



INNOVATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL SOCIETIES

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BOUTELLIS: Today is the 12th of May, 2008, and I am now sitting with Aaron Weah, who is with the ICTG [International Center for Transitional Justice] in Monrovia, Liberia. First, thank you for your time. Before we start the interview, I'd like you to please confirm that you have given your consent for the interview.

WEAH: *Yes, I've given my consent, but I'm going to speak to this interview in my capacity as a former civil society guy, because I did more work on SSR [security sector reform] than I am currently doing in ICTJ. All my views, comments and opinions are in no way that of my current employer.*

BOUTELLIS: I'd like to start the interview by actually asking you about your personal background, and particularly the positions you've held before coming to work with ICTJ, and in what way did you get interested in a security sector in Liberia.

WEAH: *I worked for the Center for Democratic Empowerment [CEDE], and I started off first as a research assistant. By that time we were conducting some research to evaluate the United Nations mission in Liberia, one year of existence in country. For the most part, I solicited the views of people living in Monrovia and around the suburbs about how they see security in Liberia after one year of the United Nations mission being in Liberia: how did they see security, was it better? Did it improve? Was it bad? On the other hand, we were also interested in their comparison with how they regarded their safety. Did they feel safe with the UN or with the LNP [Liberian National Police]?*

BOUTELLIS: Liberian National Police.

WEAH: *Exactly. So basically, that was the perspective of our interview, and the project was funded by the NDI [National Democratic Institute] and a few other organizations, civil society organizations. There were quite a few interesting findings that came up later on. By then, in 2004, were the very early beginnings of my work in security sector reform.*

Then I moved on in CEDE and became program associate. I served as focal point on the Security Sector Working Group. SSR WG is a coalition of leading civil society organizations in Liberia committed to research and advocacy with the aim to impact public policy processes on the reform of security agencies. Consequently, the Working Group deployed its members in four African countries to document best practices of SSR. The countries were Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra [Leone], and South Africa. I was tasked with the responsibility to document the best practices from Ghana with assistance from CDD [Center for Democratic Development]. It was a two-week exercise, but very interesting as well.

At the moment, all the reports on best practices are being compiled into one volume and will be used as a tool for civil society engagement with the reform process. The reports at some point might be published for the sake of drawing on comparative experience and how it has helped shape the—informed the Liberian process considerably.

BOUTELLIS: It will be published this year?

WEAH: *I don't know specifically when it is going to be published. It is still going through some editing by international partners. ICTJ, who is the technical advisor to the Working Group, is assisting tremendously, including the review of the study.*

Again, sometime later in March I attended this Police Reform Conference in South Africa, Pretoria, where I delivered a paper on civil society involvement in police reform in Liberia. This paper was published on the IDASA web site [Institute for Democracy in South Africa], the civil society organization in South Africa.

BOUTELLIS: As we go into functional areas of police reform, I'll invite you to draw on your comparative experiences as well: what you may have seen in other countries. First I'd like to ask you about Liberia and maybe give us a brief history of the status of public order and crime since the time when you conducted the first survey in 2004, sort of the evolution, as well as evolution in terms of the major challenges facing the Liberian National Police.

WEAH: *As far back as 2004, when we conducted this study, there are still issues that were present even from 2004 until now. Doing the research study we conducted, ordinary Liberians are very keen on police availability and prompt response to crime scene; even when they would call on the police hotline, police were no-show or very late. The time it took for police to get there was always unhelpful.*

BOUTELLIS: The police hotline was established when?

WEAH: *The police hotline had been in existence even prior to the interim government. There had been traditionally a number to get to the police, but I don't know the extent to which the country or people nationwide were knowledgeable. Besides, there are community police stations where people normally run to call on the police. But there are always concerns and frustration on the part of community that the police are not very prompt in their fight against crime. However, they continued to report the lack of adequate logistics to fight crimes—it is true there aren't sufficient logistics for police to operate professionally in Liberia. They are just managing at the moment. Even up to now you see the police, inasmuch as they've got very good training, yet the logistics are incompatible with skills acquired. So they have the theoretical knowledge, but it runs to the operational.*

BOUTELLIS: What are some of the specific needs when you say logistics? What's missing?

