

# Liberia

<b>Response to Information Request Number:</b>	LIB99002.ZNK
<b>Date:</b>	2 February 1999
<b>Subject:</b>	Liberia: Information on the current status of the National Teacher's Association of Liberia (NTAL)
<b>From:</b>	INS Resource Information Center
<b>Keywords:</b>	Liberia / Armed conflicts / Collective bargaining / Continuing education / Educational institutions / Freedom of association / Hostile working environment / Intellectuals / Labor disputes / Labor relations / Political participation / Political representation / Right to education / Right to organize trade unions / Right to security of persons / Right to strike / Teachers / Teachers training / Trade unions / Working conditions

## Query:

1. What are the educational requirements to be a teacher in Liberia?
2. Was the educational system functioning during the war, if so where?
3. Was the NTAL active during the war, if so how and where?
4. What qualifies a person to become an NTAL officer?
5. Current list of NTAL officers.
6. Are NTAL leaders at risk of harm by the government because of their activities?

## Response:

### Introduction

The main objective of the NTAL is to represent the teachers of Liberia, with their most notable activity aimed at developing a credit union for teachers. The educational system in Liberia starts with elementary education that includes kindergarten and primary school followed by secondary education that consists of junior high school and high school (AFJN 11 Nov. 1998). Education is compulsory for nine years, between seven and sixteen years of age. Primary education begins at age seven and lasts for six years, followed by secondary education beginning at 13 and lasting for another six years. In 1989, an estimated 60.5% of the population was illiterate (*Europa* 1991, 1677).

#### **1. What are the educational requirements to be a teacher in Liberia?**

A representative of the NTAL stated that in order to become a teacher in Liberia theoretically you must have attended one of the educational institutions, such as Kakata Rural Teachers Training Institute (KRTTI), Zorzor Rural Teacher's Training Institute (ZRTTI), the University of Liberia, or the Cuttington University College. Obtaining a "C" certificate allows teachers to teach in the elementary division, a "B" certificate allows teachers to teach in the Junior High School Division, and the "B.Sc." allows teachers to teach at the Senior High Division. However, the NTAL representative also said, "It is possible that a person with only a high school education would be teaching in Liberia" (NTAL 23 Dec. 1998).

A representative of the Africa Faith and Justice Network (AFJN) indicated that it was uncommon before the war for those who only graduated from high school to teach

high school. However, since there are not enough teachers in Liberia now, it is possible that high school graduates would be teaching high school and college graduates teaching college. The representative added that teachers tend to get paid more if they completed a teacher's training course, which is equivalent to a college degree (AFJN 11 Nov. 1998).

**2. Was the educational system functioning during the war? If so, where?**

The NTAL representative stated that the educational system was functioning during the war but only in the Bushrod Island area of Monrovia (NTAL 23 Dec. 1998).

**3. Was the NTAL active during the war? If so, where?**

The NTAL was relatively inactive during the war. However, some activities resumed under the preceding interim governments, Liberian National Transition Governments (LNTG) III and IV. The NTAL is currently active with the majority of their work consisting of advocating for the rights of their members (NTAL 23 Dec. 1998; *Country Reports 1997 1998*, 192). For a current list of NTAL officers, refer to question five.

**4.) What qualifies a person to become an NTAL officer?**

In order for someone to become an NTAL officer, the person must be a graduate of a teacher training institute or college, must have served a local branch as an officer before running for National office, and be of good character (NTAL 23 Dec. 1998).

**5.) Current list of NTAL officers:**

The NTAL representative provided the following list of the organization's current officers (NTAL 23 Dec. 1998):

President: Reverend J. Rudolph Marsh, Sr.

Vice-President/Administration: Joshua F. Sammy

Vice-President/Operations: Randolphson Kollie

Secretary General – distant: Paul Koimene

Acting Secretary General: B. Carlu Kamara

Treasurer/Directress - Womens Bureau: Reverend Malia E. Harris

Deputy Director/Professional Development: Alfred Goumorlor

Finance Officer: Evelyn S. Kolako

Secretary: Charlotte Nah

**6.) Are NTAL leaders at risk of harm by the government because of their activities?**

The NTAL representative said that officers (NTAL) fear state security when

they are advocating for their members, but provided no further details (NTAL 23 Dec. 1998). In January 1997, teachers were on strike for payment of salary arrears and instructional material. At the same time, the teachers were demanding an explanation about the disappearance of one of their members, Charles Davis. Mr. Davis was a member of the Liberia Peace Council (LPC) and served as special assistant to the Education Minister Moses Bah until he disappeared mysteriously in December 1996 (DPA 8 Jan. 1997). It is unclear whether Mr. Davis' disappearance was linked to his involvement with the NTAL.

The U.S. Department of State's annual *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1997* indicates that most civil servants who had not been paid for almost a year were paid by the end of December 1997. The report also states that the Taylor government strictly enforced the union registration requirements that had fallen into disuse during the war. Neither the interim governments (LNTG III or IV), nor the Taylor administration took discriminatory action against organized labor. The Taylor government however dismissed large numbers of Muslim Mandingos from their government jobs after assuming power (*Country Reports 1997 1998*, 192).

Among the sources contacted by the Resource Information Center (RIC), no information was presently available regarding specific incidents of harassment or persecution by the Taylor government against the NTAL and its members. A recent press article indicates Taylor's government is more focused on armed security rather than rebuilding the shattered economy and infrastructure. The Liberian daily newspaper *The Inquirer* describes the feeling of the populace as that of still living in a war zone. In September 1998 Monrovia was subjected to violent clashes when Taylor's forces attacked the military camp of his rival, Roosevelt Johnson, an ethnic Krahn who Taylor believed to be preparing to stage a coup to oust him from power. Taylor's former militiamen dominate the security forces and there are routine reports of the police and soldiers robbing or beating civilians. (*The Washington Post* 14 Jan. 1999).

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.

#### References:

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