



World Directory of Minorities

Africa MRG Directory → Liberia → Liberia Overview

Print Page

Close Window

Liberia Overview

- [Environment](#)
- [Peoples](#)
- [History](#)
- [Governance](#)
- [Current state of minorities and indigenous peoples](#)

Environment

The Republic of Liberia is located on the Atlantic Coast of West Africa and is bordered by [Sierra Leone](#), [Guinea](#) and [Côte d'Ivoire](#). Liberia has a 560-kilometre coastline and mountains in the north and east. The country contains vast timber reserves and substantial deposits of iron ore, gold and diamonds.

Peoples

Main language groups: English 20% (official), Bassa, Kru (Klao), Kpelle, Gola, Loma, Mann

Main religions: traditional religions (40%), Christianity, often mixed with traditional beliefs (40%), Islam (20%)

Main minority groups: Kpelle 487,400 (15.2%), Bassa 347,600 (10.9%), Gio (Dan) 150-200,000 (4.7-6.3%), Kru (Klao) 184,000 (5.8%), Grebo 222,000 (6.9%), Mano 185,000 (5.8%), Americo-Liberians/Congo People 160,000 (5%), Loma 141,800 (4.4%), Krahn 126,400 (4.0%), Kissi 115,000 (3.6%), Gbandi 100,000 (3.1%), Gola 99,300 (3.1%), Vai 89,500 (2.8%), Mandingo 45,400 (1.4%), Mende 19,700 (0.6%), Kuwaa 12,800 (0.4%), and Dei 8,100 (0.3%)

[Note: Percentages for religions are taken from the 2007 US CIRF report. Total population est of 3.2 million is taken from the 2007 CIA World Factbook, as is the estimate for English speakers and total for Americo-Liberians/Congo People. For most ethnic groups, figures are taken from Ethnologue numbers stemming from various years: Kpelle (1991), Bassa (1991), Gio (1993), Kru (1991), Grebo (1991 for two sub-groups, 1999 for two others, and 2000 for a fifth), Mano (1995), Loma (1991), Krahn (1991) Gola (1991), Mandingo (1991), Kissi (1995), Vai (1991), Gbandi (2001), Mende (1991), Kuwaa (1991), Dei (1991).]

The forest belt in West Africa that covers large swathes of Sierra Leone, Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana and Nigeria has always been populated by a large number of ethnic groups. In Liberia there are at least sixteen ethnic groups, each belonging to one of three major language groupings.

The southeastern Kru linguistic group comprises Kru, Bassa, Grebo, Krahn and Dei. Kru (Klao) live along the southern coast bordering Cote d'Ivoire. According to their oral tradition, Kru migrated from the north-east to the coast of West Africa in the sixteenth centuries and became fishermen and sailors. Kru political organization was traditionally decentralised, each subgroup inhabiting a number of

autonomous towns. Rural Kru engage in fishing and rice and cassava production but their region, criss-crossed with rivers, has seen little development and many young Kru have migrated to Monrovia. Bassa have their own writing system, called 'Bassa' or 'Vah,' which was developed around 1900. They practice Christianity and indigenous religions. Together with Dei they settled early on in Monrovia and became assimilated into the settler economy as artisans, clerks and domestic servants. Grebo live along the coast in Eastern Liberia, on both sides of the Cavall River, which serves as a border between Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire. The Grebo migrated to Liberia during the sixteenth century. They lacked strong central structures; village ties were primary rather than clan affiliation. They were subject to a twenty-year campaign of subjugation by the Americo-Liberian-dominated government. The ethnic kin of the Krahn in Liberia are known as the Wee in Côte d'Ivoire. Krahn live in Nimba, Grand Gedeh and Sinoe Counties, along the border with Côte d'Ivoire. The Krahn have historically been disparaged as 'uncivilized' by both the ruling Americo-Liberians and members of the larger indigenous ethnic groups. When Doe took power in 1980, Krahn, in particular those from Doe's own village, became more dominant. Krahn (Wee) from Côte d'Ivoire made up the Executive Mansion Guard. In 1990, during the civil war, Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) attacked Krahn civilians in Nimba County and elsewhere as they moved through the country, especially in Grand Gedeh County, and many fled to Côte d'Ivoire. The small Dei group lives in Montserrado County near the coast and Monrovia, primarily between the Lofa and St. Paul rivers. Dei were among the first to come into contact with the settler immigrants, settling in Monrovia early on and becoming assimilated like the Bassa. Kuwaa are a Kruan-speaking people who live in Lofa County. In the past, Liberian government officials have referred to them as Belle, a name that has disparaging connotations.

