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PAACET AFRICA REGIONAL DIRECTOR MAKES A WORKING VISIT TO THE REPUBLIC LIBERIA



Monrovia, Liberia. 11th – 24th September, 2016

A REPORT OF A WORKING VISIT TO LIBERIA

By Charles Lahai, Africa Regional Director, Peace Africa Alliance Consulting, Educating and Training Centre (PAACET).

.....**Acknowledgement**

My two weeks combined working visit to Liberia was made possible by the support of certain individuals and institutions. On behalf of PAACET, I wish to thank Mr. William Bwewusa, Officer in Charge of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) Radio, for planning, coordinating and also attending most of the meetings with me and for providing me accommodation.

I would also like to thank Mr. Caleb Katwebaze, head of Human Rights Section, UNMIL, for co-supporting the arrangement of meetings and for sparing his time to take me round to the first three meetings.

My sincere thanks and appreciation to Society for Learning and Yearning for Equal Opportunities (SLYEO) for enabling me to attend the regional summit under a joint project that seeks to “engage children and youth as partners in preventing the worst forms of violence against children in the Mano River Union (MRU) countries of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

I remain grateful to the Executive Director of PAACET, Janyce Konkin for co-supporting my stay in Liberia, and my family for motivating me to work for humanity.

INTRODUCTION

My visit to Liberia was accomplished through several telephone and skype conversations with William Bwewusa. In May, 2016, while I was in Canada meeting and planning with other PAACET Directors, we (the Executive Director, Janyce Konkin and myself) agreed in a skype conversation with William, for me to make a working visit to Liberia to explore possibilities of establishing our operations in Liberia.

Since that time, we have all been working to make that proposal a reality. With several challenges, ranging from restricted work schedules to resource constraints, the trip materialised in September 2016.

Prior to my travel, I sent a draft travel plan to William in order to enable him to position himself to meet the fulfilment of the plan. William, Janyce and myself gave serious consideration to the plan and William contributed both in cash and in kind to see this process come to fruition.

The visit enabled me to undertake a strategic mapping of key stakeholders working in the areas of peace and human rights, governance and electoral processes, healing and reconciliation, organisational development and community enhancement and social justice in Liberia, and to deepen our understanding of the key issues for engagement within PAACET’s strategic mandate. The following activities were designed to be undertaken, among others;

- Discuss and disseminate PAACET’s organisational mission, vision and strategic direction through available meetings and media engagement.
- Identify and hold consultative meetings with strategic and potential allies, e.g., Peace Ambassador, Peace Commission, UN, local and international NGOs and other private and public entities and individuals
- Hold media discussions with available radio, TV and newspaper outlets in Liberia
- Any other activity that would contribute to the realisation of the overall travel plan.

Institutional Mapping:

We identified key agencies and individuals working in any of PAACET’s six thematic areas in Liberia with the aim of establishing strategic partnerships, association, affiliation, cooperation and linkages. We also identified at least three Universities, Colleges and/or Secondary schools where PAACET will provide lecturing, seminars and/or trainings in peace and human rights education and other related areas.

Outcome:

It was expected that the process would support PAACET’s desire to establish its operations in Liberia in the shortest possible time pending the achievement of the travel plan. The plan required that I (ARD) would follow the outcome of my engagement with key stakeholders and advise the international office in Canada of any possible future operational and strategic engagement in Liberia. William, who served as my Itinerant Adviser, also provided strategic advice in this direction. It is expected that William’s role will eventually go beyond the scope of this plan to representing PAACET in Liberia in the short to medium term.

REGIONAL SUMMIT

I arrived in Monrovia, Liberia on September 11th 2016. From September 11th to 17th, I was engaged with SLYEO and its partner’s summit which brought together partner organisations from Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea to discuss the way forward on a project titled: “Engaging children and youth as partners to prevent the worst forms of violence

against children in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea.” This is an eighteen (18) months project that is supported by the European Union, and before my resignation from SLYEO as Executive Director, I was a key player in the project’s implementation.

My mission to fulfil PAACET’s mandate started from 17th to 24th September, 2016. William and I reviewed the itinerary in consultation with the respective personalities and institutions. The final itinerary is presented as an annex to this report.



