective reasons, but who may progress to active participation;
- Former child soldiers.

Group Four:

Are there are issues that are common to the experience of all children who have participated in conflict and which require consideration if they are to reintegrate with their families and communities?

- Separation from the family;
- Family poverty and vulnerability;
- Education and vocational training;
- The participation of children;
- Health;
- Children in need of special care.

Group Five: What can be done to reintegrate children to normal life?

- Assessing child care needs: determining the numbers of children who will be immediately reunified with their families; the numbers for whom interim care is required during tracing; and the numbers requiring longer-term alternative care;

- Establishing criteria to identify vulnerable families and to determine appropriate assistance to enable the reintegration of their children;
- Identifying networks of social support at the community level: churches;
- mosques; schools; women's organizations; youth and community structures and so on;
- Identifying children with special needs, and paying particular attention to the special situation of the girl soldiers.

Re-Establishing Social and Emotional Bonds:

As they try to return to normal life, the impact of the children's experiences as soldiers may affect the re-establishment and development of social and emotional relationships. It would be helpful for individuals engaged in programmes to assist social reintegration to consider how the following issues may be addressed in a practical way within programme activities.

- The re-establishment of trust
- The re-establishment of self-esteem
- Self-control
- The re-establishment of identity
- The recognition of resources/strengths
- The re-establishment of attachment.

Afternoon session:

The session started with a surprised visit of ***Dr. Dennis Bright, Honorable Minister of Youth and Sport in Sierra Leone***. Dr Bright had an informal meeting with the participants in the lobby of the hotel. He commended the participants for their selection and formally welcomed them to Sierra Leone on behalf of the Government of Sierra Leone. He also praised the West African Youth Network for selected Freetown as venue for the seminar and for chosen to collaborate with the United Nations of Youth-Sierra Leone Network as partner to organize the event. Dr. Dennis Bright, who is fluent in French, also chatted with some of the participants on an individual level. His visit, though impromptu, helped to reawaken a sense of sub-regional consciousness and a renewed level of commitment amongst the participants.

Site seeing: Field trip to Leicester Peak

After this session, participants prepared themselves for a sight seeing with a visit the Regent Village, one of the oldest communities in Freetown, Sierra Leone. Several historic sites were visited including the University of Sierra Leone and the Botanical Garden at Leicester Peak. Discussions were held with the Head of the Peace Studies Department in relation to the early settlers and a brief history of Sierra Leone linking the establishment of the Mano River Union and intercultural exchange programmes were talk about. Also, participants visited the mountain with the aim to view the wild life in comparison with their respective countries and the impact of a decade civil war on the environment. This evening session ended with cultural activities during which participants had the opportunity to display their cultural talents through Dramatization, role songs, fairy tales, traditional games, and a musical concert at which time participants tried to blend their national anthems.

DAY FIVE: THURSDAY 31st AUGUST 2003

Topic: Understanding Conflict-root cause/mapping; Actors and approaches to conflict prevention.

Morning session:

Mrs. Memunatu Pratt, Head of Peace Studies at the University of Sierra Leone served as Facilitator.

Objectives:

- a. To understand the causes of conflicts;
- b. To enable participants to understand the methods of resolving conflict;

The facilitator divided participants into three groups to do a situational analysis on Pre conflict, Open Conflict and the Post Conflict in the Mano River Union:

Presentation of Group work; participants reported in a large group on the following:

Group one: *Pre-Conflict*

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bad governance• Social exclusion• Denial of rights• Corruption• Mismanagement• Unemployment• Lack of patriotism• Indiscipline forces• Hunger	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No Civil education• Drug abuse• Violence and non-transparent elections• Violence against women• Drug abuse• Arms trade and trafficking• Smuggling of mineral and resources
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Group two: *Open Conflict*

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gross human rights violation;• Destruction of social institution;• Lack of access to education and training;• Deprivation of empowerment of women;• Conflict Resolution;• Peace agreements and the Process;• The United Nations and other agencies;• Civil society roles;	<p>Group three: <i>Post Conflict</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Accountability;• Dealing with the trauma of war;• Gender based violence;• Child soldiers;• Reform of democratization;• Restoration of values in society;• Fight against corruption;• Respect for human rights;• Enhanced cohesion for the common good of all;• Involvement of youth in regional; envelopment control of small arms;
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Resolving conflict in the Mano River Union:

Resolving civil conflicts in Mano River Union include basic techniques designed to facilitate the resolution of conflict at all levels. Approaches in conflict resolution seek to identify the root causes of conflict and bridging the gap between hostile groups. Conflict resolution also refers to the strategies that address open conflicts in the hope of finding not only an agreement to end the violence but also a resolution of incompatible goals underlying it; while conflict transformation is the most thorough and far reaching strategy in analyzing early warning signs.

