



Australian Government
Refugee Review Tribunal

Country Advice Liberia

Liberia – LBR36017 – Security situation –
Police – Judiciary

20 January 2010

1 Could you please update the security situation in Liberia? Has it improved since September 2009?

Travel advice by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs (DFAT) dated 7 January 2010 but current at 18 January 2010 states that the security situation in Liberia “remains unpredictable” and that the “potential for unrest and violence is high due to ongoing political and social tensions.”¹

Travel advice by the UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office dated 10 December 2009 but current at 17 January 2010 states that the security situation in Liberia “remains volatile.” The UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office continues:

The security situation in Liberia is assessed to have deteriorated slightly following a major disturbance in Harper in June [2009] and recent unrest by Guthrie Rubber Plantation workers, the Guinean community, market traders and dismissed Inter-con guards. The controversial Population Threshold Bill and TRC [Truth and Reconciliation Commission] Report remained key political issues and the demolition campaign in Monrovia remains a point of concern for the local population. The poorest people in the city are most affected by the destruction of their homes, being left homeless during the rainy season.

... Violent incidents, particularly in rural areas, are also possible as a result of land disputes, illegal mining and occupation of rubber plantations. ... Organised groups of former combatants may be present in some inaccessible areas of the country with limited government and UNMIL presence, including Sinoe rubber plantation and Sapo National Park.²

2 Have there been any improvements to the police in recent months?

No improvements to the police since September 2009 were found amongst the sources consulted.

DFAT travel advice dated 7 January 2010 but current at 18 January 2010 states that the police forces in Liberia “do not have the capacity to provide effective protection.”³ Travel advice by the UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office dated 10 December 2009 but current at 17 January 2010 states that the LNP “has very limited capability to prevent or detect crime, or to provide

¹ Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade 2010, *Travel Advice – Liberia*, 7 January <http://www.smartraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/Advice/Liberia> – Accessed 15 January 2010 – Attachment 1.

² UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office 2009, *Liberia Travel Advice*, 10 December <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/travel-advice-by-country/sub-saharan-africa/liberia> – Accessed 15 January 2010 – Attachment 2.

³ Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade 2010, *Travel Advice – Liberia*, 7 January <http://www.smartraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/Advice/Liberia> – Accessed 15 January 2010 – Attachment 1.

emergency response in any part of the country.”⁴ A 2009 article by journalist Ruthie Ackerman reports that the Liberian “police are poorly equipped, questionably staffed, and certainly ill-prepared to impose their authority and deal with the lack of rule of law.”⁵ An article dated 24 December 2009 in *The Liberian Observer* reports that the Director of the LNP has admitted that corruption exists with some police officers requesting illegal fees to perform their duties. The Director notes, however, that this issue was being addressed by LNP leadership.⁶

3 Have there been any improvements to the court system in recent months?

No improvements to the court system since September 2009 were found amongst the sources consulted.

A 2009 article by journalist Ruthie Ackerman reports that very little money has been put into reforming the judicial sector in Liberia. Ackerman reports that the judicial process is hampered by a “lack of qualified personnel and unpaid salaries for judges, prosecutors and court staff”. This has resulted in the majority of Liberians distrusting the judicial process. According to Ackerman, “Without a functioning court system, there has been a complete breakdown of law and order, marked by rampant corruption.”⁷

An article dated 26 November 2009 in *The Informer* reports that Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf recently called for “an urgent need of improvement in the performance of the country’s judicial system.” The President described the long delays in the adjudication of cases as “unacceptable”. According to Liberia’s Solicitor General, “one of the most serious problems in the country’s judiciary was corruption among jurors.” The Solicitor General said jurors “were accepting bribes and messing up good cases, casting an ugly aspiration on the judiciary.”⁸

A report dated 4 November 2009 by the US Institute of Peace and the George Washington University provides information on Liberian experiences with and perceptions of local justice options in Liberia. The report found that Liberians are “overwhelmingly dissatisfied” with the formal justice system in Liberia:

Liberians are overwhelmingly dissatisfied with the formal justice system, particularly at the local level.