WEAH: *Vehicles, for example, are one of the impediments. Where vehicles are present there is a problem in certain police units that petroleum is not available. Arms are not available, amidst increasing level of violent crime in the country. Armed robbery remains one of the Liberia crucial security nightmares. Armed robbery is on the rise in Liberia. It is indeed a looming security crisis, considering the number of ex-combatants making up the population. The percentage of ex-combatants in our country is approximately 3.3% if you draw from the total number of ex-combatants who disarmed. More than 100,000 ex-combatants disarmed, so we have a percentage of almost 3.3%, approximately. With that kind of statistic, it is only realistic and practical to adequately prepare the police to confront the kind of challenges that post-war Liberia is faced with.*

BOUTELLIS: So armed robberies, and generally the presence of ex-combatants that still have weapons, are some of the major challenges? And in terms of crime?

WEAH: *Another challenge which the police has to deal with is the issue of the recruitment of the police. It is imperative that the recruitment process cautiously avoid recycling ex-combatants or individuals with history of rights violations. For the most part, most of the ex-combatants were not freed from that stigma. There*

have been concerns that people who were known ex-combatants with terrible human rights records are currently wearing police uniforms.

If you can just look in the lens—go back in the way the recruitment was done and how the LNP tried to ward off ex-combatants and those with terrible human rights records; you'll see how some of the concerns are genuine. For example, the current training of the military: the successful candidates that go through the different vetting exercises and are about to be sent on the base have their pictures placed in the street. So if you have an issue with this particular guy, you go and say, look, this guy is an ex-combatant, or this guy does not have a good human rights record. But for the police, for the most part, they were just names, basic names that were placed around in different areas. I'm not too sure if it appeared in the newspaper at some point in time—but at the time in Liberia, the police reform was not sufficient to have the public participate in the scrutiny process. During the course of the war, most ex-combatants were using noms de guerre; they were not using their real names. So putting their real name up was already a disguise.

Additionally, the coverage area for in the newspapers and the general media at the time was limited. In 2004, the Center for Democratic Empowerment conducted a survey of newspaper circulation around Monrovia, and it revealed that only 1% of Liberians in the Monrovia area read newspapers. So that was another issue. During the vetting process, LNP used extensively the newspaper as the primary medium to engage with the public. Due to the limitation of this medium of communication, a considerable number of participants were alienated from the process.

The TRC public hearings were another process that exposed the weakness of the vetting of the LNP. Many witnesses testifying reported—accused members within the LNP as being ex-combatants who'd previously committed—abused them. This newly reformed police—there were more than three cases where witnesses came up and said, this happened to me because of this guy, and this guy is currently in the police. This happened to me because of this guy, and this guy is currently in the police. So this further reinforced the public outcry after the police reform process got underway, that the process of vetting and the process of recruitment more generally was flawed.

BOUTELLIS: So the vetting process of the police was not linked to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission?

WEAH: *No, not really. It wasn't meant to be that way. The example I'm trying to introduce here is, people were saying that the whole issue of general participation of the public being involved—the whole idea was public scrutiny before anyone goes into the police. You have a way of communicating to the public and say, this guy wants to become a police officer, do you know him. If he has a human rights record, please come forward and say it. This was done on a very low scale which really didn't incorporate—by way of the media, like I said, didn't go beyond Monrovia. If it did, then it did only on posters with only names and not photos, and people needed to see photographs because Liberia is still a very illiterate society, 76%, so people would not be too familiar with reading names like they would do with pictures, photographs. So that was an issue that needed to be considered seriously.*

Monrovia alone is maybe one-third of the entire population of Liberia. Much was not done to solicit the participation of people in rural Liberia. The public hearing in January actually reinforced some of these concerns by saying people with bad human rights records are a part of the new police force. This is what the guy said at the public hearings; the witnesses said that. Not one, not two, but more than three said that.

