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PRESS RELEASE

Political Prison Rebuilt as Education Center

At the site of the infamous Liberian prison, Belle Yelle, students are learning modern practices in sustainable agriculture, and carpentry trade skills. Many such schools were destroyed during the recent civil war. The new buildings and programs at Belle Yelle represent a return to pre-war stability, when Liberia had an impressive network of training and vocational schools. The site has been completed by the international aid organization Solace International, in partnership with the Liberian government. In Monrovia in 2007, Solace Director, Nate York, met with President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and the Minister of Education in Vocational Training, to discuss the project.

While there is a future road planned for Belle Yelle, during construction the site was far removed from truck routes; few outside organizations had worked in the area. Getting there required a twelve-hour trek through thick jungle and over raging rivers. With a track record of building schools and training programs in countries like Afghanistan, Sudan and Nepal, Solace was well-suited to manage the challenge. When construction began in 2008, workers had to haul all supplies and tools in by backpack. Nate York himself carried steel rebar for the foundations on his shoulders. By 2009, the buildings and vocational programs at The Belle Yelle were completed.

Facilities now include two new school buildings, a solar-powered wood shop and several acres of vegetables and grains that have been shown to thrive in the region. Programs in sustainable agriculture are being taught by an expert from Kenya. In addition to the new buildings at Belle Yelle, two other schools have been completed in nearby villages.

In eighteen months, Solace, the Liberian government and the local community have completed classrooms for over 700 local villagers. Additional help and funds have been provided by Roger & Kathy Stewart and Overstock.com CEO, Patrick Byrne.

Belle Yelle was once a place of pain and sorrow. It now offers many people the tools for rebuilding a better life. Solace is proud to have managed this project alongside so many hard-working men and women of Liberia.