The second largest linguistic group, the Mande, is located in the north-west and central regions and subdivided into the Mande-Ta (Manding and Vai) and the Mande-Fu (Kpelle, Gio, Mano, Loma, Gbandi and Mende).

The Mandingo population immigrated into Liberia from Guinea over the past 200-300 years and is widely scattered throughout Liberia, albeit concentrated in upper Lofa County. Their trade routes linked other Liberian populations with the savanna. Mandingos settled amongst Mano and Vai and became involved in agriculture and craft industries, including blacksmithing, leather and gold work. Mandingos were seen as distinct because of their Islamic religion. Further they were viewed as outsiders by both the Americo-Liberian government and other groups, as a group whose main ties lay in Guinea. Vai live on both sides of the border between Liberia and Sierra Leone in an area extending 90 kilometres up the coast from the Vannje River in Sierra Leone to the Lofa River in Liberia, and into the hinterland. Traditionally Vai are engaged in trade and are mostly Muslims converted by itinerant Dioula traders. The Vai are known for their indigenous syllabic writing system, developed in the 1820s by Duala Bukele and tribal elders. Over the course of the 19th century, literacy in the writing system became widespread. Its use declined over the 20th century, but modern computer technology may enable a revival. Vai were part of the large-scale migration in the sixteenth century. Before coming to the coast they probably inhabited the savanna region roughly 150 kilometres inland. Although individual Vai leaders formed coalitions with Americo-Liberians and established trade links with them, Vai resisted taxation until 1917.

The Mandé-Fu includes the Kpelle, Dan, Ma, Loma, Gbandi and Mende. The largest single Liberian group, the Kpelle, also live in Guinea, where they are known as the Guerze. They inhabit central and northern Liberia. Kpelle moved from Guinea into Liberia during the sixteenth century. They united and held out for many years against the imposition of Americo-Liberian rule. Kpelle are predominantly rice farmers, though many have migrated into the capital and other cities. Traditionally organized into chiefdoms, the *poro* and the *sande*, respectively male and female secret societies, enforce social norms through their courts, socialise young people through their initiation schools, and provide bonds that unite members from different kin, territorial, or even tribal units. Dan (also inhabiting Cote d'Ivoire) are more

commonly known as Gio in Liberia, which stems from the Bassa phrase meaning slave people, but the term Dan is preferred and used by the people themselves. The Dan are a southern Mandé-speaking group and those living in Liberia live in Nimba County surrounded by the Côte d'Ivoire, Ma(no), Bassa and Krahn (Wee). The Dan also inhabit the mountainous west-central Côte d'Ivoire. They originated somewhere to the west or northwest of their present lands. Unlike many other tribal peoples, Dan largely accepted the rule of the Americo-Liberians. The Ma are Mano, a name given to them by the Bassa and meaning literally 'Ma-people' in Bassa. They reside in Nimba County in north central Liberia, surrounded by Kpelle, Bassa and Dan. The Mano also live in Guinea. The Loma live in Northwest Liberia in upper Lofa County, surrounded by the Republic of Guinea and Mandingo, Kuwaa and Kpelle populations. They are also found in Guinea where they are known as Toma. Gbandi and Mende also live in upper Lofa County. Their homeland is surrounded by Sierra Leone and Guinea and by Kissi and Gola. The Gbandi and the Mende formed part of the migration into Liberia from Guinea in the mid-sixteenth century as political refugees from Mandingo expansion in the northwest.

Most of Liberia's ethnic groups came to the forest belt in southward waves of migration, creating a number of different population layers. Some came to uninhabited areas; others imposed themselves upon groups already in the area. The Gola and Kissi, who also live in Sierra Leone and are known to be the oldest inhabitants of Liberia, belong to a third linguistic group known as the Mel group (West/Southern Atlantic). These groups live in the north and in the coastal region of the northwest. The Gola live in a 6,000 square kilometre area in the western Liberian hinterland, along the St Paul and Mano rivers in Lofa and Grand Cape Counties, and also in eastern Sierra Leone. The Gola used to live in the forested mountains of north-east Liberia and south-east Sierra Leone but migrated to the coast as traders. The Gola had a tradition of accepting protected status through the exchange of women. They did not assimilate but instead succeeded in assimilating Dei and Vai people into their society. They then gained ascendancy over their former patrons as their numbers increased through migration. Many Gola fled to Sierra Leone especially from the northern region prior to 1918 as the government conducted a ruthless campaign against them. In Liberia, Gola became apprentices to Americo-Liberians and formed a lower-middle-class group. Kissi live in a belt of hills covered by wooded savannas where Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia meet, and are surrounded by Mandingo groups. Other members of this group live in Sierra Leone and Guinea. Kissi and Gola are the only groups in Liberia who are descendants of Liberia's original peoples. Rice, yams, peanuts, cotton, bananas, melons, and taro are subsistence crops; coffee and kola nuts are grown for external trade.