Method of Conflict Resolution civil conflict:

- Conflict mediation
- Negotiation and multi-track diplomacy
- Conciliation programmes
- Arbitration and judicial procedures
- Adjudication

Afternoon Session:

Training in Strategies for HIV/AIDS Prevention

This Session was facilitated by Emmanuel Roberts, Programme Coordinator of UNOY-SL. Emmanuel, who also served as Assistant Technical Advisor on Gender and Child Protection at GTZ in Freetown, has a vast experience in working with youth and refugees in Sierra Leone, Gambia and Guinea.

Activity: *Participants were asked to discuss amongst each other in twenty five minutes on the definition of HIV & AIDS and how an individual can get affected with AIDS?*

HIV was defined by participants as:

- Human Immune Deficiency Virus
- AIDS was defined as Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome; AIDS is a disease caused by a virus in which the body's immune systems fails, leaving it prey to the development of a variety of illnesses which can lead to death;

Most participants readily concluded that sexual intercourse is the most common way people can get infected with HIV/AIDS. They however admitted that people get the virus through

- a. Using needles for injection or sharp objects used by an infected person,
- b. Exchange of HIV infected skin piercing, or cutting instrument such as needles; razor blades;
- c. Receiving a blood transfusion with infected blood;
- d. Giving birth by an HIV infected mother;

Participants were also asked to list groups at high risk from AIDS

- Homosexual or bisexual men who are sexually active;
- Intravenous drug abusers, particularly those who share needles;

- Hemophiliacs and those who have transfusions in inadequate;
- Sexual partners of any of the above;
- New born babies of mothers infected with HIV;

A brainstorming and knowledge assessment on HIV/AIDS was conducted with a view to identify level of awareness among participants in relation to HIV/AIDS prevention in local communities. Few participants responded that they have very little knowledge on the symptoms of HIV/AIDS and do not really believe the virus exist at all. Participants requested to detail information on the symptoms of Sexually Transmitted Infections, HIV/AIDS, prevention strategies and response mechanism for victims of HIV/AIDS.

Session Two: Video Show on Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI's) and HIV/AIDS

During this session, a movie called *Silent Epidemic* was shown to highlight the causes of the Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD's) and HIV/AIDS. Several issues:

- Have sex with an infected person,
- Getting blood from an infected person,
- Using needles, or sharp objects that have been used by an infected person,
- Syphilis, hypes, tuberculoses,
- Repeated infections of the skin, mouth and throat,
- Unexplained fever, fungi infection, etc)

Were mentioned as diseases people can contract through sexual intercourse. Furthermore, Participants were then asked to brainstorm and develop an action plan on prevention strategies at community level with A.B.C of prevention.

- A = Abstain from sex (that means don't have sex at all;
- B = Be faithful to one uninfected partner who is faithful to you;
- C = Condom use which can be obtained at any health centre and drug store;

The session ended with a review of the workshop objective, aims and expectations of participants, Participants expressed thanks and appreciation to the facilitators for enabling them to acquire skills that will be adaptable in their operational areas and working with community groups to attain their objectives.

Participants were then requested to brainstorm on how young people can joined the fight against the spreading of the epidemic in the sub-region. Each country presented a statement on the level of HIV infection with emphasis on young people.

After one hour of deliberations, the participants agreed that the setting up of Youth HIV/AIDS Brigades in the three countries was the most effective method of spreading the message using the youth to youth approach mechanism. They also stressed the need for a concerted effort on the parts of all youth organizations in helping to combat the disease.

In summary, the facilitator asked the participants this question: Can condom prevent AIDS? Participants responded that:

- For sexual active people who are not “faith partners” a strong condom, correctly used, is the single most effective defensive against AIDS.

This session was followed by a Special Feature: A Radio Panel Discussion:

Six of the participants, Richelieu Allison and Ms. Deena Cooper (Liberia); Mohammed Toure and Ms. Mariama Camera (Guinea) and Husam Sesay and Ms. Salimatu Kamara (Sierra Leone) were special guests of Radio UNAMSIL Youth Programme. They participated in a Radio Discussion Programme explaining the objectives of the seminar as well as highlighted the unique role of young people in building a culture of peace in the Mano River Union.

DAY SIX: FRIDAY 1st AUGUST 2003

Morning Session: Root causes of the rebel war in the MRU. Youth Participation

This session was introduced by Mr. Musa Sam. During the session, participants were asked to brainstorm on the root causes of conflict in the Mano River Union, indicating the role of youth.

