



Report

ISS Seminar on Post-Conflict Criminality in Liberia

Pretoria, 10 September 2008

On Wednesday 10 September 2008, Thembanani Mbadlanyana (TfP/APSTA, Junior Researcher) presented a seminar on post-conflict criminality in Liberia. Dr. David Zounmenou (Senior Researcher, ASAP) chaired the seminar while Judy Smith-Höhn (ASAP, Senior Researcher) was a discussant. The seminar followed a field research trip to Liberia by a five-member research team, drawn from different APSTA (the African Peace Support Trainers Association) member institutions. The broad objective of the field research was to examine how the peacekeeping operations of the UNMIL have contributed to the longer-term goals of security and development in post-conflict Liberia. Its specific objectives were to:

- (i) Examine the nature and trends of criminality in PCL;
- (ii) Establish the connection, if any, between peacekeeping and criminality in PCL;
- (iii) Identify the factors responsible for the rising or decreasing incidence of criminality in PCL;
- (iv) Highlight the challenges facing Liberian Government and UNMIL in addressing the issue of criminality and in (re) establishing the rule of law and order and protection of human rights
- (v) Suggest strategies for enhancing the effectiveness of the Government and UNMIL in combating criminality in order to ensure sustainable security and development in PCL.

However, the seminar aimed at providing a critical account of the recorded increases of criminality in post-conflict Liberia. The speaker, Thembanani Mbadlanyana, shared some perspectives on the nature and scope of criminality in the country. Looking at the quarterly crime statistics from UNMIL (United Nations Mission in Liberia) Crime Analysis Unit, the speaker highlighted armed robbery, rape and ritual killings as one of the most recorded crimes in Liberia. The seminar agreed that a critical analysis of the crime statistics needs to be done so as to reach well-informed conclusions.

The weak criminal justice system, faulty DDRR and vetting processes, lack of institutional capacity, and other socio-economic dynamics such as high unemployment and uneven migration patterns, were all cited as one of the contributing factors to post-conflict criminality in the country. Mr Guy Lamb (Programme Head, ISS Arms Management Programme) raised the issue of broken social contract as another predisposing factor. This and other factors further fuelled poor state-community relations and the attacks on government institutions such as police. Lauren Hutton (Researcher, ISS Security Sector and Governance Programme) raised the issue of local ownership in post-conflict reconstruction programmes and it was agreed that empowering locals is centrally in achieving the desired local ownership.

The speaker concluded that increase in post-conflict criminality in Liberia is not something that is fundamentally new of any post-conflict situations. He also concluded that although the country is currently enjoying a fragile peace, the situation in the country remains volatile. The regional political dynamics renders the country susceptible to relapse. Since the country's security sector reforms started in a fragile socio-economic and political landscape, it was recommended that there is a need to build institutional capacity both at national and local level. In order to restore law and order, there is a need to rebuild state institutions, more especially strong criminal justice institutions. The speaker further recommended that, it is critical to channel some energies and resources in rebuilding state authority and legitimacy. It was recommended that UNMIL would need to revisit its exit strategy due to the situation on the ground.