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Amnesty International Report 2010 - The State of the World's Human Rights

Head of state and government **Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf**

Death penalty **abolitionist in practice**

Population **4 million**

Life expectancy **57.9 years**

Under-5 mortality (m/f) **144/136 per 1,000**

Adult literacy **55.5 per cent**

The final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was released in December. Some progress was made in establishing the Independent National Human Rights Commission. Although the government made some institutional progress to address rape and other forms of sexual violence against women and girls, many cases went unreported. Serious concerns remained regarding the administration of justice, with significant judicial delays leading to overcrowding in prisons.

Background

President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf made significant cabinet changes in April, June and July to address poor performance in key sectors, particularly the justice and security sectors.

The acquittal in April of five senior government officials – Charles Gyude Bryant, former Chairman of the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL); Edwin Snowe, former Speaker of the House; and three other NTGL members – was considered a major setback in the fight against corruption. The Liberian Anti-Corruption Commission, established early in the year, started investigations on two major cases. Several government ministers were dismissed for alleged corruption.

President Johnson-Sirleaf officially closed the disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration programme in July, which had disarmed and demobilized 101,000 former combatants and provided reintegration for 90,000 former combatants since 2003.

There were three separate incidents of violence that involved the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) soldiers and Liberia National Police officers in Monrovia in February, April and May.

Mob justice prevailed on several occasions because of the public's lack of confidence in the administration of justice. In June, for example, in the south-eastern city of Harper, an allegation of a ritual killing sparked a riot involving more than 2,000 people who ransacked the police station, damaged the prison and tried to kill police officers by dousing them with petrol.

A joint field mission drawn from UN peacekeeping operations in Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire visited western Côte d'Ivoire in April. It found that many of the estimated 1,500 to 2,000 Liberian combatants associated with Ivorian militias were involved in illegal exploitation of natural resources.

In September, the mandate of the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) was extended for a further year, with a reduction in military and civilian personnel to approximately 8,500.

In December, the UN Security Council lifted the arms embargo on Liberia that had been in place since 1999. It also extended the travel ban and asset freeze imposed on people considered a threat to the peace process. The mandate of the Panel of Experts that monitors UN sanctions on Liberia was extended to December 2010.

No steps were taken to abolish the death penalty after its reintroduction in 2008 in violation of the Second Optional Protocol of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Liberia acceded in 2005.

Impunity

Little progress was made in bringing to justice people responsible for gross human rights violations during the conflict in Liberia between 1989-1996 and 1999- 2003.

In January, Benjamin Yeaten, a former general of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) and a close associate of former President Charles Taylor, was indicted for the murders of two Deputy Ministers and a former Minister and members of his family in November 1997 and June 2003. Benjamin Yeaten was alleged to be living in Togo.

In June, the TRC concluded its work and submitted an unedited version of its report to the legislature and the President. The final report was made public in December. The TRC recommended the establishment of an extraordinary criminal tribunal to prosecute people identified as having committed crimes under international law as well as economic crimes. A total of 98 individuals were identified as the "most notorious perpetrators", including Charles Taylor and seven other leaders of various armed groups. Thirty six were identified as responsible for crimes under international law but not recommended for prosecution because they spoke truthfully and expressed remorse. President Johnson-Sirleaf was included in the list of supporters of armed groups, and the TRC recommended that she be banned from running for public office for 30 years. In July, President Johnson-Sirleaf committed to work with all key stakeholders to implement the TRC's recommendations, but no progress had been made by the end of the year.

Independent National Human Rights Commission

After substantial delays, progress was made towards constituting the Independent National Human Rights Commission. In August, President Johnson-Sirleaf nominated seven members, including the Chairman. The Senate had not confirmed the nominations by the end of the year.

Violence against women and girls

Rape and other forms of sexual violence against women and girls remained widespread. The vast majority of reported cases of rape involved girls under the age of 16. Of the 807 reported cases of rape in Montserrado County in the first six months of 2009, 77 involved girls under the age of five; 232 involved girls aged between five and 12; and 284 involved girls and young women aged between 13 and 18. It remained difficult to estimate the total number of rapes, especially of women, because of stigmatization and rejection by the families and communities of the survivors. According to international organizations working in Liberia on sexual and gender-based violence issues, the large majority of rapes were committed by a man known to the victim/survivor – either a close relative or neighbour.

- A 12-year-old girl from Bong County was reportedly raped by four men, including her stepfather. The girl was thrown out of her home after the rape and labelled as "mad" and "possessed by the devil".
- In February, after waiting eight months for a case of multiple rape of a 14-year-old girl to go to circuit court in Margibi County, a closed-door session between the judge, the defence, the girl and the prosecutor effectively resulted in the case being dropped. It was alleged that the girl was coerced into dropping the case. The accused was released.

The government created a special court to deal with gender-based violent crimes. By November it had conducted four trials, three of which resulted in convictions.

Traditional harmful practices continued, including female genital mutilation (FGM) and trial by ordeal, whereby the guilt or innocence of the accused is determined in an arbitrary manner and in some cases in Liberia has resulted in the death of the accused.

Justice system

Serious challenges remained regarding the police, judiciary and prison sector. The judiciary lacked the capacity to hear cases in a timely manner, contributing to a backlog in the criminal justice system. Local experts estimated that the chronic delays meant that 92 per cent of prisoners were pretrial detainees.

Prisons also remained ill-equipped, resulting in prisoner escapes throughout the year. In April, 50 inmates escaped from a maximum security prison in south-eastern Liberia. In November, an attempted escape of around 50 inmates in Monrovia was aborted by UNMIL troops.

Amnesty International visit/reports

Amnesty International delegates visited Liberia in March.

[Liberia: After the Truth – Liberians need justice](#) (23 January 2009)

[Lessons from Liberia – Reintegrating women in post-conflict Liberia](#) (1 March 2009)

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