



Liberia

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Liberia is a centralized republic, dominated by a strong presidency. The Constitution provides for three branches of government, but no effective system of checks and balances, and presidents traditionally have wielded extraordinary power. Americo-Liberians, descendants of freed slaves from the United States and the Caribbean, who make up approximately 5 percent of the population, dominated the country's government through the True Whig party until 1980. In 1980 Sergeant Samuel K. Doe, a member of the indigenous Krahn ethnic group, seized power in a military coup. Doe was killed by rebels in 1990 early in the 7-year-long, ethnically divisive civil war, which was ended by the Abuja Peace Accords in 1996. Forces led by Charles G. Taylor, who is of both indigenous and Americo-Liberian ancestry, emerged dominant. In 1997, Taylor won the presidential election, and his National Patriotic Party (NPP) won three-quarters of the seats in the legislature. The elections were administratively free and transparent, but were conducted in an atmosphere of intimidation, as most voters believed that Taylor's forces would have resumed fighting if he had lost. Most other leaders of the former warring factions subsequently left the country. The bicameral legislature exercised little independence from the executive branch. The judiciary is subject to political influence, economic pressure, and corruption.

The regular security forces include: The Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL); the Liberia National Police (LNP), which has primary responsibility for internal security; the Antiterrorist Brigade (ATB) created in 1999, composed of an elite special forces group; and the Special Security Service (SSS), a large, heavily armed executive protective force. There also are numerous irregular security services attached to certain key ministries and parastatal corporations, the responsibilities of which appear to be defined poorly. The national army, which fought against Taylor's faction during the civil war, has yet to be downsized and restructured as required by the Abuja Peace Accords, due primarily to a lack of funding. By year's end, a commission had been formed with funding allocated at approximately \$100,000. Only a few contingents have been deployed to maintain security in parts of rural areas. The ATB absorbed Taylor's most experienced civil war fighters, including undisciplined and untrained loyalists. During the year, the Government revived the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI), which had become defunct during the civil war. Security forces frequently acted independently of government authority, particularly in rural areas. Members of the security forces committed numerous, serious human rights abuses.

Liberia is a very poor country with a market-based economy that has yet to recover from the ravages of the civil war. Average per capita income is estimated at \$171, only a small fraction of the prewar level. Prior to 1990, the cash economy was based primarily on iron ore, rubber, timber, diamond, and gold exports. An unemployment rate of 85 percent, a 25 percent literacy rate, the internal displacement of civilians in Lofa and Nimba counties, and the absence of infrastructure throughout the country continued to depress productive capacity, despite the country's rich natural resources and potential self-sufficiency in food. Government officials and former combatants continued to exploit the country's natural resources for personal benefit. Extortion is widespread in all levels of society.

The Government's human rights record remained poor, and there were numerous, serious abuses in many areas. The security forces committed many extrajudicial killings, and they were accused of killing or causing the disappearance of persons. Security forces tortured, beat, and otherwise abused or humiliated citizens. The Government investigated some of the alleged abuses by the security forces; however, offenders were rarely charged or disciplined. Prison conditions remained harsh and sometimes life threatening. Security forces continued at times to use arbitrary arrest and detention, and lengthy pretrial detention remained common. The judicial system, hampered by political influence, economic pressure, inefficiency, corruption, and a lack of resources, was unable to ensure citizens' rights to due process and a fair trial. In some rural areas where the judiciary had not been reestablished, clan chieftains administered criminal justice through the

traditional practice of trial-by-ordeal; authorities tacitly condoned this practice. More than 20 political prisoners remained in jail. Security forces violated citizens' privacy rights, conducted warrantless searches, harassment, illegal surveillance, and looted homes. The Government restricted freedom of the press; it detained, threatened, and intimidated journalists into self-censorship and shut down two radio stations, one temporarily. Security forces restricted freedom of movement, using roadblocks to extort money from travelers and returning refugees. Security forces frequently harassed human rights monitors. Violence and discrimination against women remained problems. The welfare of children remained widely neglected, and female genital mutilation (FGM) continued to increase. Societal ethnic discrimination remained widespread, ethnic differences continued to generate violence and political tensions, and the Government continued to discriminate against indigenous ethnic groups that had opposed Taylor in the civil war, especially the Mandingo and the Krahn ethnic groups. Forced labor persisted in rural areas. Child labor remained widespread, and there were reports of forced child labor. Ritualistic killings also persisted.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Section 1 Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom From:

a. Political and Other Extrajudicial Killing

Security forces continued to commit extrajudicial killings. Human rights organizations estimate the number of such killings to have increased to several hundred during the year. Many of the abuses were linked to ongoing violence in Lofa county between security forces and antigovernment dissidents who launched a series of crossborder incursions from Guinea. No perpetrators were arrested or convicted for any of these killings.

In February the police shot and killed Nyanqui Luoh, an accused armed robber. The police reported that they acted in self-defense. A human rights organization called for an investigation of the incident, but none had been undertaken by year's end.

There were credible reports that government forces as well as members of the Lorma ethnic group continued to harass, intimidate, and, on occasion, kill members of the Mandingo ethnic group in Lofa county. For example, in January armed men reportedly killed 18 Mandingos in the town of Bawon. In March security forces arrested and killed five Mandingos on a road linking Voinjama, Lofa County with Guinea. Human rights monitors reported that hundreds of Mandingos were killed during the year.

There was no investigation into nor action taken in the May 1999 death of a security officer allegedly while in detention.

At year's end, the Government had not released a report on its November 1999 investigation of the reported killing of as many as 30 Mandingos in Lofa county in August 1999. In that incident, the authorities initially arrested 19 persons, but they did not charge anyone with a crime.

The trial of nine Krahn AFL soldiers accused of involvement in 1998 violence ended in February; four soldiers were convicted of sedition and sentenced to 10 years in prison; the other five were acquitted and released.

There was no further action taken in the 1998 extrajudicial killings of Mannah Zekay, John Nimely, or others reported during that year.

In 1999 the President Pro Tempore of the Senate told the Interparliamentary Union that the investigation into the 1997 killings of opposition political leader Samuel Saye Dokie and three family members continued. However, there was no active investigation into the case during the year, and the case essentially was dropped.