The Americo-Liberians, who are descendants of freed slaves that arrived in Liberia as of 1821, make up an estimated 5 per cent of the population, of whom half are descended from US slave origin and half from the Caribbean, as well as a number of 'Congos', slaves freed before they made the Atlantic crossing. Increasingly, all Liberians with origins outside of the region are lumped together and called 'Congos'. There are also a sizeable number of Lebanese, Indians, and other West African nationals who make up a significant part of Liberia's business community. Under Liberia's constitution, non-Africans are excluded from citizenship.

[^top](#)

History

Liberia is the only nation in sub-Saharan Africa that was never a European colony. Most of Liberia's ethnic groups came to the forest belt in southward waves of migration. Liberia's first inhabitants were ancestors of the Gola and Kissi peoples from north-central Africa who arrived as early as the 12th century. They were joined by the Kruan people (Kru, Kuwaa, Bassa, Krahn and Dei ethnic groups), moving in from the north and east. Around the 15th century, people of the Mande language group (including Gio, Mano, Loma, Gbandi, Mende and Kpelle) migrated into the region.

These communities traded with the Mali and other kingdoms to their north. The Kru especially took up trade with European merchants beginning in the 15th century, initially in minerals and spices, and later with slaves from the interior. By the 18th century, Kru sailors were a common sight on European ships engaged in the slave trade. According to oral tradition, Kru escaped slavery themselves by making a bargain with the Europeans; slaves could be transported across their territory as long as Kru themselves were not enslaved. Therefore Kru wore a tattoo - a vertical line down the centre of their forehead - so they would be identified. Kru received slaves from inland societies and transferred them to Europeans.

American Colonization Society

In 1816 the American Colonization Society (ACS) was founded in the USA to resettle former slaves in Africa. Some of its founders were abolitionists who viewed a return of former slaves to Africa as the best way to restore the dignity of victimized blacks, while others saw the scheme as a vehicle to rid the United States of free blacks, spread Christianity in Africa, or make money through trade.

Beginning in 1820, the first freed slaves arrived in West Africa and eventually established the settlement of Monrovia, named after US President James Monroe. More settlers gradually arrived and established separate colonies, negotiating treaties with indigenous chiefs to expand their territory and ensure the settlers' safety. The settlers spoke English and established in Liberia many of the customs of America's southern states, including forms of social interaction, religion, dress and architecture. The colonizers looked down on tribal peoples, discriminated against them in hiring and education, and attempted to replace their indigenous beliefs with Protestant Christianity. Many actions of the colonial government served to strengthen and crystallize ethnic self-identification among the repressed tribal peoples.

In 1847 the colonies united, and Liberia became the first independent nation in black Africa. The new nation faced a variety of problems, including resistance to the government by the local population, a decline in demand for Liberian sugar-cane and coffee exports, and territorial encroachment by the British, French and Germans. Liberia was only able to maintain its independence with support from the US, although Washington did not formally recognize its statehood until 1862 and its borders were not finally defined until 1892.

Indigenous rebellions

The second half of the 19th century was punctuated by indigenous rebellions against Americo-Liberian domination, including an uprising by Grebo and Kru peoples in 1856. In 1915 the Kru revolted again, largely because of a tax imposed by the government, which they viewed as the latest of a series of injustices at the hands of merchants who neglected to pay wages and continually raised the prices of goods sold to local people. In 1930 another uprising was unsuccessful, and taxation was imposed. This led to an outmigration of Kru primarily to Monrovia. The indigenous population was not given citizenship until 1904, and were not granted the right to vote until 1946. This right was then restricted to property owners or those who paid a 'hut tax'.

