

Liberia

Response to Information Request Number:	LBR99007.ZNK
Date:	August 23, 1999
Subject:	Liberia: Information on the Liberia Unification Party (LUP), treatment of LUP members, treatment of family members of LUP members, and the possible execution of LUP activists in 1994
From:	INS Resource Information Center, Washington, DC
Keywords:	Liberia / Arbitrary arrest / Detained persons / Extrajudicial executions / Freedom of association / Freedom of expression / Opposition leaders / Prisoners of conscience / Political opposition / Political persecution / Political prisoners

Query:

- 1) Please provide information on the Liberia Unification Party (LUP).
- 2) Please provide information on the treatment of LUP members, especially the possible execution of LUP activists in April 1994.
- 3) How are family members of executed LUP activists treated in Liberia?

Response:

1. Information on the Liberia Unification Party (LUP).

The Liberia Unification Party (LUP) was formed in 1984 by Gabriel Kpolleh, banned by the Doe government in 1987, and recertified in 1990 (*Political Handbook 1998*, 1998, 546; *Vancouver Sun*, 19 June 1990). The LUP was one of six parties that constituted the Interim Government of National Unity (IGNU) in late 1990 (Dunn 1998, 96).

The LUP participated in the July 1997 presidential election in a coalition with the Liberia Action Party (LAP) called the Alliance of Political Parties (or Alliance), but the Alliance won just 2.6% of the vote. The Alliance currently holds two seats in the House of Representatives (HRW/Africa Nov. 1997, 13).

2. Information on the treatment of LUP members and the execution of LUP activists.

In March 1988, while the LUP was still under ban, LUP founder Gabriel Kpolleh was detained along with his deputy Cepar Mabande and nine colleagues (Africa Watch May 1990, 8; *Political Handbook 1998*, 1998, 546). The men charged that they were "beaten, hung upside-down, and otherwise mistreated and threatened while in custody" (Harsch March-April 1989, 58). The ten were sentenced to ten years imprisonment on charges of attempting to overthrow then-Liberian president Samuel K. Doe. In March 1989, a mixture of domestic and international pressures led the Doe government to release all ten prisoners (Africa Watch 1990, 8; *Country Reports 1990*, 1991, 194).

Amnesty International reported that members of Charles Taylor's forces, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), assassinated Gabriel Kpolleh and others in 1994 upon Charles Taylor's orders (AI 1995). According to a member of the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission (JPC) in Liberia, many people were extrajudicially executed in Liberia in 1994, though only the deaths of more prominent individuals such as Mr. Kpolleh may have been reported (JPC 13 Aug. 1999). A policy analyst at the Africa Faith and Justice Network (AFJN), stated that especially in Bong and Nimba counties, many local political and civic leaders were "eliminated" (extrajudicially executed) at that time in Liberia as Taylor tightened his grip on power in these areas (AFJN 16 Aug. 1999). Over 200,000 Liberians died during the civil war in the country (JPC 13 Aug. 1999).

According to the JPC member, the Liberia Unification Party (LUP) has been "virtually nonexistent" in Liberia since President Charles Taylor's victory in the July 1997 presidential election (JPC 13 Aug. 1999). The policy analyst at AFJN stated that opposition political parties in Liberia are created largely to bring specific individuals to power. In the case of the LUP, this individual was Gabriel Kpolleh, whose assassination in 1994 took away the driving force behind the LUP. The recent brutal history of the country and the current climate of fear also keep opposition political activity to a minimum (AFJN 16 Aug. 1999; LUPD 17 Aug. 1999). According to a human rights attorney from Liberians United for Peace and Democracy (LUPD), this climate of fear surrounding opposition politics is not new in Liberia, but became more acute under the harsh brutality of former president Samuel K. Doe and current president Charles Taylor (LUPD 17 Aug. 1999). Opposition political parties are legal and may be formally registered with the Liberian government, but in practice, they do not function except at election time (AFJN 16 Aug. 1999; JPC 13 Aug. 1999; LUPD 17 Aug. 1999).

The JPC member stated that the human rights situation in Liberia is "fluid," meaning that it is hard to predict who among opposition political party members could be at risk in the country. Targeting of opposition party members does not appear to be "organized or systematic," yet certain individuals may be at risk because of past activities or because of public comments against President Taylor's regime (JPC 13 Aug. 1999). The AFJN analyst stated that anyone who publicly announces opposition to Taylor, or makes remarks construed to be in opposition to Taylor, "will invite the wrath of Taylor" (AFJN 16 Aug. 1999). The analyst also stated that if one lives quietly in Liberia, one may be safe unless one is "victimized by the general unruliness of the security forces" (AFJN 16 Aug. 1999). The analyst pointed out that those who committed many of the atrocities during the civil war in Liberia are now enforcing the law in that country (AFJN 16 Aug. 1999).

3. How are family members of executed LUP activists treated in Liberia?

A human rights attorney with Liberians United for Peace and Democracy (LUPD) stated that there is a mentality of "wanting to please the chief [Taylor]" in Liberia (LUPD 17 Aug. 1999). Taylor and his supporters do not specifically have to ask for revenge against or punishment of their political enemies. Often acts of violence and/or intimidation will be carried out against Taylor's enemies in order to curry Taylor's favor without his direct orders. The attorney feels that close family members of assassinated political activists would be at risk of such acts by "the security forces and militant [Taylor] party loyalists" if they attempted to return to Liberia (LUPD 17 Aug. 1999). Such acts may not be sanctioned by the government but may be committed nonetheless by "the people who want to please the powers that be" (LUPD 17 Aug. 1999).

The policy analyst at AFJN agrees that some people may target Taylor's enemies, perceived enemies, or family members of such, even without direct orders to do so, but feels that this would only occur outside Monrovia. The

analyst feels that incidents inside Monrovia are largely organized and facilitated "under instruction of the bosses" [Taylor and his regime], or are at least condoned by the regime (AFJN 19 Aug. 1999). Again, the AFJN policy analyst feels that returning family members of slain activists would be targeted only if they publicly vocalized their opposition to Taylor's rule (AFJN 19 Aug. 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.

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Last Modified 06/14/2002