

Liberian Warlord-Politician's Death and the Search for Justice

Victims Never Saw Prince Johnson Prosecuted for War Crimes



[Click to expand Image](#)

Prince Y. Johnson attends a political rally in Liberia in 2017. © 2017 Zoom Doss/AFP via Getty Images

Liberia's Prince Y. Johnson, who rose to prominence first as a [warlord and then politician](#), was implicated in serious abuses during the country's two civil wars between 1989 and 2003. His death on November 28, without ever being prosecuted, highlights the need to bring those responsible for international crimes to account and uphold the promise of justice.

Johnson was a member of former Liberian President Charles Taylor's rebel armed group, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), and a [founding member of its breakaway group](#), the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL). In 2005, he was elected to the Liberian Senate. Liberia's Truth and Reconciliation Commission in its [final report](#) recommended Johnson's prosecution for "gross human rights violations," [stating](#) that he was among the "most notorious perpetrators." Human Rights Watch had [found](#) Johnson responsible for egregious abuses as far back as the early 1990s.

Other prominent Liberians have been held to account for their role in crimes during the country's civil wars, largely due to efforts by victims and civil society organizations who have sought justice beyond Liberia's borders under the [principle of universal jurisdiction](#). In 2008, Charles "Chuckie" Taylor Jr., the former president's son, was found [guilty by a court](#) in the United States for committing torture in Liberia. In 2021, Alieu Kosiah, a former commander of United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy (ULIMO), a Liberian armed group, was [convicted by a Swiss court](#) for war crimes. Another former ULIMO commander, Kunti Kamara, was [convicted](#) by a French court in 2022 for crimes against humanity and torture.

Unfortunately, these cases have been the exception rather than the rule. In Liberia, where some alleged perpetrators have held positions of power, [impunity for serious wartime crimes](#) remains the norm. This includes [George Boley](#), a former warlord, who was elected to parliament in 2017. Prince Johnson had used his position in the Senate [to work against the creation of a Liberian war crimes court](#).

Liberian President Joseph Boakai has committed to setting up a war crimes court, and earlier this year he [established an office](#) to support that effort. He should ensure the office has the resources it needs to advance swiftly. As Johnson's death shows, there is no time to waste: justice delayed can sometimes mean justice forever denied.