

## Liberia

<b>Response to Information Request Number:</b>	LBR01005.OGC
<b>Date:</b>	March 28, 2001
<b>Subject:</b>	Liberia: Information on the Role of Liberia's National Security Agency (NSA) Since the Election of Charles Taylor as President in 1997
<b>From:</b>	INS Resource Information Center
<b>Keywords:</b>	Liberia / Arrested persons / Human rights violations / Impunity / Intelligence services / National security / Political violence / Security forces / State responsibility / Torture victims

### Query:

Does Liberia's National Security Agency still exist? Has it changed, improved or worsened since the 1997 election of Charles Taylor as president?

### Response:

The Liberian National Security Agency (NSA) continues to exist and to play an important role within the country's internal security apparatus. The agency has played a prominent role in investigating economic crimes, including alleged corruption at the National Security and Welfare Corporation. The National Security Agency was the center of controversy in June 2000 following President Charles Taylor's executive order to require passport applicants to receive clearance from the agency before receiving a passport. The NSA was accused of detaining and abusing or torturing four foreign journalists who were accused of spying in August 2000. However, it should be noted that while Liberia's National Security Agency has featured in some high-profile cases involving alleged human rights violations by the agency, the NSA has not figured prominently among the list of organizations accused of rights abuses by the major international human rights organizations or the U.S. State Department since the election of President Taylor in 1997.

The U.S. State Department reported that during the latter part of Liberia's seven-year civil war (1989-1996), the bodies responsible for internal security - the police, the National Security Agency and the Special Security Services (SSS) - lacked the resources to function effectively. Following his election and inauguration as president in 1997, Charles Taylor "made security a top priority, placing many [of his] NPFL [National Patriotic Front of Liberia] former combatants in the security apparatus" (U.S. DOS, 30 Jan. 1998, p 2). In the years since Taylor came to power, the NSA has been an important component of Liberia's system of internal security. Its director, Freddie Taylor in an interview, broadly defined its role: "It collects and disseminates (intelligence) information" (Nubo, 23 Mar. 1999). The director of the agency, Mr. Freddie Taylor, has been variously described in news reports as the brother, cousin, former brother-in-law, and no relation to the country's president, Charles Taylor (AFP, 7 June 1999; Star Radio, 18 Feb. 2000; Williams, 29 Mar. 1999; The Perspective, 22 June 2000).

There are numerous security agencies in Liberia. A human rights activist who was arrested for criticizing the Liberian government lists the "Special Safety Unit, Anti-Terrorist Unit, National Board of Investigation, Demus Forces, Special Operation Division, Presidential Guards, the Special Investigative Unit of the National Security Agency, the stand-by unit, the small boy unit and many more" (Torh, 10 Nov. 2000). The roles of these agencies, however, are ill defined and at a Liberian Senate committee hearing both the police

director and the head of the National Security Agency called for a clearer definition of the roles and functions of each security agency (Kamara, July 1999, p 10; Chea, 21 Feb. 2000).

Since Charles Taylor became Liberia's president in 1997 the National Security Agency has played a prominent role in investigating alleged economic crimes. In May 1999, the NSA's Economic Crime Division imposed a fine of 2,000 Liberian dollars on a businessman for refusing a torn \$5 Liberian banknote (Star Radio, 29 May 99). The NSA was responsible for investigating alleged corruption in the National Security and Welfare Corporation (BBC, 11 May 1999) and for investigating dealings at the Cavalla Rubber Corporation (Star Radio, 23 Sept. 1999).

The National Security Agency was in the news in June 2000 when President Taylor issued an executive order that anyone applying for a passport would have to receive a clearance from the agency. Civic organizations strongly opposed giving a secret police organization authority to approve the granting of routine travel documents to Liberian citizens (Kahler, 21 June 2000; The Perspective, 22 June 2000).

In other signs of the continued existence and influence of the Liberian National Security Agency, the director of the agency was made a member of a committee that also included the ministers of defense, education, and information and the army chief of staff, to oversee the destruction of arms left over from the civil war. And the NSA director was named to a task force set up to collect the debt of the Liberia Telecommunications Corporation. Task force members include a presidential advisor and the directors of police and the National Security Agency, and the ministers of defense and national security (AFP, 7 June 1999; Star Radio, 8 Jan. 2000).

In August 2000 the Liberian National Security Agency played a role in the high-profile detention of four journalists - two Britons, a South African, and a Sierra Leonean - who were making a documentary and were accused of spying by the Liberian government. The men reportedly "suffered 'mental abuse' while being held overnight . . . at the headquarters of the National Security Agency, a criminal investigation unit under [President] Taylor's personal control" (The Holland Sentinel, 26 Aug. 2000). According to other press reports, the journalists were subjected to torture while detained at NSA headquarters (News 24, 23 Aug. 2000).

In another prominent case in August 2000, the National Security Agency arrested Liberia's auditor general and former central bank governor, Raleigh Seekie, "for alleged in dissident activities" after carrying out a search at his home (CNN.com, 18 Aug. 2000).

Finally, it should be noted that while Liberia's National Security Agency has featured in some high-profile cases involving alleged human rights violations by the agency, notably the case of the four detained journalists, the NSA has not figured prominently among the list of organizations accused of violations by the major international human rights organizations or the U.S. State Department since the election of President Taylor in 1997. Human Rights Watch in its year 2001 World Report identifies "two extra-legal elite security forces known as the Anti-Terrorist Unit (ATU) and the Special Security Services" as "regularly responsible for abuses against the population" but does not single out the National Security Agency in relation to specific rights violations (HRW, 2001). Amnesty International in its year 2000 report states "the Special Security Service, the Special Security Unit (a special unit within the police), and the Anti-Terrorism Unit . . . have been accused of serious violations of human rights" but does not implicate the National Security Agency specifically in relation to human rights violations (AI, 2000). And in its Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2000, the U.S. Department of State mentions the National Security Agency only in connection with President Taylor's decision to grant the agency a role in providing clearance to passport applicants (U.S. DOS, Feb. 2001).

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RIC within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to

be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

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