Participants were divided into three groups as per their country to analyze events that lead to war and social disorder in their countries from the 1960's within the context of social, political and economic factors.

The road to war in Liberia:

- 1960-1971: Tubman's era- Marginalization. of indigenous Liberians by the minority ruling class, misused of Public funds;
- 1971: Death of President Tubman after an unprecedented tenure of twenty seven;
- 1974-80: practice of nepotism by the Tolbert's regime, arrest of journalists, forming of progressive opposition groups;
- 1979: Rice riot; arrest of political prisoners and opposition 16 OAU Summit;
- 1980: violent overthrow of government by non commissioned officers from the army; public execution of officials;
- 1981: Crack in the new regime, execution of member alleged of coup attempt, promised to return to Civilian government in 1985;
- 1981-85: Arrest of Political Opponents and journalists;
- 1983: Crack in regime-dismissal of army commander, revolt in Nimba County;
- 1985: holding of Presidential elections announcement of results, elections rigged and attempted military takeover by former army commander, attempt failed, reprisal

by government loyalists against the tribal group of the army commander, most escaped into self imposed exile;

- 1996: Inauguration of President Doe, coming in second republic;
- 1989: Commencement of Civil Conflict; Armed group is composed of majority of those who fled the country in 1985; recruitment of child soldiers; massive killing on tribal line by government troops and rebel group; beginning of national and sub-regional night mare;
- 1991: War exported into Sierra Leone

Situational Analysis since independence in Guinea;

- 1958: independence under the leadership of Sekou Toure and the Parti Democratique de Guinea;
- 1960-1970: Crack down on perceived enemies by government including, imprisonment and execution; 250,000 Guineans went on exile to neighboring countries;
- 1970: Portuguese-Back invasion failed;
- 1978: Relationship with France improved considerably following the visit of President Giscard d'Estary. President Toure had earlier rejected French Aid;
- March 1984: Death of Sekou Toure;
- April 1985: Military coup headed by Colonel Lassana Conte;
- July 1985: Attempt to remove Col. Lassana Conte from power by Prime Minister Diarre Toure failed miserably;
- 1985-1990: Strengthened of his grip on power by President Lassana Conte;

Afternoon Session: Conflict Transformation Mechanism, Non violent Conflict Resolution

This session was facilitated by **Prof. Desmond Williams**, of the International Relation Department of the University of Sierra Leone.

Activity: Participants were asked to list the type of conflict.

- a. Conflict of interest;
- b. Ethnic Conflict
- c. Political Conflict
- d. Local Conflict

- e. Personality Conflict
- f. Economic Conflict
- g. Domestic conflict
- h. Religious conflict

Case studies on the types of conflict were distributed to all the participants to analyze the stages in conflict:

1. Pre-Conflict Stage:

- Incompatible goals;
- Hidden objective from general views;
- Tension in relationship

2. Confrontation:

- Issues identified publicly;
- Each side gathers resources and allies;
- Polarization

3. Crises

- Peak of conflict tension;
- Intense violence in conflict zone
- Public Statement/accusation of parties in conflict;

4. Outcome:

- Victory
- Defeat
- Ceasefire
- Imposition of settlement
- Agreement reached with the help of mediators

5. Post Conflict

- End of violence confrontation
- More normal relations
- If issues and problems not address return to violence is likely

The Liberian Scenario was used as case study to illustrate the fact that if conflicts are not properly address violence will return. The Liberian participants cited the refusal of the Liberian Government to fully implement the Abuja Accord as the main reason for the renewed hostilities.

A new topic-***Diplomatic Negotiation*** was introduced with an aim to enable participant's acquire skills in diplomatic negotiations as a tool in resolution civil conflict;

Diplomacy was defined as the art of dealing with the relationships that exist between states and non-state actors' aims at creating order and peace in international relations

Negotiation was defined as processes which people/groups which people/groups with at least partly opposing views are made to reach an agreement.

The facilitator stressed the importance of negotiation in resolving conflict he admonished the participants that negotiators should be patient and neutral if they are to succeed. In negotiation, the parties also have to compromise and give and take.

Participants were then divided into groups to discuss the approaches to diplomatic negotiation and then giving the task to serve as negotiator in a matter involving two parties in a conflict situation as a means of exposing them to the tedious art of negotiating.

Another session: Leadership among youth leaders

Objectives:

- a. To create awareness on the concept of good leadership and its impact in our communities and organizations with a focus on institutional building.
- b. to sharpen the administrative and analytical skills of youth leaders so as to enhance the work of their organizations;

This session was facilitated by Mr. Desmond Williams. He said that most Youth organizations failed to achieve the objectives due to poor leadership. He called on the participants to take advantage of the session to help them improve their style of leadership.

