Strengthening the Rule of Law and Combating Impunity in Liberia

# The Carter Center Record

Issue 3 August 2007

## People must cooperate with police long after the crime has been done

*By Emmanuel V. Kwenah, Bong Youth Association*

We at the Bong Youth Association have noticed that a lack of understanding about legal systems is causing problems with justice in Bong County. According to an interview with a police captain in Gbarnga City, people often make complaints, but they do not follow up on the matter. This makes it difficult for the police to gather the evidence they need, and sometimes results in the release of suspected criminals. He further added that when these suspected criminals are seen in the streets, people conclude that the police have connived with these criminals.

This problem could be avoided if people had better knowledge of how the justice system works. From feedback received from most of our project villages and towns, information on the legal system has taken very long to reach them.

One old woman, Ma Larko, said that since her lifetime, this is her first time to be informed about what is called a court system and the difference between the various courts.

People see our civic education program as an eye opener to knowing and understanding the justice system. Now many traditional people are beginning to build some confidence in the peace we currently enjoy.

Louise Elliott Bedell and Lucy Macarthy of SEWODA

## Why should teenage marriage be accepted?

*By Louise Elliott Bedell, SEWODA*

In the rule of law, marriage happens when a couple is ready and wants to build their lives together and raise a family.

The traditional inhabitants of southeastern Liberia, especially the Grebo tribe of Maryland County, accept teenage marriage

*(Continued on page 3)*

# Can rights stand without responsibilities?

*By Wilmon Wesseh, Cape Palmas High School Human Rights Club*

Rights and responsibilities are twin brothers. Where there is a right there is a responsibility, and where there is a responsibility there is a right that protects you.

I have the right to go to school and I have the responsibility to study. I have the right to be protected against any discrimination and I also have the responsibility to obey the rules and regulations of the country.

I have the right to my opinion and I have the responsibility to respect others' opinions.

Once there is no responsibility, there will be no right. Because if my right is to be respected then it's my responsibility to respect the rights of others.

In short, right stands with responsibility and responsibility stands with right.

Cartoon by George G. Moore

# The Liberian immigration debate in U.S.A.

(Continued from page 4)

tion status they previously had. Those with pending asylum status will likely be granted leave to remain in the U.S. so that they can have their applications reviewed and have their interview. However, those who are in the U.S. on TPS status alone will be expected to return to Liberia. I interviewed an immigration attorney who handled TPS termination cases for Sierra Leoneans, and he told me that it is very unlikely that the State Department would search for Liberians with the sole purpose of deporting them, although offenses as minor as traffic violations could put a person at greater risk.

Because many Liberians under TPS have been in the U.S. as long as sixteen years, and have worked, paid taxes, and raised children, community advocates are concerned that termination of TPS will cause a rift in the social, family, and economic networks that Liberians in the U.S. have created. Some advocates also argue that by staying in the U.S. and by continuing to send money home, Liberians under TPS can make greater contributions to the rebuilding of Liberia than they could if they were in Liberia, due to the country's weak economy.

*"Friends of Liberia in the U.S. are lobbying Congress for a change."*

In July, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a bill by Congressman Patrick Kennedy that would extend TPS by one year; it is awaiting consideration in the Senate. President Sirleaf has also petitioned President Bush for the delay of TPS termination until the legislative debate is resolved. While it is not certain that either bill will be passed, friends of Liberia in the U.S. are working hard to lobby Congress for a change that will allow those Liberian's on TPS status to remain.

# Is teenage marriage good for our society?

(Continued from page 1)

among the young ladies in the society. Leaders, especially high priests, marry young ladies by force. The community even asks him to choose any lady he desires, regardless of her or her family's desire.

We at SEWODA realized during the assessment and sensitization we carried out for The Carter Center that the inhabitants of our native towns are still in the constant habit of forcing teenagers into marriage. It still happens that people arrest young ladies to force them to marry the high priest.

But if we want to respect our rights, we should encourage people to enter wedlock by choice. Likewise, we should let people know that their rights – to inheritance, property and custody over their children, for example - are best respected inside marriage.

Having resolved to live in harmony, to practice love, tolerance and understanding as a people, and being fully mindful of our obligation to promote unity and peace, we do hereby appeal a formal request to courts of law to stop this kind of teenage marriage.

**The Carter Center**
**www.cartercenter.org**

*Strengthening the Rule of Law and Combating Impunity in Liberia*

The Carter Center Record
Alex Tubman Street
Harper
Maryland County
Liberia

06 454 682
jeffreylarkinaustin@yahoo.com

The Carter Center, founded in 1982 in Atlanta, U.S.A., by former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and former First Lady Rosalynn Carter, is committed to advancing human rights and alleviating human suffering.

The Center's staff and its partner organizations wage peace, fight disease, and build hope by engaging with those at the highest levels of government and working side by side with people at the grassroots. A not-for-profit, nongovernmental organization, the Center's work is supported by donations from individuals, foundations, corporations, and countries.

The Carter Center works in Liberia in partnership with the Liberian Justice Ministry and is currently supported by the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor and by Irish Aid.

# Liberians in U.S. to face legal hurdles

*By Rachel Brown, Carter Center*

As an intern at the Carter Center in Atlanta, U.S.A., one of my tasks is to follow developments in the news in Liberia. During the strikes this spring in Guinea, there was a lot of concern about the safety of Liberian refugees in Guinean refugee camps, and a lot of discussion about the various ways an influx of refugees returning to Liberia might affect the country. At the same time as tracking the news, I have had the opportunity to assist the efforts of the "Atlanta Friends of the Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Commission" a group of institutions and individuals that are working with the Liberian TRC to implement their mandate in the Diaspora. The Atlanta friends this summer began recording statements given by Liberians in Atlanta, Georgia, who were affected by conflict. These two initiatives have led me to do a lot of research on the situation of Liberians outside of their country.

One of the big issues currently affecting many Liberians in the United States is the announcement by the U.S. Government that the Temporary Protected Status (TPS) program for Liberians will end on September 30, 2007. Liberians in the U.S. were first given TPS in 1991, when the U.S. State Department deemed the country politically unstable and therefore unsafe for return. Since then, it has been redesignated under TPS several times, granting certain Liberians in the U.S. protection from deportation, the right to work in the U.S., and a limited right to travel outside the U.S.

Because the U.S. government now considers the conditions in Liberia to be "improved," an estimated 5,000 to 10,000 Liberians benefiting from the program will return to the immigra-

*(Continued on page 3)*