Charles making a presentation at the summit

CONSULTATIVE MEETINGS WITH STAKEHOLDERS IN LIBERIA

During my visit, I met with key institutions / organisations and their representatives. In all of the meetings, I made summary briefings of the purpose of my visit and what we do in PAACET. The reception and encouragement I received was warm and overwhelming. Below is a narrative of the outcome of the visit.

A. Meeting with the Independent National Commission on Human Rights

My first meeting was with the Independent National Human Rights Commission. I was accompanied by Mr. Caleb Katwebaze, who heads the Human Rights Section of UNMIL. At the Commission we first met with Commissioner Oretha S. Davies, Esq., who is responsible for Oversight of Department of Complaints, Investigation and Monitoring. After a brief introduction by Caleb, and explanation of who I am and what we do at PAACET, Commissioner Oretha gave a background of the Commission, noting that the Commission was established by an Act of Parliament following the recommendation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). She noted that the Commission is funded by the government of Liberia and is restricted to source resources from outside. She expressed intrigued feelings about our work and requested that we meet with the Chairperson of the

Commission. We were led by Commissioner Oretha to hold discussions with the Chairperson.

We were welcomed into the office of the Chairman, Commissioner James D. Torh. Incidentally, Commissioner Torh and myself have been long-time friends, working on the promotion and protection of human rights in the Mano River Union (MRU) in particular and promoting the ideals of the West African Human Rights Defenders Network (NETWORK). While we were both amazed to have met each other, the bond of affinity availed itself and we saw how much our institutions can gain from each other should we work together.



L-R: Charles, Caleb, Commissioners Oretha and Torh

After my organisational background presentation, Commissioner Torh resounded what Commissioner Oretha had said about the mandate of the Commission and expressed great delight and willingness to work with PAACET. He added that he will do everything in his powers [positively] to ensure that PAACET is registered and operational in Liberia. He expressed willingness to provide a temporary working space for PAACET. A follow up meeting was planned between the Commissioner and myself on the following day

We concluded the discussions and planned for our next meeting on the following day which was the International Day of Peace.



Charles and Comm. Torh in Commissioner's office.

B. Meeting with the National Council of Chiefs and Elders of Liberia

As PAACET, we recognise the role of Traditional Leaders in every conflict situation. We believe that traditional methods of reconciliation are best for indigenous people. We were fortunate to meet with the National Chairman of the National Council of Chiefs and Elders of Liberia, Chief Zanzan Karwor in his office. As tradition demands, we recognised the traditional protocol of standing until we were asked to sit down.

Caleb introduced me to the Chief and his assistant, Madam Musu. I explained my mission to Liberia and in his response, he applauded PAACET for recognising tradition. He noted that PAACET has his blessings in any of our future engagements, noting that as traditional leaders, they cover the length and breadth of the country. He added that the network of traditional leaders is very strong in Liberia and that PAACET should inform him about any planned engagement so that his office can contact the other elders for support in any part of the country that our operation may take us.

He appealed that we speed up our registration process and help to sensitise the populace on peaceful elections as Liberia draws nearer to its general and Presidential elections in 2017. He committed to support and work with PAACET.



L-R: Caleb, Chief Zanzan, Charles and Md. Musu

C. Meeting with the Ministry of Internal Affairs

At the Ministry of Internal Affairs, we met with the Assistant Minister of Culture and Customs, Hon. Joseph Jangar and his Principal Assistant Mr. William Jallah. After a brief introduction, I explained the purpose of my visit and what PAACET does. In response, the Minister thanked me for taking the bold step to visit Liberia in the midst of the rains. He

expressed deepest satisfaction and committed his office's support to PAACET's registration process.



L-R: Mr. Jallah, Charles and Hon. Jangar

The Hon. Minister informed me that his office plays a central role in the operations of all local and international Non-Governmental Organisations, adding that the information on PAACET's brochure encourages him so much as he is confident that PAACET can contribute immensely to maintaining peace in Liberia. He encouraged me to call on him at any time his service is needed.

D. Celebrating International Peace Day

Following a previous agreement, I was picked up at my residence by Commissioner James D. Torh. We drove to his office to finalise discussions on PAACET's registration process and the temporary working space. Commissioner Torh is committed to support PAACET in that drive. It was International Peace Day and I had expressed the desire to attend the ceremony. I joined Commissioner Oretha to attend the function. The ceremony took place at the Monrovia City Hall. The ceremony was symbolic with speeches and statements from representatives from various sectors of the Liberian society (Religious Leaders, Government officials, National Peace Building Commission, Youth, Women, Persons with Disabilities, Local Artists, etc.). This year's celebration was under the theme: ***"A Time for Peace, Rejecting Violence to Secure Human Rights"***.