Definition of a Good Leader:

- takes initiative
- develop action plan with subordinate
- show concern for members
- give consideration to other views
- take decision critically
- leads and directs
- Encourages and facilitates dialogue

He reminded the participants that most conflicts in the region erupt as a result of poor leadership and that most youth organization failed to achieve their inherent objectives because leaders lack innovation and analytical skills to lead. He stressed the importance of the participant inculcated into their organizations good leadership skills so as to improve the effectiveness of their work.

Participants were asked to develop a skit on the different types of leaders with presentation in plenary session on the following:

- a. The dictator
- b. The Politician
- c. The Boss
- d. The Coordinator

DAY SEVEN: SATURDAY 2nd AUGUST 2003

Strategies for the Mano River Union Parliament; Follow up Plans; recommendations and projects to be developed by participants;

This important session was facilitated by Richelieu Allison of the West African Youth Network. In his presentation, Mr. Allison stressed the importance of formulating a Regional Youth Action Plan as a means of ensuring the continuous involvement of young people in all activities of the MRU. He further noted that young people can play a crucial role in revitalizing the structure of the Mano River Union.

He then recommended to the participants the setting up of a Youth Parliament within the Union as a means of galvanizing the support of youth people across the region in activities relating to peace-building, human rights, conflict resolution and youth empowerment.

The participants were then divided into two groups to brainstorm on the proposal and also formulate the structure of the proposed Parliament.

After one hour of deliberation, the two groups presented their findings. Their presentations revealed a general consensus amongst the participants for the immediate setting up of a Mano River Union Youth Parliament to serve as a catalyst for youth empowerment in the region. They further suggested that the Parliament be headed by a Speaker, two Deputy Speakers One Secretary General and three Assistant Secretaries

After formally agreeing on the structure of the Parliament, the participants then embarked upon the next stage of the Parliament, the election of its officials. While many observers were looking forward to a heated election, one of the participants from Sierra Leone, to the surprise of some of the participants, broke the ice when she suggested that Guinea be allowed to nominate the Speaker while Sierra Leone and Liberia nominate the First and Second Deputy Speakers.

This brilliant formula, which was immediately endorsed by the rest of the participants, demonstrated the maturity of young people in exercising their franchise.

The following participants were then nominated and subsequently endorsed by all of the participants to serve for a period of two years:

<u>Names</u>	<u>COUNTRY</u>	<u>POSITION</u>
1. Hon. Mohamed Toure	Guinée	Speaker/ President
2. Hon. Ms. Salamatu Kamara	Sierra Leone	1 st Deputy Speaker
3. Hon. Ms. Wede Seekey	Liberia	2 nd Deputy Speaker
4. Hon. Sekou Conde	Guinée	Secretary General
6. Hon. Lancine Doumbouya	Guinée	Sec-Projects

7. Hon. Mohamed Nyakoi	Sierra Leone	Regional Coordinator
8. Hon. Tamba Williams	Liberia	Projects
9. Hon. Ms Mariama Camara	Guinée	Sec-Arts and Sports
10. Hon. Ms Kemah Varfley	Liberia	Arts/Culture/Sports
11. Hon. Abdulai Gamanga	Sierra Leone	Arts/Culture/Sports

The officials were congratulated for their preferment by the Seminar Bureau and challenged to ensure the success of the Parliament.

A Special Plenary Session was convened to provide an open forum for the participants to brainstorm and deliberate on follow up plans and to also draw up an Official Communiqué as well as formulate group Proposal for the future.

After three hours of brainstorming, characterized by frank exchange of ideas and healthy debates, the participants issued an Official Resolution to climax the Training Session:

We, the participants of a seven day **Mano River Union Youth Training Seminar on Peace Building and Conflict Resolution**, convened from 27 July-3 August 2003 in the City of Freetown,

Having gone through a vigorous Training Exercise aimed at empowering us in the areas of Peace-Building, Conflict Resolution, Leadership and Ngo Project Management, HIV/AIDS and Human Rights and

Having further deliberated on numerous issues of concern in the Mano River Union,

Do hereby resolve:

1. That a Mano River Youth Parliament be set to ensure the involvement of young people in sub-regional issues and to serve as an advocacy mechanism for youth empowerment in the Mano River Union;
2. That the Parliament be strengthened and empowered to form an integral part of the Mano River Union and to play a more proactive role in the search of peace, human rights, reconciliation, integration, and good governance in the MRU Basin;
3. That Participants endeavor to organize similar Training Program, Peace Caravans and Marches in their respective countries;

