

Liberia

Response to Information Request Number:	LBR99008.ZNY
Date:	August 23, 1999
Subject:	Liberia: Information on the Liberian National Security Agency (NSA) from 1982 through 1997.
From:	INS Resource Information Center, Washington, DC
Keywords:	Liberian/National Security Agency/NSA

Query:

Could the Liberian NSA be linked to any persecution in Liberia, or was it a legitimate investigative agency?

Response:

According to an African human rights worker, Mr. Ezekial Pajebo of the Africa Faith and Justice Network, the Liberian NSA is ostensibly organized something like the FBI in the United States Government (USG), with the task of combating sophisticated crimes such as counterfeiting or drug smuggling. Pajebo says that in practice, however, the NSA has been used as a kind of secret service to monitor the opposition, that it possesses and exercises powers of arrest and imprisonment, and that the opposition generally views it as a hostile institution used by the government to intimidate critics (AFJN 23 Aug. 1999). A Liberia Desk Officer at the Department of State (who recently served in Liberia) also notes that only unusual circumstances could account for an individual being able to work for the NSA from the early 1980s through the mayhem and executions following the death of President Doe in 1990 and up to the end of the civil war with elections in 1997. While it is possible that this applicant was a lower level bureaucrat regarded by political appointees as a non-partisan, effective and irreplaceable worker, it is also possible that high level political shenanigans were involved in his lengthy tenure. At the least, his tenure is a red flag that might require further investigation. Furthermore, it appears unusual that a long term employee of the NSA would have no knowledge at all of the use to which his intelligence reports were put (List 23 Aug. 1999).

As recently as July 1998, according to Deutsche Presse-Agentur (see attached), opposition leaders have accused the Liberian government of staffing the NSA and other security organs with former fighters of the NPFL militia, and using these organs to harass, intimidate, and disappear opponents (Deutsche Presse-Agentur 31 July 1998). In January 1997, according to the Liberia Communications Network Radio (see attached), three executives of the *National Chronicle* newspaper were arrested and detained by the NSA, although the director of the NSA subsequently apologized to the newspaper's staff for their detention (LCNR 9 Jan. 1997). According to a 1990 Op-Ed in the *New York Times* (see attached) the NSA detained and tortured two journalists for 55 days, whose case was documented by U.S. lawyers in 1986. Although the Op-Ed did not give many details, the same case was reported by the BBC in 1985 (see attached), this evidently being a year after the initial arrest and detention, when the two were re-arrested for suing the Minister of State for Presidential Affairs and the director of the NSA for "false imprisonment" (BBC 20 July 1985; Kappia 9 Sept. 1990).

An American human rights worker who has published on Liberia says "it would be unfair"

to conclude that it would be impossible to have worked for the NSA without having been responsible for some kind of persecution. Nevertheless, the applicant's background raises justifiable suspicions (Peterson 23 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.

References:

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BBC Summary of World Broadcasts. *Elwa*, Monrovia. "Opening of Election Campaign in Liberia" (20 July 1985) – as reported in Nexis.

Deutsche Presse-Agentur. "Insecurity, abuse of human rights still frequent in Liberia," *Tepitapia Sannah* (31 July 1998) – as reported in Nexis.

Kappia, Joe S. "In Liberia, the Regime Makes Journalism a Very Risky Business," *New York Times*, Op-ed (September 9, 1990), p. D24 – as reported in Nexis.

Liberia Communications Network Radio (LCNR) "Security Agency Releases Detained Newspaper Executives (9 January 1997) – as reported in the Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) web site.

List, Kathleen. U.S. Department of State, Liberia Country Desk. Telephone Interview (Washington, D.C.: 23 August 1999).

Peterson, Dave. Program Officer for Africa, National Endowment for Democracy. Telephone Interview (Washington, D.C.:23 August 1999).

Attachments:

BBC Summary of World Broadcasts. *Elwa*, Monrovia. "Opening of Election Campaign in Liberia" (20 July 1985) – as reported in Nexis.

Deutsche Presse-Agentur. "Insecurity, abuse of human rights still frequent in Liberia," *Tepitapia Sannah* (31 July 1998) – as reported in Nexis.

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Last Modified 06/14/2002