Liberians reflected on the horrendous past and called on all to embrace peace. Cultural performances climaxed the occasion.



Commissioner Oretha making a statement at the celebration

E. Meeting with William V.S. Tubman University

William Bwewusa accompanied me to the meeting with the Vice President for Institutional Advancement at the University, Rev. Rita E. Townsend. Incidentally, William lectured at the university for about three years while also working with the UN. The meeting was very interesting inasmuch that after presenting a background of PAACET, the Vice President expressed optimism that PAACET is best suited to support with lecturing and seminars for students. She encouraged me to pay a visit to the university campus on my next visit to Liberia. She gave a brief outline of their courses and encouraged us to stay in touch.



Rev. Rita E. Townsend welcoming Charles

Rev. Townsend expressed willingness to invite PAACET to deliver talks on key human rights and peacebuilding topics. She also noted that her institution is ready to partner with PAACET on issues relating to the subject matter.

F. Meeting with the National Peacebuilding Ambassador

Liberia's National Peacebuilding Commission is a strategic institution in building and promoting peace.

The office of the Peacebuilding Commission oversees several community peacebuilding ambassadors. Ambassador William R. Tolbert Jr. is the Ambassador for Peace. We (William and myself) were led by a young female community peace Ambassador who introduced us. I explained the purpose of my visit with a brief background of what PAACET is and what it does. In response, the Ambassador, who happens to be the son of the Late President William Tolbert welcomed us to Liberia. He said that his office commenced work in July 2015 after his appointment by President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. Following his appointment, he said that he consulted with traditional people in order to help develop a term of reference for his work. He noted the key challenges to include resource mobilisation to sustain his office. He mentioned the Commission's key programmes: bringing both Christian and Muslim youths together and the constitutional review.



L-R: William, Ambassador Tolbert Jr. and Charles

Ambassador Tolbert Jr. informed us that the Commission is planning to build a memorial to depict a historical record of the civil war in Liberia. Responding to PAACET'S thematic area on Elections and Electoral processes, he commented on the role of the press in elections, which he added should be based on objectivity.



L-R: Young Female Community Ambassador, Ambassador Tolbert Jr and Charles in the Ambassador's office

He said that his Commission is also working to cement the relationship between the police and the cyclists (motor bike riders), which is called “Penpen” and “Kekeh”. “Kekeh” is a kind of tricycle used as transportation. He said that there are about 38,000 cyclists. He concluded that having stayed in Sierra Leone for about four (4) years, working with the Inter-Religious Council he is familiar with the challenges that his office is faced with and therefore needs partners to collaborate with in order to make greater impact on the lives of Liberians. He implored upon us to maintain the newly established relationship with his office as there are several ways our organisations can build synergies for effective collaboration.

G. Interview on UN Radio: Rule of Law Program

I took two interviews on the UN Radio; the first was on The Rule of Law program which is a popular 30-minute program that is widely listened to and on which I was the studio guest for that day’s edition. The second was a telephone interview on the “Morning Coffee”. The program drew insights about PAACET and its desire to establish its operations in Liberia. Issues on the Rule of Law, transitional justice, human rights and pre-trials were discussed. The program enabled the popular listeners to understand how PAACET’s work fits into addressing the fundamental human rights and social justice issues. A full audio recording is available and will be uploaded on PAACET’s website.



Charles as studio guest of UNMIL Rule of Law program

The telephone interview was a 10-minute telephone call from the program producer to enable listeners to know about PAACET. The two interviews supported our public relations that will strengthen our commitment to service.

H. Meeting with Sabato Neufville, UNMIL Outreach Section

Sabato Neufville works at the Community Outreach section, UNMIL. Before his recruitment into the UN system, Sabato was Executive Director of a local NGO, Youth Movement Against Violence and also runs a school called the Kingsley Lington School in Liberia. Sabato has a youth centre that has existed for about ten years. We discussed the possibility of collaboration with his school, and the wider civil society. While working with the UN, Sabato works with civil society organisations and local communities. He assured me of his support to help fast-track our registration process. We went on a conducted tour around his office to see first-hand impressions of his community engagement. We agreed to open the lines of communication and cooperation.



Charles and Sabato at the UNMIL Headquarters.