4. That Participants endeavor to promote peace and reconciliation amongst member states of the MRU and serve as positive catalysts for social change in their communities;
5. That immediate steps be taken for the revitalization of the structures of the Mano River Union;
6. That immediate steps be undertaken to resolve the Liberian crisis by the International Community to ensure that the sub-region become an oasis of peace and that efforts be taken to ensure the supplies of humanitarian supplies to the suffering people of Liberia;
7. That Young people and Youth organizations increased their involvement in the fight against HIV/AIDS by forming HIV/AIDS Brigades in their communities;
8. That Peace Brigades be established by young people especially along the various border areas and that sensitization programs be held for community leaders;
9. That Young people advocate for the inclusion of human rights and Peace Education in the curriculum of schools in the region;
10. That young people and youth organizations seek collaboration with governments and regional organizations, e.g. MRU Women Network, MRU Civil Society Movement, MRY Inter Religious Council, International agencies, and donors in implementing their objectives;
11. That a Regional Mechanism on Child Rights be established , within the framework of the **MRU Youth Parliament**, to monitor the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols, with emphasis on child soldiers;
12. That the first Session of the **MRU Youth Parliament** be convened in **2004** in Conakry, Guinea and that the **West African Youth Network and the United Nations of Youth Sierra Leone Network** serve as conveners of the Parliament and work along with the MRU Youth Parliament in galvanizing the necessary support for this historical setting;
13. That the Training Session be extended to other West African Countries and that the sessions be conducted in these countries to ensure the maximum involvement of many youth organizations for the setting of Peace Brigades and Youth Pressure Groups;

14. That the Training Coordinator, Mrs. Memunatu Pratt and her dedicated team of experienced facilitators be commended for their enormous assistance in ensuring the success of the seminar;
15. That the **West African Youth Network** and the **United Nations of Youth- Sierra Leone Network** be extolled for organizing the seminar and the **Open Society Initiative of West Africa** be praised for funding it as well as encouraged to convene seminars similar to this ones.
16. That the Sierra Leone participants, Minister of Youth and Sports and Staff, be further commended for their warmth hospitality accorded their brothers from Liberia and Sierra Leone.

Formal Closing Session:

A Formal Closing Program was held in the Presidential Lounge at the National Stadium to climax the Training Sessions. The Program was addressed by Mrs. Menamuta Pratt, **Head of the Peace Studies Department, University of Sierra Leone** and Training Supervisor of the Seminar. In her Inspiring Address, Mrs. Pratt spoke highly of the significant of the seminar and admonished the participants to take full advantage of the knowledge acquired during the seminar. She described their participation in such a rewarding seminar as an opportunity and congratulating the West African Youth Network for initiating the idea.

The Officials of the **MRU Youth Parliament** were formally inducted for a two year term during the closing program. In his post induction speech, the Speaker of the Parliament, **Hon. Mohammed Toure** of Guinea urged his colleagues to serve as Peace Ambassadors in their respective countries and communities. He then spoke of plan by his administration to unite the youth of the sub-region for peace and sustainable development.

The Coordinator of the Seminar, **Richelieu Allison**, also commended the **Open Society Initiative of West Africa** for their support to the Seminar, which forms an integral part of the Programme Plan of Action of his organization. He told the participants that the objectives of the seminar could only be achieved if they return home to their respective countries and become peace-builders and human rights advocates. "In one week, you have learned the basic rudiments of peace building, human rights, Project writing, Management, Leadership and basic advocacy skills; In one week you have been able to acquire what usually take six months to learn, the challenge is yours to take the bull by the horn and transform the MRU from its present state of hopelessness and violence to one of peace, reconciliation and economic prosperity", he concluded.

The Participants were then presented special certificates of achievements and the program was followed by a Special Closing Reception.

CONCEPT PAPER ON THE MANO RIVER UNION YOUTH PARLIAMENT

Introduction:

The Mano River Union Youth Parliament (MRUYP) is a sub-regional network of young peace builders, students, journalists, development practitioners and human rights activities within the Mano River Union Basin that advocates for the peace, human rights and development of young men, women and their communities.

The Mano River Union Youth Parliament is dedicated to the sustainable development of the Mano River Union Basin through its youth by create a platform to identify the causes of violent conflict, poverty, marginalization vulnerable groups and poor of educational opportunities; development action plans to address issues identified with support from well wishers who wants to see the smiling face of the Mano River Union.

