



JUBILEE CAMPAIGN

ECOSOC Special Consultative Status (2003)

**United Nations Human Rights Council
Universal Periodic Review – THIRD CYCLE**

Submission to the 36th session of the Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review Working Group

October 2019, Geneva Switzerland

Liberia

Submission by
Jubilee Campaign USA, Inc.

A Vital Voice for Those Suffering in Silence

9689-C Main Street · Fairfax, VA 22031-3746 TEL: (703) 503-0791 FAX: (703) 503-0792

EMAIL: jubilee@jubileecampaign.org

P.O. Box 700 · Addlestone · Surrey, KT15 9BW · United Kingdom

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**United Nations Human Rights Council
Universal Periodic Review of the Republic of Liberia**

I. Background

1. Jubilee Campaign, in special consultative status with ECOSOC, submits this analysis of religious freedom and human rights in the Republic of Liberia as a contribution to the Universal Periodic Review of UNHRC member-state Liberia.

II. Scope of international obligations and cooperation with international human rights mechanisms and bodies.

2. Liberia has ratified the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the Convention on the Rights of the Child; and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
3. Liberia has ratified the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

III. Implementation of international human rights obligations, considering applicable international humanitarian law

A. Freedom of religion or belief

4. The majority of Liberian citizens are Christian, 85.9%. Muslims make up only 12% of the Liberian population, and all other religions, including Buddhism, Hinduism, and Judaism account for less than 1% of the population of Liberia each.
5. Article 14 of the 1986 Constitution of Liberia grants freedom of religion it also includes the principle of separation of state and religion.
6. Article 18 of the 1986 Constitution of Liberia states “All Liberian citizens shall have equal opportunity for work and employment regardless of sex, creed, religion, ethnic background, place of origin or political affiliation, and all shall be entitled to equal pay for equal work.”
7. The US State Department’s Liberia 2018 International Religious Freedom Report reveals that there are many complaints by Muslims that Christian

chaplains are hired at a disproportionately higher rate than Muslim chaplains to work in government organizations.

8. The same report revealed that “a number of religious organizations, Christian and Muslim, cited the government’s perceived indifference to the interests of the Muslim community as having the potential to fuel long-term grievance and instability.”
9. Muslim workers reveal that it is common for the government to overlook Muslim pleas for the recognition of Islamic religious holiday such as Eid-al-Fitr and Eid-al-Adha, while the government recognizes Christmas and Good Friday.
10. Baha’i religious holidays are not recognized by the Liberian government.
11. In March 2019, a 21-year-old man Ayouba Sanoe reported facing constant persecution for converting to Christianity. His house and belongings were burnt down by unknown arsonists and was forced to leave the country.¹
12. Subsidies, which the Liberian government provides to private schools, have “disproportionately favored Christian schools,” according to Muslim communities.²
13. A proposal to instate Christianity as the official state religion of Liberia was discussed in 2015 but received rejection from Muslim officials.³
14. Many Baha’i and Ahmadiyya Muslims have expressed their interest in joining the Inter-Religious Council of Liberia, but their applications were ultimately rejected.⁴

Recommendation(s)

Jubilee Campaign urges the State of Liberia to:

¹ Koinyeneh, Gerald C. “Liberia: Man, 21, Suffers 'Religious Persecution' for Joining Christianity'.” *FrontPageAfrica*, <https://frontpageafricaonline.com/news/liberia-man-21-suffers-religious-persecution-for-joining-christianity/> [accessed 3 October 2019].

² United States Department of State, *2018 Report on International Religious Freedom - Liberia*, 2019, available at: <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/LIBERIA-2018-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf> [accessed 3 October 2019]

³ *ibid.*

⁴ *ibid.*

15. Maintain the policy of secularization, and refrain from promoting any religion/ideology or rejecting the rights, freedoms, and validity any religion/ideology.
16. Meet equal employment standards for individuals of all faiths, not excluding the Baha'i.
17. Be unbiased in its allocation of subsidies to private schools run on human rights principles.
18. Recognize religious holidays of all religious communities in Liberia.

