

POLITICAL PARTIES ENGAGE IN SOCCER, KICKBALL TOURNAMENT

...NAYMOTE-PADD, USAID Promote Unity & Development through sports

Five Liberian political parties will this weekend begin the first phase of a soccer and kickball tournament organized by the National Youth Movement for Transparent Elections-Partners for Democratic Development (NAYMOTE-PADD) with funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The overall goal of the tournament – which will be held under the theme “WHO OWNS THE LAND” – is to promote free competition of ideas, enhance constructive political engagements & partnership, and generate increased cooperation amongst political actors for national unity, growth and development.

The tournament runs from September 15 to 30, 2007 and will take place at five different venues across five electoral districts in Montserrado County. Participating political parties include the ruling Unity Party (UP), of President Ellen-Johnson Sirleaf; the Congress for Democratic Change (CDC), of George Weah; the former ruling National Patriotic Party, of Dr. Roland Massaquoi; the Liberia Action Party, of Cllr. Varney Sherman; and the Liberty Party, of Cllr. Charles Brumskine.

Each match shall be complemented by brief discussions and exchanges lead by NAYMOTE-PADD's staff to accentuate the key objectives and concepts portrayed by the sporting activities. All participating teams (kickball and soccer) have received set of jerseys, footballs and will be transported to and from the games with funding from (USAID). Players of all participating teams will receive medals as Peace Ambassadors, Certificates for the most valuable players, best playing teams, disciplined team and best coach and the 1st and 2nd winners will receive trophies.

The USAID/OTI Country Director Musu Clemens will officially launch the tournament on Saturday, September 15, at 12:30 PM at the D. Tweh Sports Pitch in New Kru Town (located within Electoral District #12). Political party leaderships, the Head of UNMIL Alan Doss, the Minister of Youth and Sports, the President of the Liberia Football Association, youth, women and community leaders are being invited to attend the opening program, as a means of stimulating increased citizens' participation throughout the tournament, awareness banners, t-shirts and promos have been developed and will be posted within the five electoral districts and promos aired on five national radio stations for ten days.

NAYMOTE-PADD recognizes the potential of sports to unify people estranged by various strife-brewing factors, including politics, religion, ethnicity, social and economic disparities, and realizes that the 2005 General and Presidential Elections left deep bruises and divisions amongst political actors. Presently, many political leaders even consider their opponents as enemies, thus leaving very little hope of building a common front as a people to pursue a national recovery agenda. Hence, the

organization has adopted sports (especially soccer which is the most popular in Liberia) as a medium of engendering a healthy political culture wherein political parties and their members/supporters would see themselves as partners with a common focus and vision rather than enemies, and collectively develop a new national vision for growth and development in post-conflict Liberia.

NAYMOTE-PADD recalls that even when the civil war left Liberians sharply divided along factional, tribal and political lines, and planted the seed of hatred amongst the citizenry, the Liberian National Soccer Team (Lone Star) emerged as the unifying force that brought together all Liberians estranged by the war. Under an uncommon euphoria, they enthusiastically cheered and supported their national team, and the world watched with great amazement as enemies or perceived enemies stood together, chanting, celebrating and even hugging one another whenever the Lone Star played.

Drawing inspiration from this, NAYMOTE-PADD has decided to use these sporting activities to strengthen links between Liberian political leaders, communities and partisans of various political parties within five electoral districts in Montserrado County; promote a sense of nationalism; encourage purposeful and positive political party engagements; contribute to national development; and inspire reformed political pluralism, free and open exchange of ideas, and greater interaction amongst political actors and partisans