I am not saying we need to link it up with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission; no, I'm just saying that, unwittingly, the Truth and Reconciliation process public hearings brought it up, which actually reinforced some of these concerns made in 2005.

BOUTELLIS: Talking about recruitment, can you clarify which part of the Liberian National Police comes from the prior police? There have been some that were retired, and then how were the numbers of new recruits decided upon?

WEAH: *I don't think I got you too clear, can you state that again?*

BOUTELLIS: In terms of the recruitment, we're talking about the vetting of new candidates. At the time of the transitional government, how many were new recruits versus existing already in the police force?

WEAH: *The total number of recruits and the old LNP.*

BOUTELLIS: What part of the LNP is new, post-conflict, and were there any officers from the prior police force?

WEAH: *That was a clear instruction to deactivate the entire LNP and recruit a new LNP. That meant if any element of the old LNP was interested still being a part of the service and met the basic criteria, he/she was welcome to do that. But for the record, the entire LNP was deactivated.*

BOUTELLIS: That was what year, the deactivation?

WEAH: *The deactivation started in 2005, 2006, around that.*

BOUTELLIS: So technically, the whole new LNP has been recruited again and vetted.

WEAH: *It is safe to say that, yes.*

BOUTELLIS: Aside from what you were mentioning, the posting of the names in the newspapers, were there any attempts to look at human rights records through either civil society organizations or United Nations and office of hire?

WEAH: *Yes, there was a time the LNP had a section where they were trying to corroborate information provided by candidates wanting to enlist. So if you come up and you say, "I want to enlist" you go through the preliminary. They would go through the community you claim to be from, and they would go and do background checks on you, talk with neighbors, talk with people about who you are and whether you were suitable for enlisting in the new LNP. This was led most times by the UN Police unit, a lot of internationals.*

BOUTELLIS: In terms of the minimum criteria for recruitment, do you have knowledge of how was this decided, and what were they in a country where you have, as you

mentioned earlier, 76% illiterate population? How were the minimum standards of education?

WEAH: *The minimum standard for education was high school, basic Liberian high school with the WAEC [West African Examinations Council] certificate. The WAEC certificate is the West African Examination Council; it is a regional evaluation done, and everyone that goes through high school is required to have that particular document. But there was some gender consideration to incorporate more female officers. There was a target of reaching 3,000 new members of the LNP, but this number was already at the point of being concluded when the trainers realized that the number of Liberian women in the police was very, very minimal and did not meet with the set quota. There is a set quota, I am not too sure of the quota that should be in the LNP, but there was a number that was not reached at the end of the day, so there was an additional 500 consideration to have women enlist into the LNP. But then most of the women who wanted to become part of the LNP did not reach the high school standard, so they had some fast-track accelerated program at the academy so they are brought up to speed with basic requirements, high school standards.*

BOUTELLIS: So basic literacy, high school education training for these women.

WEAH: *Yes, most of them were high-school dropouts that wanted to be a part of the LNP. Because they didn't get through high school and the LNP wanted to have a very good representation of women, they had to find another way to accommodate women. So they drew up this academic program, more or less a fast-track program to have them brought up to speed on basic secondary stuff.*

BOUTELLIS: Do you remember when the idea of a quota of female officers was brought about? Was this something along the way that was agreed on?

WEAH: *I'm not too sure of the specificity of that. It was just before they concluded the 3,000 benchmark. They knew that if the 3,000 benchmark was concluded, you would have a new LNP with far less women than expected. So this must have been about a year ago.*

BOUTELLIS: So the process of—

WEAH: *We may have to interrupt this.*

BOUTELLIS: Second part of the interviewer with Mr. Aaron Weah. We were just talking about the introduction of the quota for female officers into the Liberian National Police. I'd like now to move into training and professionalization. If you could maybe describe some of the training programs that have been developed. If you witnessed some of this or if you possibly have given inputs.