B. Sexual Violence

19. In 2006, a law (what is commonly referred to as “the rape law”) was passed in Liberia which states “the maximum sentence for first-degree rape shall be life imprisonment. And for the purposes of bail, it shall be treated as per capital offenses under Section 13.1.1; Capital Offenses of the Criminal Procedure Law.”
20. A new amendment was passed by the Liberian House of Representatives in 2017 to make the crime of rape a bailable offence.⁵
21. The history of rape in Liberia dates back to the Liberian Civil War of the late eighties and early nineties, where rape was used as a weapon.⁶
22. In 2016, five-year-old Jane Doe was raped by a 22-year-old male relative. As the result of the rape, she developed obstetric fistula, which has made her incontinent of urine and feces.⁷
23. UN Women Global Database reveals that 39% of Liberian women aged 15-49 have experienced “lifetime physical and/or Sexual Intimate Partner Violence,” 36% have been victim of child marriage, and 50% have been victim of female genital mutilation.
24. Former Liberian president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf signed an executive order in January 2018 prohibiting female genital mutilation and cutting. The order, however, only lasted for one year and was not renewed.⁸

⁵ “Reversing the Tide of Rising Violence against Women in Liberia.” *UN Women*, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2017/11/feature-reversing-the-tide-of-rising-violence-against-women-in-liberia>. [accessed 3 October 2019]

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ United States Department of State, *2018 Report on International Religious Freedom - Liberia*, 2019, *supra* note 2.

25. According to the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), rape is used as a tool during periods of conflict because “mass sexual violence even becomes a brutal form of ethnic cleansing when it is used to displace whole communities or deliberately impregnate women with combatants’ ‘superior’ genes.”
26. ODI reports that the most common and perhaps more distressing result of sexual violence is infertility due to the idea in such patriarchal cultures that “a woman’s worth is measured, and her future secured, by her ability to produce children.”⁹
27. More often than not, victims of rape and sexual violence experience mental and emotional debilitation that outlives their physical injuries, such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder.¹⁰
28. According to ODI, “Liberia has one of the highest incidences of sexual violence against women in the world.”¹¹
29. The Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC) reveals in its 2018 Crime & Safety Report that rape and sexual assault are the most reported of all violent crimes, and that the majority of victims are minors.¹²
30. Many rape cases are overlooked due to lack of evidence, either because it is “often a child’s word against an adult’s,” or because too much time has passed for there to be physical evidence of the rape.¹³

Recommendation(s)

Jubilee Campaign urges the State of Liberia to:

31. Renew the ban on female genital mutilation and cutting, as well as outline a comprehensive list of punishments for the crime.
32. Publicly condemn any and all acts of sexual violence against all individuals, including women, men, and children.
33. Repeal the amendment making rape a bailable offence.

⁹ Overseas Development Institute (ODI), *The fallout of rape as a weapon of war*, June 2014, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/53cfa34e4.html> [accessed 3 October 2019].

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ *ibid.*

¹² <https://www.osac.gov/Content/Report/2dc447fa-38da-4fee-ad62-15f4aeb31b77>

¹³ <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news/2014/07/18/tackling-liberia-s-high-rape-rate>

34. Provide therapy, counseling, and medical care to victims of sexual violence.
35. Provide educational courses throughout the state of Liberia teaching the inhumanity and international illegality of sexual violence.

C. Gender-based Discrimination

36. Liberia ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) on July 17, 1984.
37. The Council on Foreign Relations reveals that almost 75% of Liberian female workers are “informal laborers,” and that 41% of women with university and college education “work informally.”¹⁴
38. Most female workers experience obstacles such as “lack of access to credit and banking services, limited financial literacy and business training, few social protections or childcare options, harassment from citizens and local authorities, and poor sanitation within marketplace.”¹⁵
39. Women workers are subject to discrimination by police officials.¹⁶
40. In 2017, only 9 out of 73 women who ran for legislative seats were elected. Only two women were part of President Weah’s cabinet as of 2017.¹⁷

Recommendation(s)

Jubilee Campaign urges the State of Liberia, in accordance with CEDAW, (in particular: Article 2; Article 5, Section A; Article 10, Section A,C; Article 11, Section C) to:

41. Ensure that women are being hired at the same rate as men for formal jobs and careers.
42. Offer formal work for Liberian women with a college education.
43. Eliminate discrimination towards women on the basis of credit and financial educational training.