Since September there were reports of attacks by fighters based in Liberia on the Guinean border towns, which caused several deaths. These attacks generally are perpetuated by a combination of Revolutionary Front United (RUF) rebels from Sierra Leone, Liberian military, and some Guinean rebels; however, some attacks also were perpetuated by armed Liberian dissidents based in Guinea. There was at least one attack reported on a Guinean town close to the Sierra Leonean border.

In November attacks were reported in northeastern Nimba, which resulted in numerous deaths, but it was unclear whether the rebel incursion was from Guinea or Cote d'Ivoire.

In October in Nimba county, a property dispute between Mandigos and members of the Mano and Gio ethnic

groups led to rioting, which reportedly killed four persons (see Section 5). A mosque and five other buildings were burned. Police arrested 12 persons in connection with this violence and charged them with arson. The 12 remained in detention pending a trial at year's end.

Incidents of ritualistic killings, in which human body parts used in traditional rituals are removed from the victim, continued to be reported (see Section 5). The number of such killings is difficult to ascertain, since police often described deaths as accidents even when body parts have been removed. Deaths that appear to be natural or accidental sometimes are rumored to have been the work of ritualistic killers (see Section 5). In February there was a riot in the town of Ganta, Nimba county when police released on parole two suspects in the death and mutilation of a 10-year-old girl. The two suspects eventually were charged with her killing. A police investigation launched in August 1999 into alleged ritual killings in Harper resulted in the acquittal of one of four defendants; no information was available on the status of the three remaining defendants.

b. Disappearance

Security forces were responsible for disappearances. In June security personnel arrested seven refugees returning from Guinea in an UNHCR vehicle after discovering that one of them carried a photograph of a former faction leader who opposed President Taylor during the civil war. The authorities claimed they were dissidents plotting to overthrow the Government. The detainees were charged with treason; however, their whereabouts were unknown at year's end despite legal challenges to the Government to produce them.

Security forces produced suspects whom they had held without charge when the courts issued writs of habeas corpus on the applications of human rights organizations. Their disappearances often were the result of prolonged illegal detention at the Gbartala base (see Section 1.c.).

There were no indications by year's end that the Government carried out its promised investigation of the reported disappearance of Mandingos following the violence in Lofa county in 1999.

There were no developments in the 1998 disappearance case of market woman Nowai Flomo.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The Constitution prohibits torture and other degrading treatment; however, government police and security forces frequently tortured, beat, and otherwise abused and humiliated citizens. In some cases, security forces produced suspects whom they had held without charge when the courts issued writs of habeas corpus on the applications of human rights organizations. Detainees continued to charge that they were tortured while in detention, especially at a security training base in Gbatata. Victims and witnesses reported beatings, torture, killings, and sexual abuse at the base. In October 1999, human rights organizations called for the closure of the base because of a number of credible reports of torture there; however, the base remained opened. A local NGO, the Catholic Affiliated Justice and Peace Commission, tried to investigate claims; however, the Government blocked their efforts.

On several occasions, government security personnel harassed, assaulted, and arrested journalists (see Section 2.a.).

Law enforcement personnel, including the security forces, were implicated in numerous reports of harassment, intimidation, and looting. For example, in February SSS members carried out a series of armed robberies and shot and injured an LNP officer in the West Point area of Monrovia. In April armed soldiers clashed with marketers in Monrovia; they confiscated goods and harassed the marketers. There was a series of incidents involving harassment or looting and assault of foreign diplomats and local embassy employees. In February LNP officers pulled a foreign diplomat from his car in Monrovia and assaulted him. In March LNP officers demanded money from an embassy security guard and beat him with metal pipes. After various complaints in March from members of diplomatic corps, the Government called for investigations and punishment for offenders. Meetings with security agencies also were organized to brief them on diplomatic immunity; however, in June another local embassy employee was assaulted, searched for weapons, and robbed by AFL officers.

Paul Mulbah, who was appointed director of the LNP in August 1999, took some steps in 1999 to curb abuse of the LNP; however, in general his efforts were unsuccessful and made no difference in the situation by year's end. In February Mulbah ordered that off-duty armed security men be removed from the streets. However, a human rights organization criticized Mulbah's order to police, issued early in the year, to shoot on sight any robbers resisting arrest.

There were credible reports that government forces as well as members of the Lorma ethnic group continued to harass, intimidate, and, on occasion, kill members of the Mandingo ethnic group in Lofa county (see Section 1.a.).

Rival security personnel occasionally clashed violently. In March there was gunfire at Roberts International Airport between personnel of the antiterrorist brigade and the LNP's special operations division prior to President Taylor's arrival from an official visit abroad. A few persons were injured. There also was shooting between AFL and LNP personnel in downtown Monrovia in March, resulting in injuries to two bystanders.

Security force personnel in rural areas were paid and provisioned inadequately and often extorted money and goods. For example, in March a special task force commander reportedly robbed an army payroll truck in Lofa county. There were many credible reports that security forces harassed returning refugees and displaced persons, especially in the border areas.

The international community publicly criticized the Government's support for the RUF rebels in the civil war in Sierra Leone.

Clan chieftains continued to use the traditional practice of trial-by-ordeal to resolve criminal cases in rural areas. The Supreme Court ruled that trial-by-ordeal--commonly the placement of a heated metal object on a suspect's body in an attempt to determine whether the defendant is telling the truth--is unconstitutional; however, the practice continued under an executive order. A local human rights organization sponsored a conference in March to urge that trial-by-ordeal be abolished throughout the country. A 1994 lawsuit for injuries resulting from a trial-by-ordeal that was pending before the Supreme Court was suspended indefinitely.

Prison conditions remained harsh and in some cases life-threatening. There were credible reports of unofficial detention facilities, including one at the executive mansion, in which detainees were held without charge and in some cases tortured. The Government did not provide detainees or prisoners with adequate food or medical care. Cells at Monrovia Central Prison are overcrowded, mostly with detainees awaiting trial. Only about 10 percent of the total prison population has been convicted of criminal offenses. Convicted prisoners and detainees awaiting trial are not confined in separate facilities. Similar conditions exist in the Barclay Training Center military stockade. In some counties, the structure that serves as a jail is a container with bars at one end. In May the wives of 13 Krahn political prisoners held at Monrovia's Central Prison publicly complained about denial of medical care and other abuse of the detainees. The Government did not respond to these complaints by year's end.