WEAH: *I really can't respond in depth, but I know that the curriculum of the LNP changed fundamentally by the inclusion of intensive human rights syllabus. Comparatively, looking back at previous police curriculum and the present curriculum and most of the training, the police got emphasized a lot of human rights issues, which is very fundamental to the curriculum and syllabus of the LNP now. Basically I want to limit my comment to that.*

BOUTELLIS: In terms of the survey you conducted on the perception of the police and so on, have you seen evolution in the issue of human rights after this training started being implemented?

WEAH: *There were a lot of fundamental changes in police conduct of criminal matters. Arbitrary arrests and detention that were once commonplace are almost non-existent. They are very faithful to the issue of processing criminals before actions are taken.*

BOUTELLIS: Now maybe we could move to the area where you may have been the most involved, which is the issue of external accountability of the police. If you could comment on maybe some of the major issues and what are some of the initiatives to try to improve external accountability as well as public perception of the police.

WEAH: *Oversight in the Liberian police is still something that needs to be grappled with. Oversight is very much important as a way of checking police activities in Liberia. Where the police do not enjoy the confidence of the general public, oversight is very key. This is something that civil society has been doing a couple of trainings and then participating with other organizations. At the moment civil society does not feel strongly that they have got a lot of recognition in dealing and working along with security institutions. Police reform exercises went on in Liberia with almost no input; if there was any input it was very, very marginal. Civil society and community leadership are well placed to speak to and address the relevance for oversight as part of the reform of police in Liberia.*

So in terms of external police expectations, the issue of oversight needs to be seriously considered. Additionally, the study I did when I was with civil society, bringing best practices from other countries in the region and outside West Africa, it is also very important. The more security institutions collaborate with civil society, the more they get to know about what happened in other contexts, how did these things get resolved. Public policy processes could significantly be enhanced.

BOUTELLIS: What are some of the best practices from outside that you have identified and maybe shared with the government, as you were saying, in your previous position with the Center For Democratic Empowerment when you were making policy recommendations as well/ What are some of the best practices you've identified?

WEAH: *One of them I just mentioned is the issue of oversight. In a country like Liberia just coming from conflict, it would be very useful if the community gets involved in accounting for the conduct of police. If there are ombudsmen, for example, set up in Sierra Leone, ombudsmen set up in other contexts and established where police are examined and are made to account for misdeeds, then this is a strong lesson to learn from. That would be important for the restoration of confidence and respect for the police. The community needs to speak independently to authorities, and these guys need to be accountable.*

BOUTELLIS: When you're talking about the example of Sierra Leone, are you talking about the complaint and internal investigation mechanism or the community partnership boards from Sierra Leone?

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- WEAH: *It is very similar to that, but it coordinates with the community oversight mechanism, almost ombudsmen kind of standards, like that.*
- BOUTELLIS: Are there best practices from other countries that you've identified that are potentially applicable in the Liberian context?
- WEAH: *Yes, precisely, but this one is more or less not police reform related, because when I did the study in Ghana, it was like the reform in Ghana was more driven by the military because the problem was more military. So the best practices there were very much unique to the military. So I don't know if it's inappropriate to talk about the military best practice in a police reform interview.*
- BOUTELLIS: It's all related as security sector.
- WEAH: *That's true.*
- BOUTELLIS: So the lessons from Ghana would be for the military.
- WEAH: *Mostly. One thing that was very overriding when I did the interview with the police, with a few police and civil society organizations during the study in Ghana, was that civil society was very much involved, and civil society communicated on the progress the reform was making to the general society. Another unique thing that came about was how the police historically and the military in Ghana were almost in conflict because the police felt that the military was absorbing their function. But under this new reform in Ghana, that was resolved by the military and police forming a mutual partnership. In other words, they were complementing each other's work; [...] with the police and complement any police efforts when necessary. So the whole reform exercise introduced new consideration of police-military relations, which is a very good thing to borrow from. The military and the police need to see themselves as complementary security institutions. So that was very much highlighted in the course of the study.*
- BOUTELLIS: Are there any existing oversight mechanisms, or at least internal accountability mechanisms, in the current Liberian National Police?
- WEAH: *I'm not too sure of that, but I didn't talk about that. I'm not sure of that. But another good best practice, even though it is general in nature in security institutions, was a powerful lesson from the Ghanaian reform—is the 1996 Security Act that incorporates all the different security institutions, as opposed to our current security operations in Liberia. Almost all the different security institutions are established independently by different statutes. They are all operating by different statutes, whereas Ghana has one single security legislation, which I think Liberia needs to borrow from.*
- BOUTELLIS: Amalgamation of different services. So what is the existing situation? How many security services are presently in Liberia?
- WEAH: *We have currently more than 10 security institutions in Liberia; all are established by different statutes.*
- BOUTELLIS: Is there discussion at the government level, society level, on possible integration of these ten security institutions? Do they respond to different ministries right now?