¹⁴ “Spotlight on Liberia: Growing Economies Through Gender Parity.” *Council on Foreign Relations*, Council on Foreign Relations, <https://www.cfr.org/interactive/womens-participation-in-global-economy/case-studies/liberia>. [accessed 3 October 2019].

¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷ “Where Are the Women in George Weah's Liberia?” *World Policy*, 5 July 2018, <https://worldpolicy.org/2018/05/30/where-are-the-women-in-george-weahs-liberia/>. [accessed 3 October 2019].

44. Ensure that workplaces for women workers meet the same safety and sanitation standards as those of men.
45. Increase the proportion of female officials in government positions.

IV. Rights of Children

46. Liberia ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child on June 4, 1993.

A. Health and Disease

47. According to UNICEF, “a very high mortality rate of 1,072 deaths for every 100,000 live births means that many children die with their mothers inside the womb, or are born without a mother to take care and nourish them.”¹⁸
48. 40% of pregnant women give birth at home rather than in hospital, and without any doctors or midwives.¹⁹
49. One-third of deaths for children under the age of 5 years occurs during the period from birth to one month of age.²⁰
50. Diseases and illnesses such as pneumonia, malaria, AIDS, measles, and diarrhea account for the 10% of child deaths before age five.²¹
51. One-third of children under age 5 face stunted growth.²²
52. According to UNICEF, “many children are also deprived of birth registration, which would not only give them a legal identity and protection, but also provide them with access to services, entitlements and opportunities. Only a quarter of children under 5 have a birth certificate in Liberia.”²³
53. 40% of Liberian children face malnourishment.²⁴

Recommendation(s)

¹⁸ “The Situation for Children in Liberia.” *UNICEF Liberia*, <https://www.unicef.org/liberia/situation-children-liberia>. [accessed 3 October 2019].

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ *ibid.*

²² *ibid.*

²³ *ibid.*

²⁴ “Children of Liberia.” *Humanium*, <https://www.humanium.org/en/liberia/>. [accessed 3 October 2019].

Jubilee Campaign urges the State of Liberia, in accordance with the 2011 Children's Law of Liberia (in particular: Article 3) and the Convention on the Rights of Children (in particular: Article 24) to:

- 54. Provide pre-natal and maternal health care to all women to reduce the rate of child mortality and maternal death.
- 55. Provide routine testing and medical treatment to children already suffering from disease and illness.
- 56. Properly provide and distribute resources to ensure a decrease and eventual elimination of child malnutrition and the health complications and deaths associated with it.
- 57. Provide every Liberian child with a birth registration.

B. Gender-based Discrimination and Violence

- 58. Many young girls experience female genital mutilation during their primary school years.²⁵
- 59. "19% of girls are married at the age of 15 and 40% of them before 18 years old."²⁶
- 60. Young girls (10 to 16 years old) make up the vast majority of rape victims.²⁷
- 61. "Sexual harassment" is not illegal according to the Liberian Code of Laws Revised.²⁸

Recommendation(s)

Jubilee Campaign urges the State of Liberia, in accordance with the 2011 Children's Law of Liberia in particular: Article 3, Section 21 and the Convention on the Rights of Children in particular: Article 19 and Article 34 to:

- 62. Criminalize and eradicate the harmful and inhumane practice of female genital mutilation and cutting.
- 63. Abolish the practice of child marriage.

²⁵ "Children of Liberia." *Humanium*, <https://www.humanium.org/en/liberia/>. [accessed 3 October 2019].

²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷ *ibid.*

²⁸ *ibid.*

C. Child Labor

64. Child labor is very common in Liberia, and most commonly, these children work as “prostitutes, servants, pan handlers, street vendors, and as workers on rubber tree plantations, in stone quarries and on diamond excavation sites.”²⁹
65. There is a Liberian law preventing children under the age of 16 to be hired for work, but it is often overlooked.³⁰
66. 21% of child workers in Liberia are subject to unsafe and unsanitary working conditions.³¹

Recommendation(s)

Jubilee Campaign urges the State of Liberia, in accordance with the 2011 Children’s Law of Liberia, (in particular) to:

67. Publicly condemn the act of child labor.
68. Enforce the Liberian law against child labor.

D. Street Children

69. According to OHCHR, “a street-connected child is understood as a child for whom the street is a central reference point- one which plays a significant role in his/her everyday life and identity.”³²
70. Street children often are “orphaned or abandoned” children that are often involved at an early age with drug use, sexual activity, and criminal misbehavior, and often fall victim to unwanted pregnancy, infectious disease, violence, and discrimination.
71. Almost 8,000 Liberian children were orphaned as a result of the Ebola outbreak in 2015.

