

LIBERIA**HUMAN RIGHTS DEVELOPMENTS**

Continued violence threatened to plunge Liberia back into civil war after nearly five years of shaky transition to peace. Fierce fighting continued to rage in the country's north since the start of a rebel incursion in July 2000, the fifth serious outbreak of violence since the 1997 elections that ended the civil war. The fighting and repression blocked recovery efforts with the nation's economy in tatters, 80 percent of the workforce unemployed and 80 percent illiteracy. Basic services such as health care, communications, electricity, and the public supply of drinking water remained extremely limited. Public and private institutions deteriorated amid widespread corruption and fear.

Fighting between government forces and the rebel group, Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), intensified in northern Lofa County. Amid the violence, widespread human rights abuses took place against civilians, including women and children. Liberian government troops and rebels alike detained, tortured, or killed hundreds of civilians, raping women and girls at will, and forcing men and boys to fight. Reports by Amnesty International found that government security forces—especially the Anti-Terrorist Unit (ATU), a security force accountable only to President Taylor—detained, tortured, or executed more than two hundred civilians suspected of supporting rebels, raping some of them. The government denied these allegations and took no steps to investigate, punish, or end the abuses. In April 2001, President Taylor called up 15,000 former fighters from the faction he had led during the civil war to combat the growing rebel threat. As of September, fighting had spread southward to within sixty miles of the capital, Monrovia.

Responding to the rebel action, government repression of civil society continued to intensify. President Taylor's government functioned without accountability, independent of an ineffective judiciary and legislature that operated in fear of the executive. Ethnic Mandingo citizens, whom the government indiscriminately accused of supporting the rebels, faced growing discrimination, arbitrary arrests, and violence based solely on their ethnicity. In March, state security troops stormed the University of Liberia in Monrovia, assaulting and arresting unarmed students meeting to raise legal fees for detained journalists. More than forty students were reportedly tortured and female students raped in the raid by the ATU and the Special Operation Division, a special police unit. More than fifteen student leaders from the University of Liberia went into exile in May following the justice minister's public claim that rebel collaborators operated from their campus. In August, in an attempt to allay growing criticism, President Taylor freed three of thirteen prominent ethnic Krahn leaders imprisoned on treason charges since 1998, pardoned exiled opposition leaders, and announced an amnesty for rebels who disarmed.

Press censorship and arrests of journalists continued, as President Taylor and other high-ranking officials blamed them for negative international publicity. In February, four journalists from the *Daily* newspaper were arrested and held for over a month on espionage charges following a report questioning government spending on helicopter repairs. The government shut down four independent newspapers in connection with the report. Harassment continued with the arrest in August of the editor of the *Monrovia Guardian* following an article on police brutality. The information minister announced in April that all war-related reports had to be cleared by him. The government also tightened restrictions on foreign journalists.

With most Liberians dependent on radio for their news, government silencing of independent radio broadcasts deprived them of information. In August, President Taylor banned all radio stations but the three currently licensed—his private Liberian Communications Network and two others that only operated infrequently. At the same time, he refused to lift a ban on Veritas, a station of Liberia's Roman Catholic Church, and the independent Star radio.

The violence was part of a growing subregional struggle over control of diamonds and other resources. In 2001, President Taylor shifted his commercial focus from diamonds to logging, relying on the same men who organized the arms-for-diamonds trade to export timber and ship weapons from Monrovia to Sierra Leone. Illustrating the corruption at the heart of the Taylor government, two of the individuals involved in diamond trading sat on the board of directors of the Liberian Forestry Development Authority that oversees logging. A Strategic Commodities Act reportedly passed secretly in 2000 gave President Taylor "the sole power to execute, negotiate and conclude all commercial contracts or agreements with any foreign or domestic investor" for designated commodities, including timber and diamonds. The act was challenged as unconstitutional by the legal community.