Women, who constituted about 5 percent of the prison population, are held in separate cells. Their conditions are comparable to those of the male prisoners and detainees. There were no separate facilities for juvenile offenders. Women and particularly juveniles were subject to abuse by guards or other inmates.

In a number of cases, human rights groups and interested individuals achieved the release of detainees and prisoners. However, for the most part, these cases tended to be nonpolitical in nature.

The Government generally permits the independent monitoring of prison conditions by local human rights groups, the media, and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC); however, visits to unofficial detention centers often are denied. For example, despite requests made by NGO's to the Defense Ministry, no independent monitor has been allowed to visit the Gbatata base where victims have been detained and tortured. The ICRC is allowed to visit persons held in prison facilities and police detention centers without third parties present and to make regular repeat visits.

d. Arbitrary Arrest, Detention, or Exile

The Constitution prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention; however, security forces continued at times to arrest and detain persons arbitrarily. The Constitution provides for the rights of the accused, including warrants for arrests and the right of detainees either to be charged or released within 48 hours. Although the Government generally adheres to these standards, warrants were not always based on sufficient evidence, and detainees, especially those without the means to hire a lawyer, often were held for more than 48 hours without charge. In some cases, persons were detained secretly at unofficial detention centers including one at the executive mansion (see Section 1.c.).

The Constitution provides for the right of a person who is charged to receive an expeditious trial; however, lengthy pretrial and prearrest detention remained a serious problem. In some cases, the length of the pre-trial detention equaled or exceeded the length of sentence for the crime in question. Five detained soldiers awaiting court-martial for desertion during the September 1998 incident have been incarcerated in the

stockade since November 1998. Their courts-martials still are pending; should they be convicted, the maximum sentence would be 6 months' imprisonment.

The police only have limited logistics and forensic capabilities and cannot adequately investigate many crimes, including murder cases. When the courts release known criminals for lack of evidence, police officers often rearrest them on specious charges.

In August the Government arrested Auditor General Raleigh Seekie and charged him with treason. Police searched Seekie's home and office for subversive documents, arms, and ammunition but did not find anything. Nevertheless, he is charged with aiding armed dissidents trying to overthrow the Government.

Security forces arrested and detained a number of journalists during the year (see Section 2.a.). For example, in August the Government arrested four foreign journalists and charged them with espionage (see Section 2.a.). The four were denied bail but were released a week later in response to international pressure.

The Government did not use forced exile; however, as a result of frequent harassment and threats by the security forces, a number of opposition figures and human rights activists fled the country due to fear for their personal safety or that of their families. These included human rights activist James Torh and Muslim organization leader Lartin Konneh (see Sections 2.e. and 5). During the year, President Taylor publicly alleged that some of these opposition figures had gone abroad to conspire in the overthrow of his Government, which kept numerous prominent opposition figures and former warlords out of the country throughout the year.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

Although the Constitution provides for an independent judiciary, judges are subjected to political, social, familial, and financial pressures, leading to the corruption of the judiciary. Some judges and magistrates are not lawyers. The judiciary has determined that it is not feasible to retire all judicial personnel who are not legally trained, but intends to replace those currently sitting with lawyers as they retire. By statute members of the bar must be graduates of a law school and pass the bar examination. The executive branch continued to exert undue influence on the judiciary. For example, in response to an appeal of the 1999 treason convictions of 13 ethnic Krahn AFL members, the Government demanded in 1999 that their sentences be changed from 10 years' imprisonment to death. In December 10 years was added to their sentences for a total of 20 years' imprisonment.

The judiciary is divided into four levels, with the Supreme Court at the apex. All levels of the court system in Monrovia, including the Supreme Court, functioned sporadically. The Government's efforts to revitalize the court system outside of Monrovia continued to be troubled by lack of trained personnel, infrastructure, and a lack of adequate funding. Although judges were assigned throughout the country, in some cases they were unable to hold court due to lack of supplies and equipment. Traditional forms of justice administered by clan chieftains remained prevalent in some localities (see Section 1.c.).

Under the Constitution, defendants have due process rights that conform to internationally accepted standards; however, in practice these rights are not always observed. Defendants have the right to a public trial and timely consultation with an attorney; however, there is no effective system to provide public defenders, especially in rural areas. Some NGO's provide legal services to indigents and others who have no free representation. Courts regularly received bribes or other illegal gifts out of damages that they awarded in civil cases. Defense attorneys often suggested that their clients pay a gratuity to appease judges, prosecutors, and police officers to secure favorable rulings. In October the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court stated publicly that delays in salary payments to judicial personnel contributed to corruption in the judiciary.

Human rights organizations reported that 24 political prisoners, including AFL personnel, were sentenced for treason in February and in April 1999; however, this number reportedly includes a few political detainees who have not yet been convicted of a crime (see Section 1.a.).

The Government permits access to political prisoners by international humanitarian organizations.

f. Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The Constitution provides for the right of privacy and the sanctity of the home; however, authorities regularly infringed on these rights. The Constitution provides that the police must obtain a warrant, or have a reasonable belief that a crime is in progress, or is about to be committed, before entering a private dwelling. In practice police and paramilitary officers frequently entered private homes and churches without warrants to carry out arrests and investigations.

The security forces harassed and threatened perceived opposition figures and their families by conducting illegal surveillance. In some cases, they entered the homes of opposition figures, usually at night. For example, security personnel watched the homes of activists James Torh and Lartin Konneh for several weeks (see Section 2.a.). Fearing for their safety, both activists fled the country. Several student leaders remained under surveillance at year's end (see Section 2.a.). Several journalists and human rights activists resided in the homes of friends or relatives for months at a time due to fear that the security forces might follow through with their threats against them. Incidents of harassment and threats increased with the continuing violence in Lofa county. In rural areas, particularly in remote parts of Lofa county, armed security forces illegally entered homes, most often to steal food, money, or other property (see Section 1.c.).

Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The Constitution provides for freedom of speech and of the press; however, the Government restricted this right in practice. Security agents threatened, detained, and assaulted journalists and intimidated many journalists into practicing self-censorship.

In January human rights activist James Torh's sedition trial for criticizing President Taylor began. Decisions made on motions during his trial indicated that an impartial judgement was not possible and, fearing for his safety, Torh fled the country in March. Muslim organization leader Lartin Konneh, charged with treason for calling on Muslim government officials to resign their positions, also fled the country.

With some notable exceptions, government officials are reluctantly tolerant of the press; however, they frequently rebuked the media publicly for what they considered negative reporting of events. Security personnel sometimes interpreted such criticism as a license to harass, threaten, and even assault targeted persons. Reporting that criticized the Government brought threats of violence, closure, or directives from powerful government figures to advertisers that they should discontinue business with that media outlet. For example, another respected newspaper ceased publication, and most of the management left the country after repeated threats were made against them because of editorials written by the newspaper's publisher from his home abroad.

Nevertheless, in general journalists are outspoken and even provocative. However, journalists also practice self-censorship, especially in regard to information about the President and his immediate family members and particularly after being threatened or harassed.

In April the LNP briefly detained broadcast journalist Isaac Redd of the Liberia Communication Network (LCN) for allegedly making inflammatory remarks against the President.

In August the Government arrested four foreign journalists from Britain's Channel Four network who visited the country to gather material for a documentary about countries in post-conflict stages in West Africa, and charged them with espionage; while in detention, security personnel beat and threatened them. They also were denied bail because the charge was considered a capital offense by the prosecution, although the law did not require such a ruling. The journalists were released a week later after the international community criticized the Government. In October security forces arrested and briefly detained newspaper reporter Philip Moore for alleged treasonous remarks.

In March security forces detained the president of the Press Union of Liberia (PUL), Suah Deddeh, after the organization planned a mass meeting to respond to the closing of two radio stations. The meeting never happened, and nonmembers of the PUL were threatened with arrest. Deddeh was released after spending a night in jail. In May police detained Deddeh a second time when the Press Union, in celebration of World Press Freedom, was planning a march through the center of Monrovia. Security forces also threatened other activists who opposed the radio closings.

No action was taken during the year in the case of the police forces' 1998 flogging of journalist Hassan Bility or the 1999 assault on the editor of the Inquirer newspaper, Philip Wesseh.

In Monrovia eight newspapers were published during the year, although some publish very irregularly. Two are independent dailies and five generally appeared once or more a week; they vary in their political balance. The Public Affairs Bureau of the Ministry of Information, Culture, and Tourism publishes one newspaper, and the communications network owned by the President publishes one weekly newspaper. Several newspapers that had not published regularly, and an alternative press organization became active following the news blackout in March organized by the press union in response to the closure of two radio stations. There were

numerous reports that government officials funded these newspapers, and that they generally reported only pro-government news. The ruling party also published a newspaper that circulated frequently during the period following the closures of the radio stations; however, the frequency of its publishing lessened later in the year.

Newspaper availability fluctuated during the year. The two leading independent dailies continued to publish despite being labeled as dissident newspapers after they participated in the news blackout following the closure of two radio stations and after subsequently being criticized by the Government and the ruling party.

The Ministry of Information, Culture, and Tourism did not accept late license payment from two newspapers with the result that they had to cease publication. The Ministry did not renew the annual licenses of two newspapers because the Government believed that they were supported by "agent provocateurs"--persons whom, in the government's view, want to overthrow the Government.

Management of the one printing facility capable of producing newspapers is subject to pressure from the Government. To meet costs of production, the typical newspaper's eight pages include two or three pages of advertisements or paid announcements, further reducing the amount of news reported. Some articles included are the result of "cadeaux," gifts or money that supplement reporters' meager salaries.

Due to the high price of newspapers, the high rate of illiteracy, (estimated at 75 percent), high transportation costs, and the poor state of roads elsewhere in the country, newspaper distribution generally is limited to the Monrovia area. As a result, radio is the primary means of mass communication. A number of independent radio stations existed at the beginning of the year in Monrovia including Star Radio, Radio Monrovia, two commercial stations (DC-101 and Radio Monrovia), and Radio Veritas, which operated under the Catholic Archdiocese. Radio Monrovia closed in January due to insufficient funding. There also is the national station, and FM and short-wave stations operated by President Taylor's private LCN. The President's radio station is the only station with a short-wave frequency strong enough to reach all parts of the country. Radio Veritas has short-wave frequency but a limited broadcast area and antiquated equipment. There is a French broadcast through the national radio facility, a religious station, and a growing number of small local stations in cities around the country. Media practitioners believe that the ruling party funds many of these stations.

Call-in radio talk shows are popular and frequently a forum for both government and opposition viewpoints; however, they sometimes resulted in threats generally from the Government, party leaders and security agents to the radio hosts and station managers. Interviews with prominent persons are broadcast frequently.

Due to the economic situation in the country and the dependence on generators requiring expensive fuel purchases, most of the stations limited broadcasting hours and in some cases ceased operation for short periods.

In March the Government closed two radio stations (Star Radio and Radio Veritas) without due process. Shortly before their closure, both stations had been relicensed by the Ministry of Information. The order to close them came from the President, who said that the two stations' broadcasts threatened the security of the State. Radio Veritas, owned by the Catholic Church, was allowed to reopen a week after its closing, but Star Radio, which was a politically neutral FM station funded primarily through international organizations, remained closed at year's end.

Television is limited to those who can purchase sets, the generators, and fuel to provide electricity. For those persons and businesses with satellite capability, the Cable News Network is available. There are two television stations: the LCN owned by President Taylor, and the Ducor Broadcasting Corporation which is privately owned but assisted by President Taylor's generator.

Government officials criticized journalists who used the Internet to express opinions that the authorities considered too critical of the Government. For much of the year, there was no direct access to information through the Internet. Star Radio's internet operations also were closed in March. Star Radio had supplied daily news summaries to its parent foundation, which put these on the Internet. Copies also were provided to the Ministry of Information, and the Government demanded (contrary to international practice) a special licensing fee for Star Radio's transmission of news on the Internet. During a press conference in March following the Government's closure of Radio Veritas and Star Radio, President Taylor indicated that he believed "cyber-warfare" was being waged as part of an international conspiracy against the country. Many observers believe that the Government blocked the operation of potential Internet providers.