The areas most dominated by indigenous Gio (Dan), Mano, Loma, and Krahn were not truly under the central government's control until the 1920s and not penetrated by road or rail until after World War II. Non-Americo-Liberian peoples generally received little economic benefit from developments such as agricultural improvement and foreign investments. Through sheer weight of numbers, the indigenous population dominated the armed forces. However, any hint of unrest was severely punished and Americo-Liberians pursued a policy of divide and rule in maintaining control over the army through ethnic stereotyping. The ruling True Whig Party maintained a kind of feudal oligarchy until well into the third quarter of the twentieth century, monopolizing political power and subjugating the largely peasant

population with the help of the Liberian Frontier Force (LFF), an army of non-Americo-Liberians deployed to collect taxes and forcibly recruit labourers for public works projects. While the settlers along the coast developed an elaborate lifestyle reminiscent of the ante-bellum Southern USA, the original population endured poverty and neglect in the hinterland, and repression and corruption were built into the style of government.

Liberia served as a base for Allied forces during World War I. With the automobile boom, Firestone Tire and Rubber established plantations in Liberia in 1926 that quickly gained a reputation for exploitation and forced labour.

The regime of President V.S. Tubman (1944-71) saw the beginning of change and economic development, although he maintained an iron grip, and until 1963, only three per cent of Liberians were eligible to vote. Corruption was rampant. Tubman did make an effort to integrate the indigenous Liberian population into the economy and polity. While for many groups, this attempt failed dismally, for the Mandingo - who had faced exclusion and suspicion of divided loyalty with Guinea - it brought political and economic benefits. Mandingos were brought into government offices and given commercial contracts. By the 1950s they owned a majority of transportation businesses and worked in commerce.

Tubman's successor, William Tolbert, attempted timid reform in the direction of democracy, but aroused expectations that could not be satisfied within the existing political structures. This hastened his undoing, as the country began to experience more frequent labour disputes and political unrest. Liberia served as a strategic base for the United States during the Cold War, but hundreds of millions of dollars in American financial support rewarded the loyalty of elites and brought scant benefit to the average Liberian.

Doe's regime

In 1980, illiterate 28-year-old Master Sergeant Samuel K. Doe led a coup that resulted in Tolbert's death. Doe was a Krahn - the first non-Americo-Liberian leader - and the change in regime was at first widely greeted with enthusiasm. He promised to liberate the masses from the corrupt and oppressive domination of the few and pledged a more equitable distribution of wealth. However this did not happen. Doe feared for his security and his clutch on power, and increasingly surrounded himself with Krahn kinsmen. Soldiers of the Armed Force of Liberia (AFL), with new majority Krahn leadership, proved a law unto themselves, and there were persistent reports of looting, arson, floggings, arbitrary arrests, rape, summary executions and brutality. Under Doe, the AFL detained and executed rival Grebo, Gio and Mano soldiers and civilians. The economy entered a steep decline despite enhanced American aid to Liberia under the US administration of Ronald Reagan.

Doe sought greater legitimacy through a new constitution in 1984, but his government maintained its often arbitrary ruthlessness, and 1985 elections were blatantly rigged. A failed coup led by a Gio, Thomas Quiwonkpa, in 1985 resulted in Doe's enhanced targeting of Gio and Mano peoples in northern Nimba County. The AFL subjected them to remorseless arrest, torture, rape and killings. Doe played Mandingos against these ethnic groups, and after the abortive coup, prominent Mandingos went on television to pledge support for Doe. This caused many groups who hated Doe to intensely mistrust Mandingos.

On 24 December 1989, Charles Taylor (who is half Americo-Liberian and half Gola) - a former Doe official who had been accused of embezzlement - led his National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) across the border from bases in Côte d'Ivoire. The AFL responded with a ruthless counter-insurgency campaign in Nimba County, and this brutality served to swell the ranks of NPFL recruits, many of

whom were Gio (Dan) and Mano boys orphaned by the fighting. Within weeks, over 160,000 people had fled into neighbouring Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire, beginning a refugee exodus that escalated to about one-third of the total population by late 1990. Fighting in Nimba County, an important agricultural centre, caused food shortages across the country.

By June 1990 the NPFL had reached Grand Gedeh County, largely populated by Krahn, and were urged on by Taylor to 'Kill the Krahn'. NPFL fighters attacked civilians and devastated the area, prompting a huge number of Krahn to seek sanctuary in Côte d'Ivoire. Other groups threatened by the NPFL included those who were mistaken for Krahn, particularly Grebo and Vai, and anyone who had served or cooperated with the Doe government. Mandingos, for the most part traders and business people, were considered by the rebels to have been collaborators. Thousands were killed, property was destroyed, and many fled into exile.