²⁹ “Children of Liberia.” *Humanium*, <https://www.humanium.org/en/liberia/>. [accessed 3 October 2019].

³⁰ *ibid.*

³¹ *ibid.*

³² *ibid.*

72. Street Child of Liberia recorded there being 14,185 street children in the Liberian capital Monrovia. Of these, approximately 6,000 had no jobs, 84 were beggars, and 172 are pregnant teens.³³
73. Approximately 15% of these street children were under 5 years old.³⁴
74. The most common reason among interviewed street children in Liberia for their status, “search of work,” “family breakdown,” and “no home or family to return to” are the most commonly reported.³⁵
75. The most common hardships faced by Liberian street children in Monrovia include “inability to find food,” “conflict with the law,” and “sexual abuse and violence.”³⁶

Recommendation(s)

Jubilee Campaign urges the State of Liberia, in accordance with the 2011 Children’s Law of Liberia, (in particular: Article 3 and Article 7) and the Convention on the Rights of Children (in particular Article 19 and Article 32) to:³⁷

76. Address the ever-growing situation of street children in Liberia.
77. Provide care, homes, and food to all street children.
78. Provide medical care to children who have fallen victim to infectious disease, sexually transmitted disease, sexual abuse, and unwanted teen pregnancy.
79. Publicly condemn discrimination against street children on the basis that they often are forced into this unfavorable situation.

³³<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/531748e4e4b035ad0334788c/t/565c25ece4b06b23bf339dd4/1448879596874/An+assessment+of+street-connected+children+in+Monrovia.pdf>

³⁴

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/531748e4e4b035ad0334788c/t/565c25ece4b06b23bf339dd4/1448879596874/An+assessment+of+street-connected+children+in+Monrovia.pdf>

³⁵

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/531748e4e4b035ad0334788c/t/565c25ece4b06b23bf339dd4/1448879596874/An+assessment+of+street-connected+children+in+Monrovia.pdf>

³⁶

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/531748e4e4b035ad0334788c/t/565c25ece4b06b23bf339dd4/1448879596874/An+assessment+of+street-connected+children+in+Monrovia.pdf>

³⁷ [https://www.sabin.org/sites/sabin.org/files/Children%20Law%20Liberia%20\(September%202011\).pdf](https://www.sabin.org/sites/sabin.org/files/Children%20Law%20Liberia%20(September%202011).pdf) ;
<https://www.ohchr.org/documents/professionalinterest/crc.pdf>

80. Eliminate the practice work among street children and teens under the age of 16.

V. Summary of Recommendations

81. Maintain the policy of secularization, and refrain from promoting any religion/ideology or rejecting the rights, freedoms, and validity any religion/ideology
82. Renew the ban on female genital mutilation and cutting, as well as outline a comprehensive list of punishments for the crime.
83. Publicly condemn any and all acts of sexual violence against all individuals, including women, men, and children.
84. Repeal the amendment making rape a bailable offence.
85. Eliminate discrimination towards women on the basis of credit and financial educational training.
86. Ensure that workplaces for women workers meet the same safety and sanitation standards as those of men.
87. Provide pre-natal and maternal health care to all women to reduce the rate of child mortality and maternal death.
88. Provide routine testing and medical treatment to children already suffering from disease and illness.
89. Properly provide and distribute resources to ensure a decrease and eventual elimination of child malnutrition and the health complications and deaths associated with it.
90. Abolish the practice of child marriage.
91. Enforce the Liberian law against child labor.
92. Provide medical care to children who have fallen victim to infectious disease, sexually transmitted disease, sexual abuse, and unwanted teen pregnancy.
93. Publicly condemn discrimination against street children on the basis that they often are forced into this unfavorable situation.
94. Eliminate the practice work among street children and teens under the age of 16.