When the closure of Star Radio did not stop the negative propaganda about the country on the Internet, which was generated primarily by opposition figures abroad, the Government and the ruling party began to use the

Internet to provide news and sponsored several websites. An Internet provider reemerged mid-year and opened a cybercafe that the few persons with sufficient funds can access. Because of the ties between the provider and the Government, some potential patrons believed that their use of the Internet was monitored by government security personnel and choose not to use it.

The Government generally respects academic freedom at the University of Liberia; however, on occasion the Government detained students who criticized the Government. University administrators were concerned about the militancy of student groups on campus, whose memberships include a high percentage of former combatants; however, actual physical violence was rare. At times students, whom observers believe to be paid informants, reported professors' opinions to various government officials. In July student leaders issued a statement questioning the official accounts of the seriousness of the fighting in Lofa county. In response security forces entered the Monrovia campus, took the student leaders in custody, and offered to fly them to Lofa to tour the conflict area and forced them to visit wounded soldiers hospitalized in Monrovia. The media was urged to cover this visit, after which the students were compelled to offer apologies and were released. In November student leaders released a press statement that strongly criticized the economy and urged the government to forge ties with countries that could assist national growth. They also called for the expulsion of RUF leader Sam Bockarie and for the Government to break ties with Libya and Burkina Faso. LNP director Mulbah subsequently visited the campus with armed police to convince the students they should meet with President Taylor to discuss their complaints and stated publicly that they would not be detained; however, fearing arrests, the students went into hiding. After continued public declarations by Mulbah and President Taylor that the students would not be arrested, the students came out of hiding and met with President Taylor at the end of November to discuss their complaints. The student leaders continued to be under surveillance and received warnings on a regular basis about speaking out.

Students occasionally protested the lack of resources, which they blamed more on central government appropriation practices than on the university administration.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The Constitution provides for the right of peaceful assembly, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. In May the LNP, citing security concerns, abruptly stopped a march through downtown Monrovia sponsored by PUL in observance of World Press Freedom Day. The police allowed the commemoration to continue indoors. In November President Taylor warned that while the Government would tolerate different views, it would not tolerate anarchic demonstrations in the streets; however, this warning did not result in the subsequent dispersal of any demonstrations during the year.

The Constitution provides for the right of association, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

c. Freedom of Religion

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There is no established state religion. However, government ceremonies invariably open and close with prayer and may include hymn singing. The prayers and hymns are usually Christian but occasionally are Muslim.

All organizations, including religious groups, must register their articles of incorporation with the Government, along with a statement of the purpose of the organization. However, traditional indigenous religious groups generally need not and do not register. The registration is routine, and there have been no reports that the registration process is either burdensome or discriminatory in its administration.

The law prohibits religious discrimination; however, Islamic leaders complained of discrimination against Muslims. Although there are some Muslims in senior government positions, many Muslims believe that they are bypassed for desirable jobs. Many Muslim business proprietors believe that the Government's decision to enforce an old statute prohibiting business on Sunday discriminated against them. Most Mandingos, and hence most Muslims, allied with factions that opposed Taylor during the civil war and still belong to opposition parties.

In March the Government suspended Radio Veritas broadcasts, pending assurances that the station would confine itself to "purely religious matters." The station reopened a week later and resumed its previous broadcast programming. The closure was believed to be politically motivated rather than prompted by religious discrimination (see Section 2.a.). There were no Islamic-oriented radio stations and little radio

broadcasting of any kind in the northern and eastern counties where the Muslim population is concentrated.

In February Muslim activist Lartin Konneh was arrested on charges of treason after he called upon Muslims to resign their government jobs in protest of the Government's inaction since the burning of five mosques in Lofa county in January (see Section 5). Konneh went into hiding and subsequently fled the country. While the Government has not taken actions openly against Muslims, its inaction over reports of abuses in Lofa county contributed to ethnic tension between Muslim and non-Muslim ethnic groups in that area of the country.

d. Freedom of Movement Within the Country, Foreign Travel, Emigration, and Repatriation

The Constitution provides for freedom of movement throughout the country as well as the right to leave or enter; however, the Government restricted this right in practice. Security forces maintained checkpoints where travelers routinely were subjected to arbitrary searches and petty extortion. Security forces also extorted money from returning refugees. In February and October, units of the ATB, citing security concerns, set up temporary checkpoints that interdicted traffic and visitors to a foreign embassy in Monrovia.

In June, ostensibly in order to curtail the illegal use of national travel documents, President Taylor issued an executive order that required passport applicants to obtain clearance from the National Security Agency (NSA). Opposition parties and human rights organizations criticized this directive, arguing that it violated the constitutional right of freedom of travel. Reportedly this executive order was not enforced during the year. In November the Government announced that it would no longer accept Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) safe conduct documents as valid travel documents for entering the country; however, reportedly this was not enforced.

As a result of the civil war, there were 157,000 IDP's in approximately 36 camps in 1997. International agencies and the Liberia Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission (LRRRC) have been able to resettle approximately 126,243 displaced persons since 1998. In October the fighting in northern Lofa county further increased the number of displaced persons. There were an estimated 15,000 to 20,000 IDP's in the country at year's end. International and local NGO's faced limited funding and resources to assist these IDP's.

In October after some delays approximately 400 Liberian refugees in Guinea were repatriated to the country. By year's end, a total of 5,000 Liberians were repatriated. These refugees, who are mostly Mandingos, were resettled in the Lofa or Nimba counties where political and ethnic clashes still occurred (see Section 5).

The law provides for the granting of refugee and asylee status in accordance with the provisions of the 1951 U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. The Government continued to provide first asylum to nearly 86,000 refugees, the vast majority of whom were from Sierra Leone towards the end of the year. The Government generally cooperated with the Office of the U.N. High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in assisting refugees.

In June security personnel arrested seven Liberians who were returning from Guinea in a UNHCR truck (see Section 1.b.). The Government claimed that the men were members of a dissident armed faction based in Guinea. The men have not been seen since their arrest, and NGO's and relatives believe that they were killed.

