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Head of state and government: **Ernest Bai Koroma**

The former President of Liberia, Charles Taylor, was convicted and sentenced for crimes committed in Sierra Leone during the 11-year armed conflict. The country held its third elections since the end of the conflict, which international observers declared were orderly and transparent. The police used unlawful force against unarmed citizens. The government moved closer to abolition of the death penalty. Agreements between the government and corporations were not transparent and communities affected by corporate activity were not properly consulted about the potential impacts.

Background

In April, the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL), sitting in The Hague, found former Liberian President Charles Taylor individually responsible for planning and aiding and abetting war crimes and crimes against humanity during Sierra Leone's internal armed conflict. He was found guilty on all 11 counts of the indictment, including use of child soldiers, murder, rape and sexual slavery, and sentenced to 50 years in prison. In July, both the defence and the prosecution entered appeals; a decision was expected in 2013.

Due to an amnesty provision in the Lomé peace accord and the limited mandate of the SCSL, thousands of perpetrators of grave human rights violations during the conflict were never investigated or brought to justice. Tens of thousands of victims and their families were waiting for extensive reparations programmes to be fully implemented.

Sporadic clashes between supporters of the two main political parties occurred in the lead-up to the November general elections, but the process was peaceful overall. President Ernest Bai Koroma from the ruling All People's Congress (APC) was elected for a second term.

The Constitutional Review process was years overdue. The government promised to reinvigorate discussions after the 2012 elections. Two key pieces of legislation – the Freedom of Information Bill and the Gender Equality Bill – were still pending in Parliament by the end of the year. No attempts were made to amend the Public Order Act of 1965, which allows for the imposition of restrictions on freedom of expression.

Death penalty

The government continued to move closer to total abolition of the death penalty, following the establishment of an official moratorium on executions in 2011. At the end of 2012, according to civil society organizations, no inmates remained on death row and no new death sentences were passed.

However, the death penalty was retained in law for treason and aggravated robbery, and was mandatory for murder.

Justice system

In May, the Legal Aid Act was passed but was not implemented by the end of the year. The justice system continued to suffer from lack of capacity and resources. Civil society organizations reported that many people could not make use of bail provisions as they were often asked to pay bribes, at the police station or court, before bail would be granted.

According to civil society organizations, imprisonment for debt, under fraudulent conversion and other charges, and loitering, were commonplace. Women attempting to make a living through trade or microfinance institutions were at risk of imprisonment for debt. A lack of legal expertise within the criminal justice system and corruption were found to be serious underlying problems. Without access to lawyers, many individuals remained in prison for extended periods.

Constant adjournments, indictment delays, missing case files and shortage of magistrates contributed to lengthy pre-trial detention and prison overcrowding.

Police and security forces

In January, it was leaked to the press that the Sierra Leone police had received a shipment, worth several million dollars, of arms which they had purchased, including small arms, ammunition and grenade launchers. The shipment, ahead of the November elections, alarmed national and international actors. Members of the UN Security Council visited the country in May and raised this issue with the government, who gave assurances that some of the weapons were transferred to the armed forces.

- In April, police killed an unarmed woman, Musu Conteh, and injured at least 11 others when workers at a mining company held a peaceful demonstration against poor working conditions and remuneration. The Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone investigated the incident and released its findings in September which included recommendations for criminal investigations and prosecutions. The government initiated a Coroner's Inquest into the killing but the investigation had not concluded by the end of the year. No one was held to account.

- In June, police shot and killed Alieu Sonkoh and Ishmael Kargbo-Sillah in Wellington. A third man was seriously injured. According to the families and community members who witnessed the incident, the unarmed men were part of a neighbourhood watch group who were in the area where police were looking for a vehicle. The President visited the community and set up a Coroner's Inquest, which closed in July. The results of the investigation had not been made public by the end of the year.
- In June, a motorcyclist was shot and killed by police in Goderich when he failed to stop at a police checkpoint. One officer was arrested and charged with murder. The trial continued at the end of the year.

Civil society groups called for an effective independent oversight mechanism to investigate complaints and hold the police to account.

Right to health

The government made some progress towards ensuring that the Free Health Care Initiative (FHCI), launched in 2010, became a reality for pregnant women and girls, lactating women and girls, and children aged under five. In June, the government passed the National Pharmaceutical Procurement Unit Act to monitor and regulate the supply chain of drugs and medical equipment. Health staff continued to report problems in receiving essential supplies.

Challenges remained in implementing the FHCI. Health facilities continued to charge fees for health care services that were intended to be free. A toll-free line, set up to enable people to make complaints if they did not receive the care to which they were entitled, was set up but the process was subject to delays and inefficiencies.

The overall budget for the health sector was reduced from 11% to 7.4% in 2012, or just half of the 15% recommended by the Abuja Declaration on health funding.

Women's and girls' rights

In August, the Sexual Offences Act was passed but had not been enacted by the end of the year. Discriminatory provisions remained under Section 27(4)(d) of the Constitution, in relation to adoption, marriage, divorce, burial, devolution of property on death, or other interests of personal law.

The level of violence against women and girls remained high and harmful traditional practices, such as early marriage and female genital mutilation, continued.

Corporate accountability

Land use agreements between communities, corporations and the government greatly favoured multinational corporations over local communities. Tracts of land were given over by traditional chiefs to companies with little or no adequate consultation with affected communities. Land agreements were often not available in local languages or made accessible for non-literate people. Community members and civil society organizations that spoke out in favour of corporate accountability and transparency faced harassment and intimidation.

In April, farmers, civil society organizations and activists gathered in Freetown to demand a review of all recent land deals. They called on the government to institute measures to ensure that deals between communities and multinational corporations were fair and transparent.

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