United Nations Peacekeeping

READING COMPREHENSION TEST # 12 "TRIAL BY ORDESL"

In a small village called Yama in River Gee County early this year, a 25 year old woman was accused of witch craft. She was not offered a fair trial, a lawyer or the presumption of innocence. Instead, she was made to face a trial by ordeal that UNMIL and many Liberian human rights groups believe was both unfair and cruel. The woman was taken by community members to the village square early in the morning of 11th January,2006 while a high priest, elders and some young boys of the village went into the forest to chop wood from a poisonous tree. They brought the wood's chips to the village, soaked them in boiling water and gave the brew to the woman to drink.

After an hour of public pressure and delusion, her tongue loosened. According to the villagers, she began to confess to killing her mother and a nine year old boy. After her alleged confession, she was left in the hot sun surrounded by a small circle of her own villagers for hours until she finally died. Her body was dragged away and dumped into a nearby swamp without burial rites. Her family members were ordered by village elders not to weep.

This wasn't the first time that the poisonous wood chips will determine the guilt or innocence of an individual in this village. The belief that a poison from the wood of a tree can help divine guilt or innocence is common across the hinterlands of Liberia, where "formal" justice is virtually nonexistent. The wood poison is often administered to persons who plead innocent to crimes. These persons are subjected to the procedure often unwillingly. Mostly they are coerced into taking the bitter medicine of injustice, often after being physically and mentally tortured into confusion.

Several villagers are in support of this practice. They believe that this is the best means of resolving problems and proving the guilt or innocence of an accused person. Some argue that they have no other means of getting justice for the people because they have only one county attorney, no private lawyers and no working court system.

Indeed this practice is sanctioned and regulated by the Liberian Government. The Ministry of Internal Affairs is responsible for overseeing the Regulation concerning this practice. Herbal doctors also called Witch doctors are required to procure a special certificate from the ministry. The ministry issues this certificate after ascertaining competency of the applicant.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

QUESTIONS: READING TEST # 12
"TRIAL BY ORDESL"

Family Name: …… First Name: ……
Country: …… Date……

Q1: In which county is Yama village?

Q2: What kind of trial did the 25 year old woman face?

Q3: What was the opinion of UNMIL and many Liberian human rights groups?

Q.4: Who went to the forest to chop wood from a poisonous tree?

Q5: What confession did the woman allegedly make?

Q6: When and how are persons mostly coerced into taking the bitter medicine of injustice?

Q7: Why is trial by ordeal common in the hinterlands of Liberia?

Q8: Why do some villagers argue that they have no other means of justice for the people?

Q9: Which ministry oversees the regulation concerning this practice?

Q10: What is the other name for herbal doctors?

LIVEWORKSHEETS