Objectives:

To empower local capacities for peace and sustainable development in the Mano River Union through:

- Organizing peace conferences and training seminars;
- Training young men and women in particular youth leaders, in the field of peace building, non-violent conflict transformation and reconciliation;
- Developing a regional and global network of young peace builders;
- Advocating for meaningful partnership of young individuals and youth organizations with the United Nations Systems and the Economic Community of West African States;
- Campaigning for a culture of peace in local communities.
- Empower young people and ensure their involvement in sub-regional issues

Overview of the Mano River Union Youth Parliament

The MRUYP is an initiative of the **West African Youth Network (WAYN)** in collaboration with the Open Society Initiative of West Africa and the **United Nations of Youth (UNOY) Sierra Leone Network** launched during a training conference (31st August 2003in Freetown, Sierra Leone), with representative from Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

Membership

- Mano River Union Youth Parliament is a sub-regional network of young leaders in the Mano River Union that advocates for the rights of young men, women and children and their communities.
- Our mission is to create a safe environment and build on the potential skills young men and women; and facilitate youth participation in peace building, advocacy and sustainable development programmes.
- Our vision is geared towards peace building, sustainable development and equitable society.

Target group:

Young persons aged (15-35 years) from pre-post and current conflict regions who are NGO leaders, journalists, students, and concerned young persons, active in the field of peace-building, inter-ethnic, inter-religious peaceful coexistence, conflict prevention, transformation and reconciliation.

Acknowledging that the Mano River Union is facing:

- An increasing in violence within the family and society;
- Abuse of power and lack of responsible leadership;
- Inter-ethnic, inter-religious and tribal violent conflict;
- Unequal distribution of resources and violation of basic human rights
- Marginalization and discrimination of women and youth

Considering that the Mano River Union Youth are:

- Major stakeholders in the search for the abolition of violent conflict and creation of a culture of peace and non-violence;
- The most numerous section of the society;
- The most active, dynamic, creative, innovative and flexible social sector;
- Important actors in the construction of a participatory civil society in the region;

Being aware, as Mano River Union Youth:

- The unity of mankind and the oneness of the world;
- The impressive potential of the Mano River Union civil society to build peace;
- The cultural and material richness (natural and mineral resources) of the Mano River Union;
- The fact that youth in the Mano River Union has an extraordinary potential and creativity to recapture its own history and character.

We have agreed that the time has come for the Mano River Union Youth to unite in coordinated action to build peace in the Mano River Union. A way forward is through this active Parliament/Network.

Mandate of the Mano River Union Youth Parliament:

The members of the Mano River Union Youth Parliament share a vision on the role of young individuals and youth organizations in sub-region to transform the root causes of conflict, and to bring forward the conditions to build sustainable peace based on that vision, the MRUYP will develop strategies and concrete actions to empower the local capacities of young men and women in the MRU. The mandate of the network is to articulate and structure the voice of a group of committed Mano River Union Youth, for this purpose it will concentrate initially on the following areas:

- **Empowerment** of young women to acknowledge and support their potential to build peace in their families, communities, and at national level. The participation of young women at all levels of decision-making, and the elimination of all forms of violence against women are unavoidable conditions to build sustainable peace.

- **Youth advocacy** focusing on opening spaces for Mano River Union Youth to play a major role in peace-building activities, and non-violent conflict transformation, advocacy shall also be oriented to raise awareness on other fields related to the construction of a culture of peace, such as good governance, principle-centre leadership, inter-generational dialogue, opportunities for knowledge and skills training to members of youth NGO's and citizenship participation. Another major area of concern is the recognition of youth as valuable stakeholders in multi track diplomacy.
- **Peace education** as and indispensable tool to build peace sustainable peace, and as a breakthrough mechanism for the transformation from a culture of violence to a culture of peace. Youth have the potential to make significant contribution to include issues related to tolerance, human rights and equality informal and non-formal education. The Mano River Union Youth have special qualifications to use artistic expression for this purpose; this could also be a bridge with the mass media.
- **Creating of momentum** around the idea of the Mano River Union renaissance by young people. This implies securing a Mano River Union perspective in the search for solution to the Mano River Union problems, and encompasses a reappraisal of the Mano River Union traditional methods for non-violence conflict resolution and reconciliation. It also aims for the promotion of democratic values, rooted on self reliance, peace and social development.
- **Promotion the role of Youth** in the Mano River Union as peace makers, peace-builders, and agents to prevent conflicts. This refers to the participation of youth in all strategic steps to prevent the escalation of conflicts, to be actively engaged in initiatives for their peaceful solution, and to work for the sustainability of peace once hostilities have ceased. A focus in reconciliation is unique and essential, as this the basic foundation for a sustainable reconstruction of the social fabric in societies torn by conflict and violence.

We consider this topic as interconnected, and we consider them our initial mandate. Following this mandate, we shall link up our initiatives and projects to strengthen our outreach capacity for social change through the consolidation of our network.