ECOMOG intervention

In August 1990 a multinational, but mostly Nigerian, West African force called ECOMOG entered Liberia to try to end the civil war. Nigerian leader Sani Abacha was wary of the NPFL's revolutionary rhetoric and feared its spread in the region. Doe was killed on 9 September 1990 by a breakaway 'Independent NPFL' group led by Prince Yormie Johnson, but the war continued. ECOMOG installed an interim government headed by Dr Amos Sawyer and gradually established control in Monrovia. Taylor's forces controlled most of the countryside, dubbed 'Greater Liberia', while former members of Doe's army controlled the two western provinces.

The United Liberation Movement for Democracy in Liberia (ULIMO) was formed in 1991 by former AFL soldiers (predominantly Krahn and Mandingo) who had fled to Sierra Leone. Backed by the government of Sierra Leone, ULIMO fought against the Revolutionary United Front and its Liberian allies, Taylor's NPFL, both of which had invaded Sierra Leone from Liberia in March 1991. Later that year, ULIMO crossed the border from Sierra Leone into Liberia and fought intensely against Taylor's NPFL troops in Liberia's Lofa County. ECOMOG, which had been fighting the NPFL in the interior, retreated to Monrovia in 1992. Reports surfaced of numerous human rights abuses by the NPFL, including the drafting of children into 'Small Boys Units' and the execution of civilians. ULIMO, the NPFL and ECOMOG, which had become actively involved in combat, were all involved in fighting by 1993. By then it was estimated that 150,000 had died in the civil war, many of them civilians, and half the population had fled the country or been internally displaced. After the breakdown of a July 1993 ceasefire, the UN established an observer mission in Liberia: at the same time several new factions emerged, many of them based on ethnic affiliations and most of them armed. In 1994 ULIMO split into a predominately Mandingo and Muslim faction, ULIMO-K, and a predominately Krahn faction, ULIMO-J.

In the face of the threatened escalation of the war if ECOMOG forces were removed, various attempts were made to build coalitions. The Abuja peace accord was signed under the auspices of ECOWAS in August 1995. A government of national unity included Taylor's NPFL and the ULIMO-K faction, but intense fighting erupted in Monrovia in April 1996 when Taylor and ULIMO-K leader Alhaji Kromah attempted to seize total control of the government. Their attempt eventually failed, and the transitional government paved the way for 1997 elections. During the campaign, Taylor threatened to plunge the country back into war if he lost. At rallies, Liberians chanted, 'He killed my ma, he killed my pa: I'll vote for him.' International observers representing governments and organizations eager to proclaim progress in Liberia, and motivated in part by an interest in staving-off pressure for humanitarian military intervention, nonetheless deemed Taylor's election free and fair.

1999: The emergence of LURD

In 1999 a new rebel force, Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), invaded Liberia from Guinea. LURD had backing from the Guinean government and absorbed many former leaders and fighters from the predominately Mandingo ULIMO-K. Meanwhile leading ECOMOG participants Ghana and Nigeria, along with other countries and human rights organizations, pointed to Taylor's continued backing for the RUF in Sierra Leone. There, the rebels used a campaign of terror to secure alluvial diamond resources for their own gain, and allegedly that of Taylor. As the conflict in Liberia intensified, Taylor called on RUF fighters to assist in attacking LURD in Liberia, and its sponsor, Guinea. A second major Liberian rebel faction emerged in 2003, the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL), with strong backing from Côte d'Ivoire. MODEL was a successor of sorts to ULIMO-J, and many of its members were Krahn. Between advances by LURD and MODEL, the area controlled by Taylor's government progressively shrank. All factions committed horrendous atrocities and made heavy use of child soldiers.

Taylor's indictment

In March 2003 the prosecutor at the Special Court for Sierra Leone - a UN-backed international war crimes tribunal established to bring to justice those 'bearing greatest responsibility' for atrocities in Sierra Leone - issued a sealed indictment for President Charles Taylor on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity. When the besieged Taylor traveled to Accra, Ghana for peace talks with LURD and MODEL in June 2003, Taylor's indictment was unsealed. Ghana refused to make the arrest and Taylor returned to Monrovia. The rebels continued their advance on the capital, and the international community increased pressure on Taylor to step down. As casualties mounted in Monrovia, the United Nations, US, UK, African Union and ECOWAS brokered a deal with Taylor.