We shared contacts and a package containing PAACET’s organisational background documents was presented to Sabato by courtesy of William.

I. Meeting with Eva Flomo, Focal Person for Gender at UNMIL

Mindful of PAACET’s gender sensitivity, my meeting with Eva provided an insight into how we at PAACET can best respond to gender issues in Liberia once we kick-start our operations. Eva is an employee of UNMIL and serves as focal person for gender. Her work includes coordinating with women’s groups in Liberia to solve gender issues including sexual and gender based violence.



Charles and Eva at the UNMIL Headquarters

I was introduced to Eva by William. After an introduction of PAACET and its work, Eva informed me that she had had prior information from William about my desire to meet with women's groups. Eva assured us of meeting with the Culture Ambassador and Traditional Queen who also works with a consortium of women's groups. After our brief meeting, Eva provided feedback about date and time for the appointment she had confirmed with the traditional queen of Liberia and Culture Ambassador, Madam Juli Endee.

J. Meeting at Kofi Annan Institute for Conflict Transformation, University of Liberia.

The Kofi Annan Institute for Conflict Transformation (KAICT) is a department for peace and conflict studies at the University of Liberia. We met with the Director, Professor T. Debey Sayndee in his office. We observed the necessary courtesies by way of introduction and William thanked the Professor for accepting to meet with us. I gave an introductory background of PAACET and my purpose of visiting Liberia. Prof. Sayndee expressed delight to meet with us and first shared his experience working on a non-violence election campaign in Sierra Leone in 2012. He gave a brief background to the establishment of KAICT, which he said was supported by a Sierra Leonean academic, Professor David Francis of Bradford University in the UK. Some of the institute's work he said includes among others, training in mediation for Paramount Chiefs and local leaders, training in women's participation, research in gender based violence and access to justice with reference to customary and statutory law.



L-R: William, Prof. Saynde, KAICT, and Charles

He shared examples of institutional challenges in relation to prosecution and state confidence in the police citing an instance of a 15-year-old girl who was gang raped since March 2016 and to date no justice or redress has been received by the parents. We also discussed matters relating to weak service delivery, agreeing that his department is willing to work with PAACET to confront some of these challenges. He solicited PAACET's support in teaching human rights and peace education courses, noting that the department runs a Master's program on peace. Currently, his department has 83 students who are preparing for graduation.

He also told us about research he conducted on human security in 2013 and maintained that most of the challenges Liberia is facing today were presented in the findings of the research, which includes; economic security, food security, health security, social security, etc. He added that it is sad that there are areas in Liberia where indigenous peoples have never seen a vehicle in their lifetime. He expressed great interest in PAACET's programmes and noted in particular that he wants to benefit from PAACET's healing and reconciliation program. He promised sharing some of his research reports with us.



Charles and William at KAICT

K. Meeting with Culture Ambassador and Traditional Queen of Liberia

Following an appointment scheduled, Eva Flomo led us to a meeting with the Culture Ambassador and Traditional Queen, Ambassador Juli Endee. Ambassador Endee is also Executive Director of Crusaders for Peace, a popular national group of artist/musicians. After the usual courtesies of introduction and background presentation of PAACET, Ambassador Endee thanked us for our visit. She hastened to say that she is not a traditional queen of Liberia based on royalty and said that she was on probation for nine (9) years before she was crowned as a traditional queen to serve as the voice for the voiceless.

Amb. Endee returned to Liberia from the United States 23 years ago, apparently during the war and proposed to promote peace through music. She believed that music is a universal language and through this venture, she established the organisation “Crusaders for Peace”. She played an active role in the prevention and protection from Ebola. She took us on a conducted tour in the different departments of her organisation which included, among others, Women’s department, children’s department, youth, Information Technology, music and culture, etc.

Ambassador Endee has produced several songs about combating Ebola, in different languages including krio, which is a lingua franca in Sierra Leone and French to support Sierra Leoneans and Guineans. She gave us a short listening treat of some of her recent songs targeting peaceful elections and unity in Liberia which has not yet been released. Full of enthusiasm, she noted some constraints mainly on resource challenges.

Her organisation, Crusaders for Peace has secured a large portion of land on which they intend to establish a multi-purpose village.