Structure:

- MRUYP is structured around individual membership, organizations in the Mano River Union, and partners at local and international communities who are working towards peace, sustainable development and the protection of human rights.
- The secretariat of the MRUYP consist of six members, (three network coordinators at national level responsible for projects implementation and three administrator responsible for policy formulation acts as focal persons) based in Sierra Leone.
- The board of trustees consists of eminent personalities from civil society, academia, young members of the MRUYP, and corporate personalities who are supporting and building the profile of the MRUYP.
- The MRUYP is hosted by the **United Nations of Youth (UNOY) Sierra Leone Network and the West African Youth Network**, registered under with Ministry of

Youth and Sport in Freetown, Sierra Leone and incorporated under the laws of Liberia.

Agenda:

The agenda of the MRUYP is focused on five significant areas:

1. Youth in armed conflict;
2. Leadership and Democratic values;
3. Youth fighting HIV/AIDS;
4. Breaking the cycle of poverty;
5. Socio-Economic Development/Gender;

"I appreciate and commend the effort by young men and women in creating such a positive initiatives to promote

Peace and sustainable development in the Mano River Union".

-His Excellency, Alhaji, Dr. Ahmad Tejan Kabba,

President of the Republic of Sierra Leone

15 August 2003

Youth Peace Caravan:

Objective: To promote and reconciliation in the Mano River Union and to also mobilize young people across the region

The Caravan commenced in Monrovia on June 4 2003, when four members of the Sierra Leonean Chapter of the West African Youth Network visited Monrovia to express their concern about the prevailing situation in Monrovia and to gather first hand information. While in Monrovia, they meet with youth and civil society organizations as well as with officials from the Liberian Governments including the Ministers of State for Presidential Affairs and Youth and Sports and presented Special Messages of Peace.

Attempts to brave the storm and traveled to the frontlines were thwarted due to the fact that authorities from the Liberian Ministry of Defense advised that the areas were not safe. Unfortunately, their mission was forcibly abandoned due to the escalation of the fighting in Monrovia on Monday, June 9, 2003.

The Caravan also continued to Guinea where there were informal meetings was held with Guinean youth officials. The Youth also visited the borders between Guinea and Sierra Leone and met with community leaders as a means of promoting peaceful coexistence amongst the people of the MRU. A short ceremony was held at the border at which time special peace trees were planted by the participants.

A plan visit to the border between Liberia and Guinea was cancelled due to security reasons. An Informal Meeting was also held with the Protocol Officer of the **Liberian United for Democracy**, Mr. **Edward Farley** in Freetown by some of the participants. The meeting

provided the forum for a frank exchange of view with Mr. Farley explaining the objectives of his institution with emphasis their present military struggle in Liberia.

For their part the youth representatives were basically concern about the regional dimension of the conflict and the large involvement of young people, especially child soldiers. Mr. Farley presented a Press Statement WHICH WAS ISSUED by his organization's secretariat in **Voinjama, Lofa County Republic of Liberia** on **30 June 2003** to categorically deny that his organization was involved with child soldiers. The statement specifically called on **LURD's** Commanders to disarm child soldiers.

SPECIAL PEACE MEETING WITH H.E. ALHAJI DR. AHMED TEJAN KABBAH, PRESIDENT, REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE:



Youth Representatives Posing with President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah at the Presidential Lodge, Freetown, Sierra Leone, 15 August 2003 after a Meeting

The highlight of the Peace Caravan was a Special Peace Meeting with His **Excellency Alhaji Dr. Ahmed Tejan Kabbah**, President of the Republic of Sierra Leone at the

Presidential Lodge, Hill Station, and Freetown on Friday, 15 August 2003. This Meeting provided a unique opportunity for an exchange of view between President Kabbah and his youthful guests on issues relating from youth empowerment to the conflict in the MRU, with emphasis on the situation in Liberia.

Speaking on behalf of his colleagues, **Mr. Emmanuel J. Roberts** informed the President of the successful hosting of the MRU Youth Training Seminar in Freetown and spoke highly of the support of the **Open Society Initiative of West Africa** and the West African Youth Network in making the seminar a reality. He also informed the President that the youth of the Mano River Union have resolved to help bridge the deep gorge of mistrust and suspicion existing in the Sub-region.

Mr. Roberts then briefed the President extensively about the work of the United Nations of Youth Foundation around the region and presented him with various Peace Reports of his organization. Concluding, Mr. Roberts, who also served as Senior Consultant for the seminar, appealed to President to use his good offices and work along with the **MRU Youth Parliament** in ensuring the building of a vibrant culture of peace in the Mano River Union.