- WEAH:** *What we need is amalgamation, and we need to borrow from the Ghanaian best practice of having a single legislation establish different security units. Currently in Liberia, you have more than 10 security institutions established by different sets of legislation, and to repeal these legislations you need to go through the national legislative process. At the same time these, more than 10 security institutions in Liberia have overlapping functions, which have a lot of budgetary constraints on the government; needless to mention the fact that we're from war.*
- BOUTELLIS:** So this is a consideration. Do you have any specific—aside from the problem of drawing on big budgets—in terms of their overlapping functions, do you have specific examples where this multiplicity of agencies has created problems or friction? Do you have any illustrations?
- WEAH:** *Yes, we have the Liberian National Police; we have a unit to deal with drug and other related crime activities. You have another agency called the DEA for drugs. So there's overlap and confusion over the mandate. The LNP has some broad mandates to deal with drug-related stuff, and the DEA was established specifically for drug-related incidents or crime in the country. So that needs to be looked at as well.*
- BOUTELLIS:** Coming back for a second to the lack of public confidence, what are the principal reasons? You mentioned earlier the arbitrary arrests that were coming before—is corruption a major issue in terms of the public confidence?
- WEAH:** *Exactly, and what is the problem for corruption is the low compensation for police officers. So the guys are paid very low, and the state has a huge demand on their time to deliver up to professional standards. To compensate for the demand, the guys are openly taking bribes in full view of the public. So when the public sees that, they have no respect for police, but the truth is LNP is grossly underpaid*
- BOUTELLIS:** To give an idea, a reference, can you give us a salary of an officer in comparison to maybe a teacher or some other function in society?
- WEAH:** *Interestingly, it is pretty much the same. The pay rates for LNP are: if an LNP recruit goes to the academy he automatically earns \$30 each month for the entire duration of the training program. When he completes and leaves the academy for practical before officially declared an LNP he earns \$45. When he is admitted as a full-fledged LNP he makes \$90. That is the take-home pay every month, and that is the pay he survives on if he is transferred from here to Maryland, which is almost like a two days' drive. He is expected to use that to pay rent and feed himself.*
- BOUTELLIS:** So they start below the minimum wage at \$45 in the training, and then \$90 when he finishes, and \$50 is the minimum wage.
- WEAH:** Yes.
- BOUTELLIS:** Are there any issues of politicization of the police service in Liberia?
- WEAH:** *It came up a bit, I think, in 2005, when the president made an announcement that she wants members of her party to be trained in a key security position like the SSS.*
- BOUTELLIS:** Partisans?