In October the UNHCR protested the recruitment of refugees by security personnel on behalf of the RUF rebels from Sierra Leone. UNHCR reported that such recruitment ceased after its protest.

Former RUF leader, Sam Bockarie, and several hundred of his supporters took refuge in Liberia early in December 1999. President Taylor denied that the Government was training the RUF fighters or that it has been supplying them with arms. He claimed that the ECOWAS leadership permitted these arrangements in order to advance the implementation of the Sierra Leone peace process. A coalition of civic, religious, and political groups repeatedly have asked for President Taylor to expel the RUF rebels and disassociate the Government from them.

In 1999 after a series of raids and attacks by security forces and dissidents bases in Guinea, a group of Sierra Leonean refugees migrated south from northern Lofa county towards another established refugee camp in Sinje. The Government cooperated with the UNHCR's efforts to assist the migration to the new location. International donors remained unwilling to send any further assistance to Lofa county, and the international and domestic NGO's are reluctant to resume operations there because of security concerns. The Government and the UNHCR established a second refugee camp in Sinje, a location easily accessible from Monrovia, to accommodate the refugees from Lofa county.

There were no reports of the forced return of persons to a country where they feared persecution.

Section 3 Respect for Political Rights: The Right of Citizens to Change Their Government

The Constitution provides for the right to vote in free and fair elections, and citizens exercised this right in 1997 in elections that international observers deemed free and transparent; however, the elections were conducted in an atmosphere of intimidation, as most voters believed that military forces loyal to Charles Taylor would have resumed the civil war if Taylor lost the election. Since the legislative elections were held on the basis of proportional representation, Taylor's National Patriotic Party won control of the legislature by the same 75 percent majority that he received in the popular vote for the presidency. The 1997 legislative and presidential elections were held under a special election law in accordance with the terms of the Abuja Peace Process.

The legislature did not exercise genuine independence from the executive branch. There were 16 opposition parties, most of which had little popular support outside of the capital, and opposition legislators, who held only one-quarter of the seats in the House of Representatives and in the Senate, generally were more passive than members of the ruling NPP. Congressional committees failed to develop expertise in their respective areas of responsibility. No major legislation was enacted during the year. However, during the year, the House of Representatives refused to vote in favor of a government-sponsored rural property tax and strategic commodities act.

In August the Government indicted an opposition leader residing abroad, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, for treason for alleged ties to armed dissidents operating in Lofa county.

In June Vice President Enoch Dogolea died, and in July President Taylor selected Moses Z. Blah, a founding member of the ruling party, to fill the position.

The State is highly centralized. The President appoints the superintendents (governors) of the 13 counties. Municipalities and chieftaincies are supposed to elect their own officials, but elections, postponed in 1998 due to lack of funds and disorganization, were not held during the year for the same reason. Local governments at all levels have no independent revenue base and rely entirely on the central government for funds. Education, health services, and public works are provided by the central government. Local officials serve mainly to lobby the central Government.

There are no restrictions on the participation of women in politics; however, women remained underrepresented in government and politics. The number of women in high-ranking positions in the Government and in the various political parties is low. Only 5 of the 26 senators and 5 of the 64 members of the House of Representatives are female. Of the 20 cabinet positions, 4 are held by women. A woman serves as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, and another chairs the National Reconciliation Commission. There are no women's caucuses, but the ruling party has a women's organization.

There are relatively few Muslims in government and politics; only one cabinet minister is a Muslim.

Section 4 Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

The Government permitted domestic and international human rights groups to operate largely without interference; however, members of the security forces often harassed domestic democracy and human rights activists. During the year, the Government blocked efforts by a local NGO, the Catholic Affiliated Justice and Peace Commission, to investigate claims of torture at Gbatata security training base (see Section 1.c.). Government officials frequently criticized domestic human rights groups publicly. For example, in December at a pro-government rally, President Taylor criticized democracy and human rights activists and opposition leaders of destabilizing the government, and he warned that these individuals would be punished.

In November about 100 men ransacked the offices of the Center for Democratic Empowerment (CEDE) and beat former interim president and human rights defender, Amos Sawyer, and executive director of CEDE, Conmany Wesseh. Preliminary investigation by the Government revealed that former combatants were responsible; however, only seven or eight persons were arrested, and reportedly they were not the primary assailants. Numerous sources reported that the attack commenced from NPP headquarters, and that those arrested were paid by the NPP after they were released on bond. Prosecution still was pending at year's end.

In 1999 legislators from southeast counties sued a child rights advocacy group for defaming the counties reputation in its report on forced child labor (see Section 6.c.). The suit was dropped when the child rights

activist who brought the suit fled the country.

Domestic human rights organizations are underfunded, understaffed, and their personnel lacked adequate training. There are three coalitions of human rights groups: The National Human Rights Center of Liberia has eight member organizations; eight other groups comprise the Network of Human Rights Chapters; and four belong to the Federation of Human Rights Organizations. All of these organizations sought to increase public discussion of human rights problems.

Some human rights groups paid regular visits to detainees at police headquarters and prisoners at the Monrovia Central Prison (see Section 1.c.). Several domestic human rights organizations have established branches outside of the capital and perform similar monitoring functions there. No discernible pattern of government interference with these activities emerged.

The Government permits international NGO's and human rights organizations to operate in the country, and a few international organizations did so during the year. In November an international democracy and human rights organization, the Carter Center, terminated its programs in the country and stated in a letter to President Taylor that it was leaving the country because of conditions in the country and the Government's poor human rights record.

The Government's Human Rights Commission, created in 1997, remained largely inactive throughout the year. It received no funding from the Government, and the Senate again failed to confirm the appointments of three of its five commissioners. The chairman of the Commission fled the country in August 1999 and is seeking asylum in another country.

Section 5 Discrimination Based on Race, Sex, Religion, Disability, Language, or Social Status

The Constitution prohibits discrimination based on ethnic background, race, sex, creed, place of origin, or political opinion; however, discrimination exists. There are no laws against gender discrimination, ethnic discrimination, or female genital mutilation. Differences involving ethnic groups, notably the Krahn and Mandingo ethnic groups, continued to contribute to serious political violence and abuses.

