

UN hails first female winner of national youth music contest in Liberia



A Star is Born 2009" winner, Ms. Vivian Akoto

21 December 2009 – United Nations officials in Liberia have congratulated 19-year-old Vivian Akoto on becoming the first female to win A Star is Born, a youth competition which since 2006 has used music as an instrument for social change, national unity, and an agent to promote peace and development in the West African country.

Speaking at the finale held at the weekend in Monrovia, the Secretary-General's Deputy Special Representative for Recovery and Governance, Moustapha Soumare, said that "investing in young people is investing in the future; the performances we have seen this evening indicate to all of us that the future of this country is very bright indeed."

The competition, now in its fourth year, is organized by the Government of Liberia and the United Nations Mission in Liberia (**UNMIL**). It aims to identify young leaders in Liberia and is linked to the Government's Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS), the national development plan.

The 2009 competition was launched on 19 September. Some 1,500 people aged 20 or younger from all of Liberia's 15 counties participated. Of the contestants, 18 semi-finalists were invited into the Music Academy, where they were taught leadership and time management skills, and participated in training workshops on rape and HIV/AIDS.

"This year's competition was intended to promote the PRS priorities and raise awareness of the critical issues to be addressed in order to continue to build a strong and peaceful Liberia," Mr. Soumare noted.

UNMIL's Chief of Public Information, George Somerwill, said the mission would encourage the Government, organizations and individual Liberians to take the lead in organizing the event next year.

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