- WEAH: *Yes, partisans of the current party, the Unity Party. She made some announcement that she would appreciate it if more of the partisans got trained as security officers. That was very, very controversial for the security sector reform agenda.*
- BOUTELLIS: So she wanted them to be trained as part of the different services' existing police—?
- WEAH: *She just made a statement generally that she wanted this.*
- BOUTELLIS: And what were the reactions, and what followed this announcement?
- WEAH: *People condemned it because it was very, very similar to what we experienced over the past decade, two decades or so. People interpreted that statement as tantamount to introducing the old order of security operations in Liberia.*
- BOUTELLIS: Are there any safeguards on the potential use of a security apparatus as a tool for a certain political party to make it a neutral police force?
- WEAH: *The safeguard there is one of the expectations of the security sector reform program that everybody is to have equal geographic representation. So that alone carries a lot of weight in making sure that you have a new police force that reflects a geographical balance. So people are anxious to consider all the different ethnic—to have ethnic considerations.*
- BOUTELLIS: One last area is the non-state security groups. Can you describe for us some of the non-state security groups existing in Liberia, and maybe what their relation with the LNP is?
- WEAH: *Non-state security groups?*
- BOUTELLIS: Meaning either private security or vigilante groups and so on.
- WEAH: *Non-state security groups, we don't really have a proliferation of that. What we do have is like you just mentioned.*
- BOUTELLIS: Private security groups. They're not armed.
- WEAH: *Right, private security groups; they're not armed, but they're really not considered—these guys are not considered seriously in drafting security architecture. They're not considered. These are guys that get hired just loosely like that, without most security training. So they're not considered very seriously as paramilitary so to speak. A guy will be walking on the street, and someone will say, "I've got a job for you to be a security officer; just come on my property." So they're not really considered seriously along that line. Vigilantes in Liberia—there was a controversial statement made by the former justice minister, who is now commerce minister, trying to mobilize local communities into vigilantism. When armed robbery was very high last year, at certain points armed robbery activities were on the rise, and so the justice minister mobilized through a public statement that people should come up in their various community and form into vigilantes and see how they could help to curb the increasing rate of armed robbery. Human rights institutions condemned that. It was very incompatible with human*

rights standards, looking at who vigilantes are and looking at mob violence. That was a recipe for complete disaster.

BOUTELLIS: So only the Liberian National Police carries weapons in Liberia?

WEAH: *Liberian National Police do not really carry weapons. There are just a few that do that.*

BOUTELLIS: Only the support unit.

WEAH: *The ones that are assigned. Maybe the directors carry weapons, but generally LNP do not. That decision has to be made by the president.*

BOUTELLIS: It is an unarmed police right now.

WEAH: *Yes, they are unarmed. Only the president can make that decision in consultation perhaps with the UN. The Liberian police are largely unarmed.*

BOUTELLIS: Now we've looked at different areas, a number of different areas. In terms of the broader police reforms, what are some of the broader challenges of today, looking at the future? Maybe, in your opinion, what are some tasks that should be prioritized when looking at police reform?

WEAH: *I think right now, one of the biggest challenges is how to transform its terrible economy into something viable and sustainable. The last budget was 179 million for the whole country. That's absurd. That's 179 million. The security component to that is reflected in the monthly pay of ordinary police officers, \$90. So these are some of the backgrounds to why public confidence is yet to be desired of the police, because the guys are constrained by these conditions to openly accept bribes. Also logistics: ordinary Liberians do not really feel secure if a police officer is around. They simply don't inspire safety. An ordinary guy in a situation of crime will easier call his community in a mob action to find safety than to call on an LNP. Usually they come barehanded. Sometimes they complain there's no fuel in the car. Sometimes they complain there's no logistics available. So Liberians in the current state of mind feel safe through vigilantes, unfortunately. So that is a challenge, and that challenge needs to be tackled through the economy.*

The compensation for these guys, how they currently live in society in Liberia as provided by the community; they need to be compensated in a way that the issue of bribery is behind them. They need to be taken care of in a way that they can have adequate logistics and the capacity to be able to stand in a real crime environment. So until these things can be done, Liberians will still see the police as just another unit. They really don't feel secure when police are around. The pattern to that is, our economy is in terrible shape, as a challenge, and it all needs to be done with different security units. That would be the first thing that would need to be taken care of. Then policy makers need to see the reason to review securities' compensation. Additionally we need to look at the issue of logistics, which is the basis for providing the kind of security that a post-conflict state requires.

BOUTELLIS: We discussed a couple of best practices identified in other countries. Are there any innovations or experiments, either here in Liberia or in another country, that we haven't talked about yet that you think merits more attention?