Divisions and tensions in the subregion deepened as the internal conflicts within Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea continued to spill across the borders. Guinea and Liberia accused each other of supporting armed anti-government rebels, and the Sierra Leonean government accused Liberia of providing support to the Sierra Leonean rebel group, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF).

The insecurity and violence in the subregion displaced thousands of Liberians. Humanitarian agencies estimated in July 2001 that more than 40,000 persons had been newly displaced in Lofa County since April. In the country's six internally displaced camps, about 70 percent were women and children who had fled south into areas with scarce food, clean water, shelter, or medical assistance. An unknown number remained in areas inaccessible to humanitarian workers, and without assistance in unsafe conditions in forests and villages.

Liberians also fled across the borders. In 2001, some 15,000 Liberians fled to Sierra Leone and nearly 5,000 to Ivory Coast. Although some Liberians were able to flee into Guinea, the Guinean government officially closed the border to Liberian refugees from Lofa County following cross-border fighting between Liberian, Guinean, and Sierra Leonean rebel and government forces in late 2000. This cross-border fighting also affected a longstanding Liberian refugee population that had been in Guinea for the past decade. Guinean security and civilians also targeted

refugees for attack following xenophobic statements by President Lansana Conte in September 2000. In early 2001, as the violence at the border subsided, the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Guinean government relocated some 60,000 refugees (largely Sierra Leoneans) to inland camps in Guinea. In May 2001, the relocation program ended and an unknown number of refugees chose to remain at the embattled border.

DEFENDING HUMAN RIGHTS

Following the escalation of fighting in Lofa County and a stinging December 2000 U.N. report on Liberian support of Sierra Leonean rebels, the government intensified attacks on human rights groups. Liberian security forces harassed, arrested, and tortured perceived critics, and human rights activists continued to flee the country in fear of government reprisals. Despite the threats, a small but dedicated human rights community continued to work in Liberia.

The leader of the Catholic Church's Justice and Peace Commission, a key human rights defender, said in March that he had received threats from "prominent individuals" in retaliation for a report critical of the government's human rights record. The commission's premises, which had been the object of previous attacks by security forces, were burglarized a few months later. Despite the climate of fear, human rights organizations persisted in their activities. By contrast, the government's National Human Rights Commission was inactive.

Thompson Ade-Bayo, a human rights activist who had been in hiding for a week, was arrested and detained by the police in September. He was wanted for criticizing as illegal the government's anti-terrorist security unit, which he had described as functioning like President Taylor's private army.

Lawyers in the Liberian National Bar Association came under attack for speaking out against the lack of due process in the courts. In October, two lawyers—Marcus Jones, vice president of the Liberia National Bar and Ishmael Campbell, president of the Montserrado County Bar—were ordered detained by the House of Representatives and fined after they protested its order for the detention of their colleague and Bar Association president Emmanuel Wureh. Wureh was detained for contempt of court in late September, but was released the first week of October after a week-long boycott of courts by lawyers. The two lawyers had called the House of Representative's order "unconstitutional" and urged a boycott of the courts. Although the two paid the fine, they were informed that they would be detained until March 2002 unless they retracted their statement. On October 11, lawyers started a second round of boycotts to protest the continued detention of their two colleagues.

THE ROLE OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

A downturn in foreign aid for development and relief efforts created a humanitarian crisis. Relief organizations struggling to help Liberians displaced by war

expressed strong concerns over dwindling resources. Donors stayed away, accusing the Taylor government's of human rights violations, poor economic policies, and continuing involvement in arms smuggling.

United Nations

The U.N. Security Council played an active role in attempting to end the arms-for-diamonds trade in Liberia and the subregion. In December 2000, the U.N. panel monitoring compliance with the arms embargo placed on supplies to the RUF in Sierra Leone reported that the Liberian logging industry played a key role in arms trafficking. In May, the Security Council imposed a ban on Liberian diamond exports (believed in fact to derive mostly from Sierra Leone), as well as an arms embargo on Liberia itself, and a ban on foreign travel by President Taylor and more than 130 senior government officials and their spouses. An October 2001 report for the Security Council prepared by the Independent Panel of Experts found that illegal arms shipments to Liberia continued despite the arms embargo.