Women

Domestic violence against women is extensive; however, it was not addressed seriously as a problem by the Government, the courts, or the media. Several NGO's in Monrovia and Buchanan continued programs to treat abused women and girls and increase awareness of their rights.

The status of women varies by region, ethnic group, and religion. Before the outbreak of the civil war, women held one-fourth of the professional and technical jobs in Monrovia. On the whole, women have not recovered from the setbacks caused by the civil war, when most schools were closed, and they could not carry out their traditional roles in the production, allocation, and sale of food.

Women married under civil law can inherit land and property; however, women married under traditional laws are considered the properties of their husbands and are not entitled to inherit from their husbands or retain custody of their children if their husbands die. Women's organizations continued to press for legislation on behalf of inheritance rights in traditional marriages. There continued to be few programs to help former combatants reintegrate into society, and there were none specifically to benefit former female combatants. However, several women's organizations advanced family welfare issues, helped promote political reconciliation, and assisted in rehabilitating both former female combatants and women who were victims of the civil war.

Throughout the year, professional women's groups--including lawyers, market women, and businesswomen--remained vocal about their concerns regarding government corruption, the economy, security abuses, rape, domestic violence and children's rights. Government officials often responded negatively to public criticism. There were credible reports of harassment and possible surveillance of outspoken critics (see Section 1.f.). In August the Justice Ministry granted power to the Association of Female Lawyers in Liberia (AFELL) to assist in the prosecution of rape cases.

Children

The Government generally was unable to provide for the education and health of children, although it continued its nationwide anti-polio vaccination campaign during the year. Due to the poor condition of

government schools, most children who attended school went to private institutions. Since many private schools still need to be refurbished due to wartime damage, school fees were increased significantly, thereby making education unattainable for many school-age children. In both public and private schools, families of children often were asked to provide their own books, pencils, and paper. At the end of 1999, 622,645 out of an estimated 1.4 million school age children were enrolled in primary and secondary schools, 263,556 of which were girls. Expenditures on education were estimated at \$6.4 million (288 million Id). In 1995 the literacy rate for boys was at 53.9 percent and girls at 22.4 percent.

Young persons were victimized seriously during the civil war. An estimated 50,000 children were killed; many more were wounded, orphaned, or abandoned. Approximately 100 underfunded orphanages operate in and around Monrovia; however many orphans live outside these institutions. The National Military Families Association of Liberia (NAMFA) tries to provide for orphaned military children; it has registered 650 street children. These institutions do not receive any government funding, but rely on public donations. Nearly all youths witnessed terrible atrocities, and some committed atrocities themselves. Approximately 21 percent (4,306) of the combatants who disarmed under the provisions of the Abuja Peace Accords were child soldiers under the age of 17. Many youths remain traumatized, and some still are addicted to drugs. The number of street children in Monrovia and the number of abandoned infants increased significantly following disarmament. NGO's and the U.N. Children's Fund continued retraining and rehabilitation programs for a limited number of former child fighters; however these children were vulnerable to being recruited in subregional conflicts, since most had no other means of support.

Children continued to be incarcerated with adults, and there were long delays in deciding cases involving minors (see Sections 1.c. and 1.e.).

Child advocacy groups reported forced child labor in the rural areas of the country (see Section 6.c.).

Female genital mutilation, which is widely condemned by international public health experts as damaging to both physical and psychological health, traditionally was performed on young girls in northern, western, and central ethnic groups, particularly in rural areas. Prior to the onset of the civil war in 1989, approximately 50 percent of women in rural areas between the ages of 8 and 18 were subjected to FGM. A local organization, Human Rights Watch Women and Children, which does not receive government funding, launched a campaign during the year to eradicate FGM. AFELL also has spoken out against FGM.

Social structures and traditional institutions, such as the secret societies that often performed FGM as an initiation rite, were undermined by the war. While many experts believe that the incidence of FGM dropped to as low as 10 percent by the end of the war, traditional societies are reestablishing themselves throughout the country, and the increase in the incidence of FGM continued. The most extreme form of FGM, infibulation, reportedly is not practiced. The Government has taken no action against FGM.

In January a well-known 17-year-old child rights activist fled the country to escape persistent harassment of himself, his family, teachers, and high school classmates by security personnel (see Section 1.f.). He remained in self-imposed exile at year's end.

People with Disabilities

As a result of the civil war, a large number of persons have permanent disabilities, in addition to those disabled by accident or illness. It is illegal to discriminate against the disabled; however, in practice they do not enjoy equal access to public buildings. No laws mandate accessibility to public buildings or services. Disabled persons face discrimination particularly in rural areas. Deformed babies often are abandoned.

Religious Minorities

Some tensions exist between the major religious communities. The law prohibits religious discrimination; however, Islamic leaders complained of societal discrimination against Muslims. The private sector in urban areas, particularly in the capital, gives preference to Christianity in civic ceremonies and observances, and discrimination against followers of other organized religion spills over into areas of individual opportunity and employment. There is an interfaith council that brings together leaders of the Christian and Islamic faiths.

Ethnic tensions continued in Lofa County between the predominantly Muslim Mandingo ethnic group and the Lorma ethnic group. In January five mosques were burned. There was no report of a government investigation or action taken against the arsonists.

Ritual killings, in which body parts used in traditional indigenous rituals are removed from the victim, continue

to occur. The number of such killings is difficult to ascertain, since police often describe deaths as accidents even when body parts have been removed. Deaths that appear to be natural or accidental sometimes are rumored to be the work of ritual killers. Little reliable information is readily available about traditions associated with ritual killings. It is believed that practitioners of traditional indigenous religions among the Grebo and Krahn ethnic groups concentrated in the southeastern counties most commonly engage in ritual killings. The victims are usually members of the religious group performing the ritual. The underlying religious beliefs may be related to incidents during the civil war in which faction leaders sometimes ate (and in which one faction leader had himself filmed eating) body parts of former leaders of rival factions. Removal of body parts for use in traditional rituals is believed to be the motive for ritual killings, rather than an abuse incidental to killings committed by religious group members called "heart men." Since the civil war, common criminals injured to killing also may sell body parts.