For his part, **His Excellency President Kabbah** informed the youth delegation about several personal attempts made to resolve the conflict in the MRU and regretted that despite all efforts success was not achieved. He also regretted the conflict in Liberia and commended the youths for their brilliant initiatives in working for peace in the sub-region and pledged the support of his government and his personal involvement towards the attainment of genuine peace and reconciliation in the sub.-region.

The **Africa's Future Plaque 2002 Award** was then presented to **President Kabbah**, by the youth representatives, in recognition of the President's immense contribution to the restoration of peace in the Mano River Union Basin.

The Plaque is an annual award initiated by the **West African Youth Network, in 2001** to recognize the work of personalities and institutions who have contributed to peace, conflict resolution, human right, good governance and youth empowerment in Africa.

Courtesy Visit of Mr. Chidi Njudid, Legal Officer of Open Society Justice Initiative:

The seminar was also characterized by high profile visits by some important person, youth observers and members of the fourth estate.

One of such individuals was the **Legal Officer of the Open Society Justice Initiative**, Mr. Chidiki Njudiki. In his short presentation, Chidiki extended felicitations to the participants on behalf of his organization and spoke highly of the role of young people in peace building. He praised the work of the **West African Youth Network** and the **United Nations of Youth-Sierra Leone Network** for the great contribution to peace in the Mano River Union. He also spoke highly of the role of the **Open Society Institute** in building democratic structure in West Africa.

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS
MRU YOUTH TRAINING SEMINAR, FREETOWN, SIERRA LEONE
27TH JULY – 3RD AUGUST 2003

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LIST OF FACILITATORS

1. Mrs. Menumatu Pratt:

Mrs. Pratt is the Head of the Peace Department at the **Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone**. An expert in Peace Education, Mrs. Pratt has attended numerous International Seminars on Conferences on Peace Building, Conflict Resolution and Gender. Serving as the Training Supervisor of the Seminar, She was a source of inspiration to the female participants.

2. Mr. Bert Theuermann:

Mr. Theuermann presently served as the **Child Protection Officer** of the UN Mission in Sierra Leone. He is directly responsible for initiating and implementing programmes geared toward protecting the rights of children in Sierra Leone. He provided Technical Support to the seminar.

3. Ibrahima Diouf:

Mr. Diouf is the Child Protection Advisor to the Executive Secretary of the **Economic Community of West African States**. He was appointed to this position of trust after the **Accra Conference on War Affected Children in 2000** and has been involved in a number of programs aimed at putting children on the agenda of ECOWAS. A Senegalese, he provoked laughter amongst the participants when he told them that he was not related to the two of the famous Dioufs, former President Abdul Diouf and the International Soccer Star-El Hadja Diouf. Mr. Diouf provided immense technical assistance to the Organizing Committee of the seminar.

4. Mr. Emmanuel J. Roberts:

Emmanuel currently served as **Technical Advisor** for Gender and Child Protection at **GTZ International** in Sierra Leone. A Staunch advocate for youth empowerment and Information Technology, Emmanuel worked in the Republic of Guinea for several years with refugee's youth. He did Post Graduate studies in Gender and Development Programmes in The Gambia and the Netherlands. He is the also Programme Coordinator for the United Nations of Youth-Sierra Leone and an active member of the **African Network of Young Peace builders**.

5. Mr. Richelieu Marcel Allison

Richelieu is a founding member of the West African Youth Network and presently serves as its Regional Director. He has participated in numerous seminar of youth empowerment, human rights, Management and child rights including the International Youth Leader Forum (New York, 1998); Millennium Young People's Congress Honolulu, 1999) and the West African Youth Training Seminar (Benin, 2002).

6. Mr. Desmond Williams:

Desmond currently serves as a Lecturer of Political Science at the University of Sierra Leone

7. Mr. Musa Sam:

Mr. Sam is the Community Welfare officer at the German Technical Mission in Freetown. He is an expert in peace-building and has worked in all three countries of the Mano River Union.

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Special Acknowledgement.

- a) Mrs. Memunatu Pratt, University of Sierra Leone, Training Coordinator
- b) Seminar Facilitators
- c) Ministry of Youth and Sports, Sierra Leone
- d) United Nations of Youth Foundation The Netherlands
- e) Mr. Bert Theuermann, Child Protection Officer-UNAMSIL
- f) Mr. Ibrahima Diouf, Child Protection Advisor-ECOWAS
- g) The Guinean Embassy, Monrovia,
- h) Office of the President, Sierra Leone
- i) Radio UNAMSIL
- j) Mrs. Mary Dunn-Gadeh
- k) Leno Travel Agency-Monrovia
- l) Mr. Chidiki Njudid-Open Society Justice Initiative, Nigeria
- m) Guineans and Sierra Leonean Immigration and border guards
- n) Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers
- o) World Health Organization