Co-director of Workshop Visits
West Africa on Peace-Building Mission

Last fall, Amos Sawyer, co-director of the Workshop in Political Theory and Policy Analysis, was invited to join the advisory board of the Conflict Prevention and Peace Forum of the Social Science Research Council (SSRC). SSRC established the forum in 2000 to assist in strengthening the UN’s knowledge about countries and regions in conflict or at risk of conflict, particularly at moments in the UN’s policy process when policies are being rethought, decisions made, or operations planned. Sawyer is also very active among experts who participate in workshops to discuss the details of the UN Peace-building Commission that is to be established by the Security Council.

Sawyer was former interim president of Liberia from 1990–1994, as well as former dean of the College of Social Sciences and Humanities at the University of Liberia in Monrovia. He has been at IU and the Workshop since 2001. His work on peace-building in West Africa took him to Liberia twice last fall where he participated in elections, preparation workshops, and discussions of post-elections governance issues organized by the National Democratic Institute and the Carter Center. He also visited Mali, Nigeria, and Ghana to consult on research activities undertaken by workshop-affiliated colleagues in those countries.

IU Archivist Holds Workshops in Liberia

In January 2006, Indiana University Archivist Philip Bantin led four days of workshops on archival management for archivists at the Liberian National Archives in Monrovia, Liberia. These workshops were organized as part of a larger IU Liberian Collections Project directed by Verlon Stone and funded by the British Library’s Endangered Archives Programme (see International News, summer 2005). The grant’s aim is to conduct a pilot study to preserve and provide access to the National Archives and the Presidential Archives, in particular the personal papers of Liberia’s longest serving president, William Tubman (1944–1971).

The workshops focused on arrangement and description of collections, appraisal of records,
reference service, and records management activities. The workshops introduced the Liberian archives staff to current standards, methodologies, and best practices and provided them with a basic foundation from which to seek more advanced training.

Bantin faced a number of formidable challenges in implementing these workshops. Because of the long years of civil war and the lack of maintenance, Liberia’s infrastructure has been heavily damaged. For example, electricity is not provided by the country’s power grid, but is only available to those who can afford to purchase generators. Consequently, in order to provide access to PowerPoint slides and to the Internet at the training sessions, project staff had to purchase a generator to power the computer and buy the hardware needed to access the Internet. Access to the Internet was especially appreciated by the Liberian Archives staff because none of them had ever actually “surfed the Web.”

For Bantin, education and training for the archives staff are among the highest priorities in reestablishing the Liberian National Archives as a vital and trusted repository for the country’s records. However, several other essential activities also must occur with education and training. These include additional financial support from the Liberian government, the transfer of the archives to a better facility for storing and providing access to the records, and the appointment of trained and dedicated professionals to lead and administer the archives.

Regarding his experience in the Liberian archives, Bantin said, “It was a difficult trip, but I was glad I went. I was amazed that despite all the poverty and suffering most of the Liberians I met were upbeat and optimistic about the future. I hope that in some small way I have contributed to Liberia’s development and rebirth.”

For recent update on IU activities in Liberia:

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of Indianapolis. As in past years, the two-day program featured several parallel councils, each consisting of 15 two-person teams representing the UNSC member states. This year’s agenda items included UN and Security Council reform; African issues (Sudan/Darfur, Côte d’Ivoire, Ethiopia/Eritrea); nuclear weapons and Iran; U.S. embargo of Cuba; and Israel/Palestine. The conference was organized by Allen Maxwell of IU Kokomo.

For ICIP Web site:
www.uindy.edu/~icip

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