In August 1999, the Government sent a high-level delegation of the National Police to the southeastern counties to investigate reports of ritual killings. There were no reports released from this investigation.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

Although the Constitution bans ethnic discrimination, it also provides that only "persons who are Negroes or of Negro descent" may be citizens or own land. Many persons of Lebanese and Asian descent who were born or lived most of their lives in the country are denied full rights as a result of this racial distinction.

The country is ethnically diverse. The population of about 3 million is made up of 16 indigenous ethnic groups and the Americo-Liberian minority--descendants of freed slaves from the United States and the Caribbean--which until 1980 dominated the government and the public sector through the True Whig party. The indigenous ethnic groups generally speak distinct primary languages, and they are concentrated regionally. No ethnic group constitutes a majority of the population.

Many members of the predominantly Muslim Mandingo minority encountered hostility when they sought to return, after the end of the civil war, to their villages in Lofa, Bong, and Nimba counties. Many Mandingos were unable to reoccupy their homes, which had been taken over by squatters. Members of the Lorma, Gio, and Mano minorities generally held all Mandingos responsible for atrocities committed by the Ulimo-Mandingo faction during the civil war. The lack of competent security forces and a fully functioning judiciary in these areas prevented many Mandingos from seeking redress.

The continuing cross-border violence in Lofa county exacerbated ethnic tensions between the Mandingos and the Lormas (see Section 1.a.).

Recent tension with the Guinean government aggravated unrest in Nimba between the Manos and Mandingos (see Section 1.a.). For example, in October in Nimbia, a property dispute between the Mandingos and members of Mano and Gio ethnic groups led to rioting, which reportedly killed four persons (see Section 1.a.).

Section 6 Worker Rights

a. The Right of Association

The Constitution provides that workers, except members of the military and police, have the right to associate in trade unions, and workers are allowed to join unions in practice. The Constitution also provides that unions are prohibited from engaging in partisan political activity. However, government interference in union activities, especially union elections and leaderships struggles, was common both before and during the civil war.

Although most economic activity was interrupted by the war, unions proliferated. There are 32 functioning unions organized loosely under two umbrella groups--the Federation of Liberian Trade Unions and the Congress of Liberian Trade Unions--with the common objective of protecting the rights of their 60,000 members, who largely were unemployed. The actual power that the unions exercise was extremely limited. Since the country's work force is largely illiterate, economic activities beyond the subsistence level were very limited, and the labor laws tend to favor management.

During the year, the Government strictly enforced the union registration requirements that fell into disuse during the war.

Labor laws provide for the right to strike. A decree passed by the People's Redemption Council in 1984 outlawed strikes, but it was not enforced during the year. Due to the destruction of the economy and the

estimated 85 percent unemployment rate, strikes were infrequent.

In a wage dispute in February, workers at a rubber plantation in Bomi county burned some property. The dispute was settled later that month when the management of the plantation agreed to increase wages and to provide other benefits.

Labor unions traditionally have been affiliated with international labor groups such as the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions.

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

With the exception of civil servants, workers (including employees of public corporations and autonomous agencies) have the right to organize and bargain collectively. In the past, agreements were negotiated freely between workers and their employers without government interference; however, these rights were largely moot during the year because of the lack of economic activity.

There are no export processing zones. All of those previously existing were destroyed during the civil war.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The Constitution prohibits forced labor; however, this prohibition was ignored widely in many parts of the country, such as rural areas where farmers were pressured into providing free labor on "community projects" that often benefited only local leaders. The Government denied allegations that unpaid laborers were forced to harvest crops on President Taylor's private farm.

The Constitution prohibits forced child labor; however, there were reports that it occurred (see Section 5). Some former combatants, including some in the security forces, were accused of forcing children to work in the mining industry. In 1999 a child rights advocacy group released a report on forced child labor in the southeastern counties. The advocacy group's report and that of another prominent human rights group contradicted an earlier government report that failed to find any conclusive evidence of forced child labor. Subsequently legislators from three counties sued the child rights advocacy group for defaming the counties' reputations. At year's end, the case still was pending.

d. Status of Child Labor Practices and Minimum Age for Employment

The law prohibits the employment of children under the age of 16 during school hours in the wage sector, but enforcement traditionally is lax. The Ministry of Labor did not make any inspections during the year and lacks the resources to carry out its mandate. Throughout rural areas--particularly where there were no schools--small children continued to assist their parents as vendors in local markets or on the streets, to take care of younger brothers and sisters, and to work on family subsistence farms.

The Government has not ratified ILO Convention 182 on the worst forms of child labor.

The Constitution prohibits forced and bonded labor by children; however, there were reports that it occurred (see Section 6.c.).

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

The Labor Law provides for a minimum wage, paid leave, severance benefits, and safety standards, but enforcement was targeted solely against profitable firms that generally observed these standards. Due to the country's continued economic problems, most citizens were forced to accept any work they could find regardless of wages or working conditions.

The 1977 Labor Law requires a minimum wage of approximately \$0.25 (10 ld) per hour not exceeding 8 hours per day, excluding benefits, for unskilled laborers. The law requires that agricultural workers are to be paid \$1.50 (60 ld) for an 8-hour day, excluding benefits. Skilled labor has no minimum fixed wage, but industrial workers usually received three or four times the wage paid to agricultural workers. The much-sought-after minimum wage jobs provided a minimal standard of living for a worker and family; however, there were very few such jobs. Families dependent on minimum wage incomes also engage in subsistence farming, small-scale marketing, petty extortion, and begging.

The Ministry of Labor did not have the resources to monitor compliance with labor laws.

The Labor Law provides for a 48-hour, 6-day regular workweek with a 30-minute rest period per 5 hours of work. The 6-day workweek may extend to 56 hours for service occupations and to 72 hours for miners, with overtime pay beyond 48 hours.

Prior to 1990, there were government-established health and safety standards, enforced in theory by the Ministry of Labor. During the war, these regulations were not enforced. Even under the Labor Law, workers did not have a specific right to remove themselves from dangerous situations without risking loss of employment.

f. Trafficking in Persons

The law does not prohibit trafficking in persons; however, there were no reports that persons were trafficked to, from, through, or within the country.

[End.]