WEAH: *I don't understand.*

BOUTELLIS: Any innovation or experiment, whether it be a specific unit or specific kind of training that has been done, or just a measure that has been taken, either here in Liberia, in regard to the Liberian National Police, or in another country that you've visited through your work that you think is quite important and should merit attention.

WEAH: *Right now the government is very hesitant to arm the police, because of our own experience with violence, our own experience with weapons. Look at the increase in armed robbery. Most Liberians now are of the opinion that the police should be armed. Along that line, I would suggest—or I would think it would be good to experiment with a small unit, train them to deal with armed robbery and violent crimes of that nature. I would think, for now, a small unit needs to be taxed with that and not necessarily the entire police force. So I think that—we might need to experiment to deal with that.*

BOUTELLIS: One last question, if you allow me. We've talked about the Liberian National Police. Now I'd like to turn to the donor community, and to the UN police and the United Nations in general. Are there some lessons from their involvement in the security sector reform in Liberia, or more specifically in the police reform, in terms of what maybe has been done well, and maybe things that could have been done better in terms of their involvement?

WEAH: *I can only speak on that note with respect to the kind of support civil society has had from the international community. I talked about the exchange visit for civil society organizations to document best practice; the International Center for Transitional Justice has been very, very helpful and very supportive of that particular effort. It is one of the organizations that really encouraged the capacity of the organization to be enhanced, so it could deal with the competing needs angle of civil society's own effort to partner with the Liberian police, to partner with international organizations to get the whole security sector program underway.*

The Center, along with a few international NGOs, has helped organize a civil society group into a security sector reform working group. As I mentioned previously, this group is more or less a think tank trying to draw on comparative studies, comparative experiences in police, security sector reform, in a way of carving out a unique approach for the Liberian situation. It has been very helpful. This group, this security sector group, is currently a member of the technical committee of the security pillar of the Poverty Reduction Strategy.

BOUTELLIS: It contains the five countries, as you mentioned: South Africa, Ghana, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Nigeria.

WEAH: *Yes. This has been the only group so far that has brought policymakers from government, both parliamentarian and ministers, to the table to try to address that government should see the need of trying to open up to civil society so that they can work in partnership. This is very important. We have a history where security in this country has been seen as a no-go area for civilians. There has been a historical mentality that civilians and non-security personnel are not allowed to discuss security issues. So there is a major barrier. That was a milestone; a security sector working group, along with the International Center for Transitional Justice, helped to pool out of by having the launching of the SSR*

working group and having parliamentarians from government and the ministers, even having the United States embassy through its military representative there. That was a very big event in 2005.

BOUTELLIS: That was the launching?

WEAH: *Yes, it was the launching.*

BOUTELLIS: So there will be follow-up conferences?

WEAH: *Yes the security is already trying to get back, get us together and try to be a very independent security.*

BOUTELLIS: Where would it be based?

WEAH: *It would be based here in Monrovia. The security would be based in Monrovia. It is presently a coalition of nine, a coalition comprised of nine different civil society organizations. Presently it comprises the Center for Democratic Empowerment—my immediate past employer—, Liberian Action Network, small arms, women's groups; you have several organizations there. So it is quite a very interesting mix if I can put it that way. A cross-section of civil society organizations poised to speak to security sector reform issues.*

BOUTELLIS: Before we conclude the interview, do you have any final comments?

WEAH: *I would say, I would appreciate if you could speak to a few groups of the security sector working group, even speak to the ICTJ person on that: Lans Gberie, he is the head of the Monrovia office. The working group needs to know about these kinds of studies, so that they can draw enormous resources that are being put into this exercise. Liberia, until this whole SSR—security sector reform—is going to continue for the next decade if we are to be any better. So we need these kinds of resources to enhance our own capacity over time.*

BOUTELLIS: Mr. Aaron Weah, thank you very much.

WEAH: *Thank you very much Arthur, it's nice talking to you.*