Affordability, accessibility, and timeliness are three of the most consistent demands that Liberians have when it comes to the provision of justice. Our research reveals that the formal justice system is seen almost universally by Liberians as falling abysmally short of their expectations in all three of these important service categories. Liberians report a bewildering array of fees associated with the formal system, including registration fees, gas money for police investigators, requirements that victims pay the cost of food for the detained accused, lawyers’ fees, bribes, and indirect costs such as money for transportation and time spent away

⁴ UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office 2009, *Liberia Travel Advice*, 10 December <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/travel-advice-by-country/sub-saharan-africa/liberia> – Accessed 15 January 2010 – Attachment 2.

⁵ Ackerman, Ruthie 2009, ‘Rebuilding Liberia, One Brick at a Time’, *World Policy Journal*, Summer, Vol. 26, No. 2, p.88 – Attachment 3.

⁶ Quabo, Edith 2009, ‘Police Boss Admits to Corruption at LNP’, *Liberian Observer*, 24 December <http://www.liberianobserver.com/node/3641> – Accessed 15 January 2010 – Attachment 4.

⁷ Ackerman, Ruthie 2009, ‘Rebuilding Liberia, One Brick at a Time’, *World Policy Journal*, Summer, Vol. 26, No. 2, pp.87-88 – Attachment 3.

⁸ Sengbeh, Kaihenneh 2009, ‘Liberia: Corrupt Jurors, Corrupt Judiciary -Solicitor General Opens Up’, *The Informer*, 26 November, allAfrica.com website <https://allafrica.com/> – Accessed 15 January 2010 – Attachment 5.

from livelihoods. The formal system is also faulted for its lack of transparency and impartiality, and is widely believed to be a forum in which wealthy, powerful, and socially connected people can assert their will. Finally, the formal system is widely seen as ineffective and failing to enforce – or even get to the point of making – judgments against offenders. Victims of crime report feeling further victimized by their experience with the formal courts, expressing astonishment that they would have to pay excessively while the perpetrators nearly always walked free. One woman put into words a constant theme: “There is no justice for the poor.”⁹

List of Attachments

1. Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade 2010, *Travel Advice – Liberia*, 7 January <http://www.smarttraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/Advice/Liberia> – Accessed 15 January 2010.
2. UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office 2009, *Liberia Travel Advice*, 10 December <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/travel-advice-by-country/sub-saharan-africa/liberia> – Accessed 15 January 2010.
3. Ackerman, Ruthie 2009, ‘Rebuilding Liberia, One Brick at a Time’, *World Policy Journal*, Summer, Vol. 26, No. 2, pp.83-92.
4. Quabo, Edith 2009, ‘Police Boss Admits to Corruption at LNP’, *Liberian Observer*, 24 December <http://www.liberianobserver.com/node/3641> – Accessed 15 January 2010.
5. Sengbeh, Kaihenneh 2009, ‘Liberia: Corrupt Jurors, Corrupt Judiciary -Solicitor General Opens Up’, *The Informer*, 26 November, allAfrica.com website <https://allafrica.com/> – Accessed 15 January 2010.
6. Isser, Deborah H., Lubkemann, Stephen C., & N’Tow, Saah 2009, *Looking for Justice – Liberian Experiences with and Perceptions of Local Justice Options*, US Institute of Peace, 4 November, ReliefWeb website [http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWFiles2009.nsf/FilesByRWDocUnidFilename/MUMA-7YA4X5-full_report.pdf/\\$File/full_report.pdf](http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWFiles2009.nsf/FilesByRWDocUnidFilename/MUMA-7YA4X5-full_report.pdf/$File/full_report.pdf) – Accessed 15 January 2010.

⁹ Isser, Deborah H., Lubkemann, Stephen C., & N’Tow, Saah 2009, *Looking for Justice – Liberian Experiences with and Perceptions of Local Justice Options*, 4 November, ReliefWeb website, p.3 [http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWFiles2009.nsf/FilesByRWDocUnidFilename/MUMA-7YA4X5-full_report.pdf/\\$File/full_report.pdf](http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWFiles2009.nsf/FilesByRWDocUnidFilename/MUMA-7YA4X5-full_report.pdf/$File/full_report.pdf) – Accessed 15 January 2010 – Attachment 6.