Taylor agreed to exile in Nigeria and de facto immunity from prosecution in exchange for leaving office. Upon his departure on 11 August 2003, a transitional government chaired by businessman Gyude Bryant took power. Meanwhile the Special Court for Sierra Leone, victims of the war as well as regional and international human rights organizations continued to demand that Nigeria transfer Taylor for trial at the court in accordance with its obligations under international law.

[^top](#)

Governance

Gyude Bryant's transitional government consisted of the Taylor, LURD and MODEL warlord factions, as well as representatives of civil society. The transition was marked by political inertia and allegations of pervasive corruption. Taylor's August 2003 departure also paved the way for deployment of a large UN peacekeeping force, the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), which absorbed West African peacekeepers formerly serving with ECOMOG but also included many peacekeepers from outside the region. Under UNMIL supervision, the transitional government arranged for congressional and presidential elections to be held.

In November 2005, civil society leader Ellen Johnson Sirleaf defeated football star George Weah in a run-off election for the presidency. Johnson Sirleaf had been jailed for a time during the Doe regime in the 1980s. With an economics degree from Harvard, she had previously worked as a bank executive and an executive at the World Bank. Upon her inauguration in January 2006, she became Africa's first woman to be democratically elected as head of state.

Liberia's political system is closely modeled on that of the United States. The president serves as both head of state and government. A bicameral parliament consists of a 30-seat Senate and 64-seat House of Representatives. The Supreme Court serves as the highest authority in the judiciary.

President Johnson Sirleaf launched an ambitious initiative to curb corruption, and proceeded with a three-year international scheme called the Governance and Economic Management Assistance Programme (GEMAP) that inserted international staff into Liberian government bureaucracies in order to share expertise and deter corruption. She launched audits of government ministries and an investigation of corruption during the transitional government. In 2007 former chairman Gyude Bryant was indicted on corruption charges.

Johnson Sirleaf has traveled widely to lobby foreign governments to forgive Liberia's crippling debts, which should provide much greater resources for desperately needed infrastructure projects and social spending. Reforms have led the UN Security Council to lift bans on the country's diamond and timber exports.

[^top](#)

Current state of minorities and indigenous peoples

Under international pressure in 2005, Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo had promised to relinquish Charles Taylor for trial at the Special Court for Sierra Leone only if a democratically elected government in Monrovia requested it. In March 2006, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf made just such a request. Charles Taylor briefly 'escaped' under dubious circumstances, but as international pressure on Nigeria intensified, he was apprehended at the border with Cameroon. UN forces transported him briefly through Monrovia to the court in Freetown, Sierra Leone. Citing fears of regional instability if his trial were to proceed in the region, in July 2006 the international community moved Taylor to The Hague in The Netherlands to be tried by the Special Court, but using the facilities of the International Criminal Court. The trial opened in June 2007, but then faced lengthy delay after Taylor fired his defence team. Finally, in January 2008 the prosecution called its first witnesses. Although Taylor's indictment relates to crimes in Sierra Leone, early testimony included key details about the Liberian civil war and its ethnic component.

Although there is not (yet) a war crimes tribunal to try those responsible for atrocities in Liberia, the 2003 Accra peace agreement created a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The TRC can recommend cases for prosecution, but also aims to identify the causes of the Liberian civil wars and contribute to reconciliation among victims and perpetrators. Following management and logistical difficulties, the TRC began hearing shocking public evidence in January 2008 of violence that was often committed along tribal lines. A former ULIMO-K commander, General 'Butt Naked', testified that he and his forces had killed at least 20,000 Liberians. He described his ritualistic killing of children and his fighters' consumption of their hearts. Witnesses also described a massacre of some 300 civilians allegedly perpetrated by top Taylor officials Benjamin Yeaten and Roland Duo.

Nimba County suffered severe damage to its infrastructure during the civil war. Predominantly inhabited by Mano and Gio, and lying between Guinea and Cote d'Ivoire, it has significant numbers of internally displaced persons and returning refugees. According to IRIN News on 28th September 2006, the humanitarian coordination section of the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) in a situation report in September 2006, noted the poor state of health infrastructure to deal with the illness. IRIN News also reported that Liberia's recent National Human Development Report stated that the country's health facilities were in ruins, with 95 per cent of health facilities being destroyed in the civil war.

[^top](#)

powered by [the webbler](#)