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VOL. 4 NO.62 MONDAY FEBRUARY 7, 2011 Price: L\$ 30

Top Stories

Commentary **ASSESSING PRESIDENT SIRLEAF'S LEGACY**

The legacies left behind by African leaders, it seems, are too often reflected in their beliefs, their tastes. Tanzania's Julius Nyerere was, for example, known for his very frugal tastes and life style; Central African Republic's Emperor Jean Bedel Bokassa, was best known for the swash of medallions he sported on his dashing military uniform, notorious for his cruelty particularly his brutal assault on male detainees at a prison in Bangui; Uganda's Idi Amin's victims were known to be fed to Nile crocodiles; Zaire's (now Congo) Mobutu's lavish life style and sentimental attachment to the West often led him to spend months at a time vacationing in Europe.

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Editorial **LIBERIA'S PROSTITUTION QUAGMIRE**

FIVE MONTHS after \$5 for sex story spurred a controversy, some teen girls have come out to name peacekeepers of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) among their clientele while others say they sleep with as many as twenty men in one night, if the sex business is booming. This is wrong and must be stopped.

See page 4

World News **EGYPT PANEL 'TO STUDY CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM'**

Egypt's opposition groups - including the banned Muslim Brotherhood - have responded warily to the government's offer to set up a committee on constitutional reform. The opposition met Vice-President Omar Suleiman after 13 days of protests calling on President Mubarak to resign.

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\$5LD FOR SEX- FIVE MONTHS LATER: TEEN SEX PROSTITUTION STILL LINGERS

'I SLEEP WITH 20 MEN IN ONE NIGHT'

*Prostitutes Say Nothing Has Been Done To Improve
Their Living Conditions, Some Sleep with as Many as
20 Men and Boys per Night who Beat Them; UNMIL
Peacekeepers Listed Among Clients See pg 2*

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'I SLEEP WITH 20 MEN IN ONE NIGHT'

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Monrovia-

Rose is 15, and has been selling sex for money since the final chapter of the war in 2003, when she was eight. "I got on the street during World III to prostitute. I am on the street to look for a living because I am from a poor background and I got no one to help me," said the meek girl with skeletal eyes. Rose is one of a dozen teenage girls, scrawny and bruised, huddled here around the glow of a candle in a generator room off Center Street. About a hundred of them take turns sleeping on a single dingy mattress during the day before heading to the streets to work at night.

Five months after the publication of the Front Page Africa article "5LD for sex," that caused an uproar in Liberia, the number of teenage sex workers across the country is still on the rise according to estimates by UNICEF.

Beaten and robbed by their customers, they are forced to have sex with more men and boys to make enough money to survive. In Liberia, still recovering eight years after the end of 14 years of civil war, children are driven to prostitution because of poverty. While difficult to quantify, observers say they are seeing greater numbers of ever-younger girls crowding street corners to sell sex.

Rose has a large gash on her knee that she said was caused by a client who beat her and stole back the money he had paid her. "They jump on us on the streets and take our money from us. Some of the boys call us and say, 'let's go do something,' and after that they beat us and take our money. They tear our clothes on us too after having sex with us. We do not know them but they call us like customers so we go to them but after the sex they beat us." Rose and all the girls appearing in this story asked that their real names be withheld.

Lisa, 16, who also shares the generator room off Center Street, says her head was cracked with a rock by one client. A few weeks later, she alleges, a security guard took her to the beach to sleep with her and then refused to pay.

She is forced to sleep with many clients each night to be able to pay for food and clothing, she said. "If the street is hard maybe 10, 12, 15 men per night I sleep with, but if the street is moving, I would sleep with almost 20. I buy clothes and food to eat," Lisa said.

Lisa had a baby without medical assistance in the very same generator room two years ago, with Cara, another prostitute, acting as her midwife. "We didn't have anyone to help us. We couldn't go to the hospital because she didn't have any money," Cara said.

The baby recently died. "I cared for him very much," Lisa said. Of a dozen teenage sex workers interviewed, all said they had been beaten. One girl showed a deep wound in her foot which she suffered after a client refused to pay and pushed her out of his vehicle. Some claim that when they shout for help, Monrovia police officers arrive, only to further abuse them, sleep with them and steal their money. One sex worker said a police officer forced her to undress and burned her clothing, "so that I have to walk naked in the street and everyone knows I'm a prostitute," she said.

Police spokesman George Bardue said if officers were to have sex with underage prostitutes, it would represent a serious offense. "For someone to make claims that police officers are involved in such an act, that is very serious. What we are going to do is monitor the officers' behavior," he said. There is no formal police program to assist child prostitutes.

UNMIL Plans Probe

The girls say their clients range in age and station and include United Nations personnel. UNMIL chief public information officer George Somerwill said in response to the allegations that an investigation would be launched. "Although it's a lot less common than it was in the past, I'd say it does happen. When you have 100,000 troops, there will always be some bad apples." Samuel Beh recently returned to Liberia and owns the generator room where the girls sleep. He said he acts as a brother to all of them. "They come, they sleep, and they go," Beh said. "They sleep in the day and they go in the night. I do not see it as a problem to help these girls. I try to advise them, I counsel them that they are still useful in the society, that

"If the street is hard maybe 10, 12, 15 men per night I sleep with, but if the street is moving, I would sleep with almost 20. I buy clothes and food to eat." Lisa



they should come out of the prostitution life and come into the society and it will be okay," Beh said. The girls frequently complain that they are beaten, Beh said, but he is powerless to help them. "I'm asking that the United Nations, the government of Liberia to take care of them, to put them in a place where they are supposed to be or to send them to school, to trade school, where they can learn something for themselves," he said. Since the original article on sex workers was published in September, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf has charged institutions including the police with the monitoring of places where underage prostitutes are

known to work and to protect them, according to Zeor Daylue Bernard, chairperson of the Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia (AFL). The government must do more to help teenage sex workers, she said. "[The police presence] helps a lot to reduce the number of girls, especially young girls, as young as 12. But the concern from the government and other organizations should be to see how best they can assist the girls to leave the streets, which I think is the way out," she said.

Government to the rescue

According to Executive Mansion spokesman Cyrus Badio, the government has also purchased a tract of land in Kakata where it

will build a safe house for teen sex workers.

Ruth Jappeh, an attorney with AFL, says because of social stigma, the teen prostitutes are afraid to approach anyone for help. "It's a shameful trade. If they don't see themselves as being accepted by an institution, I don't think they'll want to come," she said.

Many of the underage prostitutes, Jappeh said, come to Monrovia from Liberia's interior and have no safety net or relatives to support them.

Nearly all of the girls interviewed say they want a new life, they want to go to school and they are willing to cooperate with anyone, whether the government or non-

governmental organizations, willing to assist them leave the streets.

"I really don't like it," Lisa said. "But what to do? If I don't go on the street, you see, nobody there to do it for me. The time my parents were living, I was in school, I was doing everything, but when my mom died, it was time for me to be on the street. The life I'm doing, it's not life. I really want someone to help me move from off the streets. Always I pray to God, let someone help me, let me move from the street, let a good person come around me, for me to move off the street."

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