Feb 15, 2013 (The New Republic Liberia/All Africa Global Media via COMTEX) -- Defense Minister Brownie J. Samukai was at his best in appreciating America's role in remolding and rebranding the Armed Forces of Liberia, recounting all of the eximious endeavors the World's only superpower has brought to bear to make the AFL, a truly professional post-war army that responds to the needs of the nation in many ways.

The US played an extremely pivotal role in the recruitment and training of the first badge of the men and women of the AFL, and has committed itself to doing same in further trainings of the AFL in order to upgrade its standards and professionalism.

Mr. Samukai at Thursday's MICAT press briefing recalled fond memories of US numerous assistance in logistic, finance and training to the AFL and its component, the Liberia National Coast Guard to which much is being given.

Raining eulogies on America for its contributions to the AFL, he said "America has been excellent in its support to Liberia. America has provided logistical and other assistance to the army and has even promised to scale up its assistant efforts."

Several officers of the AFL are undergoing advanced military trainings in the US, China as well as Africa, he noted and added the government will continue to engage these friendly nations to harness needed assistance for the army.

The defense minister divulged America's involvement in the planned training of new recruits to fill the vacuum created as a result of the attrition experienced in the army.

Dozens of officers left the army for either professional or personal reasons, thereby debilitating the numerical strength of the AFL.

For the initial numerical strength of the AFL, the Liberian government anticipated close to 2600, but the number, at present, is said to be very infinitesimal.

Minister Samukai said the recruitment exercise will soon get underway to fill the gap created by the departure of others, and added that the process will be as robust as the first one.

According to him, the same standards applied in the first recruitment exercise will also be applied in the pending recruitment of men and women for the AFL.

At the same time, the Defense Minister has thrown light on the intricacies of the Mali mission, in terms of the role those chosen will play, cost of mission and many others.
He said those who will form the Mail Mission already have been identified and vetted, adding "The AFL Platoon identified is gone through medical and is undergoing pre-deployment training.

The essence of the training is to give a picture of the geography of Mali and other basic information pertaining to the mission, the minister, adding "Liberia’s participation in the ECOWAS approved and UN sanctioned mission was show of solidarity to the government and people of Mali.

Mali was one of the West African nations that deployed troops to Liberia during hey days of its civil conflict.

In the same vein, Minister Samukai said the process of identifying a Liberian to occupy the position of chief of staff of the AFL is ongoing, adding "the exercise got underway five years ago."

He felt short saying who the next chief of staff will be, but indicated that it was left with the president to make such determination.

He debunked suggestions that a lady had been identified to occupy the position, and added no decision has been reached.

On earlier claims made against investment giant ArcelorMittal that the company was bringing arms or armed security guards into the country, he avoided making further remarks, taking reliance from the fact that Justice Minister Christiana Tah who is the legal lieutenant of the government had taken a position.

Samukai said he could make further comments because the Justice Minister who is the legal person for the government had already spoken.

"We all have personal lawyers and in an event where your lawyer takes a position on a case involving you, you don’t have to make further comments," he said.

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