Ambassador Endee also teaches dance and has a lot of networks in all the 15 counties in Liberia, with seven (7) operational offices across the country. She is presently working with the National Institute for Health and UNICEF on routine vaccination and working to organise a festival for the UN in commemoration of the UN Day on October 24. She is founder of Golden Image Awards which give awards to deserving Liberians. She has a line of fabric designs and has composed songs to promote peace ahead of the 2017 elections. While Amb. Endee is a musician, a dancer, a communicator and a friend of the media, she assured us she is not a POLITICIAN.



Crusaders for Peace’ proposed site for multi-purpose village

At the end of our discussion, Amb. Endee expressed her deepest satisfaction for our visit and as a sign of her organisation’s appreciation, she informed us that by their custom and tradition, she will perform a short traditional ceremony on us so that even as we leave, we will always carry the memories of being accepted in her culture and traditional practice.



L-R: William, Ambassador Endee, Charles and Eva after the traditional ceremony.

We were clad with traditional fabric of national design and colour. We agreed to start collaboration at this point even before PAACET concludes its registration requirements in Liberia.

DEBRIEFING SESSION

Having concluded all of the scheduled meetings, I had a debriefing session with William to evaluate our successes and challenges. We both agreed that the meetings were relevant with realistic outcomes. We committed to do what it takes to take the process forward. William is committed to providing coordination and facilitation support within his limit. We further agreed to take an imperative approach to establish an operational office in Liberia giving the overwhelming supportive commitment we received, considering the adage “hit the rod when it is hot”. To

this end, we discussed the need for me to travel back to Liberia to follow up on the process and use existing facilities to commence work. We also noted that the UN draw down will provide a huge opportunity for PAACET to position itself in working with other organisations to promote human rights, social justice and the rule of law using our ethically sound traditional conflict resolution approach, [Fire Circle Reconciliation ©](#).

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

The working visit to Liberia was a productive venture. In-roads were made to commence work pending the fulfilment of the legal requirements. It is hoped that if we meet these requirements, PAACET is in a better position to source institutional support from UNMIL to take the work of human rights and transitional justice forward. The next steps should be based on a series of actions including the following;

- Follow up visit to Liberia to finalise PAACET's registration process and strengthen our organisational relationship. This requires some financial resources.
- Follow up with UNMIL to lobby for institutional support for PAACET to work on its thematic programme areas in post-conflict Liberia.
- Develop project proposals on the key human rights challenges in Liberia which includes, harmful traditional practices, sexual and gender based violence and discuss with the head of UNMIL Human Rights Section. This is not an exhaustive list.

While thanking the Board and Management of PAACET, I am also resounding our appeal for your continuous and increased support for as we all know

PEACE IS THE ONLY WAY FORWARD!

PAACET, September, 2016 ©

ANNEX 1: Provisional Itinerary

Regional Director Peace Africa Alliance, Consulting, Educating and Training – PAACET's visit in Liberia

Office /Group	Date	Time	Focal Person	Contact	Activity	Venue
Independent National Commission on Human Rights	20-09-16	10:00 AM	Caleb	0770319167	Meeting Commissioners	Office
Ministry of Internal Affairs/Registration	20-09-16	12:00 PM	Sabato Neufville Caleb / Tokba	0886-536479 0770319167	Check Requirements for Registration – (Tokba)	MIA
Liberia Peace Ambassador / Peace Building Commission	22-09-16	11:00 AM	Martina Brooks	0777348135	Meeting with the Ambassador	PB Commission
Federation of Liberia Youth	21-09-16					
Traditional Communicators	23-09-16	10:00 AM	Sabato Nuefville	0886-536479	Meeting / Identification of office space	
UNMIL Radio - Coffee break - Date-line Liberia	23-09-16	8:00 AM	Romeo Togba		Radio Interview	UNMIL radio
University of Liberia	20-09-16	2:00 PM			Meeting	
Elections Commission	22-09-16	10:00 AM	Sayor Tequor Caleb	0770319167	Meeting with the Commission	Office
WVS Tubman University	21-09-16	2:00 PM	Rev Rita Townsend	0886709455	Meet Rev. Rita Townsend	
Women groups	21-09-16	2:00 PM	Eva Flomo		Meeting	
Civil society	20-09-16	2:00 PM	Caleb Sayor Tequor	0770319167	Meeting	
Inter religious Concil /Leaders	20-09-16	10:00 AM			Imam etc	Office
Traditional Council	20-09-16	12:00 PM	Zanza	0770319167	Meeting with Zanza	Office