In response to the international scrutiny, the government made some gestures. In January, it grounded all aircraft registered in Liberia to review their legality, following accusations that Liberian-registered airplanes were flying arms to Sierra Leone. In March, Liberia banned diamond exports as well as imports of uncertified rough diamonds. However, arms continued to flow, financed by the unregulated trade in Liberian timber, which was not affected by any sanctions. A Danish trading company, however, announced in July that it would stop selling Liberian timber in Europe.

On August 14, 2001, the U.N. Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination expressed concern about "reports of extrajudicial killings, allegations of torture, including rape, and the lack of accountability of perpetrators, including government security forces, for these abuses." On August 16, 2001, the U.N. Security Council publicly stressed "the need for human rights abuses to cease by whatever parties they are committed" in Liberia. In contrast, the U.N. Office in Liberia (UNOL) Peace-building Support Office played little or no active role in addressing the growing repression and abuses in Liberia.

European Union

In July the E.U. agreed to open consultations with the Liberian government about the worsening situation in human rights, democratic principles, and the rule of law, citing "serious cases of corruption" as the primary impetus for the move. It was the first time the commission proposed using articles 96 and 97 of the Cotonou Agreement signed in Benin in June 2000 by the E.U. and the African, Caribbean, and Pacific (ACP) nations. The E.U. expressed concerns over a "significantly deteriorated" political situation, threats to freedom of the press, attacks on human rights activists, and mismanagement of public funds. In October, European Union (E.U.) envoy Hans Dahlgren visited Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea to examine prospects for peace and security in the region, and to formulate an E.U. policy on the crisis in the region.

The biggest aid donor to Liberia since the civil war ended, the E.U. suspended approximately U.S. \$50 million in aid in 2000 to pressure the Taylor government to cut its support to RUF rebels. In May 2001, E.U. member states approved a 25-million-euro (approximately U.S. \$22 million) program to assist programs for resettling refugees and displaced people.

United States

Relations between the U.S. and Liberia further deteriorated as President Taylor's role in fueling the war in Sierra Leone became more evident. Following U.N. sanctions in May, the U.S. prohibited the importation of Liberian rough diamonds. The Bush administration continued the Clinton policy of isolating Taylor politically and diplomatically, although the U.S. was less public in its approach. Administration officials stressed that until Taylor ceased efforts to destabilize the subregion, including his support for the RUF in Sierra Leone, U.S. policy would remain unchanged.

After the E.U., the U.S. was Liberia's largest donor, providing one-third of the country's total assistance. From 1997 to 2000, the USAID program focused on the resettlement of refugees and internally displaced persons and a modest, but less successful, democracy and governance program. In August, USAID reported that "the oppressive and irresponsible Charles Taylor government has overshadowed these achievements and alienated its citizens and the donor community." The agency continued to support delivery of food and health care services in 2001, but planned to put greater emphasis on strengthening civil society.

NIGERIA

HUMAN RIGHTS DEVELOPMENTS

Halfway through the four-year term of Olusegun Obasanjo's presidency, the overall human rights picture in Nigeria was mixed. There were investigations into past abuses but alarming developments, in particular recurring violence between ethnic or religious groups in several parts of the country. The military responded to attacks on its own personnel with indiscriminate killings of civilians. Political tension increased in the run-up to elections scheduled for 2003. Nigerians were expressing disillusion with the lack of fundamental change since the advent of a civilian government in 1999. The legacy of decades of repressive military rule was still keenly felt. The police were not only ineffective in maintaining law and order, but also responsible for serious human rights violations themselves.

Corruption remained rampant, despite the creation of an anti-corruption commission and adoption of anti-corruption legislation in 2000. However, the government took steps to recover some of the wealth appropriated by senior members of