

“The Guns are in the Bushes”: Continuing Abuses in Liberia

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“We, the citizens, we are sceptical because the guns have not been taken away. They are still carrying on rape in the bushes because the guns are in the bushes, UNMIL hasn’t reached there.” Liberian activist, November 2003

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Despite significant changes in the political environment over the past six months, most notably the August 2003 signing of a peace agreement, the departure into exile of president Charles Taylor and the establishment of a newly-mandated United Nations (U.N.) peacekeeping mission, the plight of civilians in Liberia remains dire. The deployment of West African forces followed by the first tranche of a 15,000-strong U.N. peacekeeping force brought relative peace and stability to the capital, Monrovia. However, in most of the country outside Monrovia, where the peacekeepers only recently started to deploy, former government forces, and both rebel factions, the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) continue to commit egregious violations of international humanitarian law against civilians. In many places, civilians are living with the same level of abuses, fear and intimidation as prior to the signing of the peace agreement in August.

In the course of an investigation in Liberia in October and November 2003, Human Rights Watch researchers found that serious and systematic abuses against civilians, including looting, assault, rape and sexual violence, and forced labor, continue to take place in areas where the U.N. peacekeepers have yet to deploy. While some of the incidents accompany continued skirmishes between the warring parties, the vast majority of the abuses are motivated by undisciplined, unpaid fighters seeking to obtain as much booty as possible. Looting and related abuses are particularly common in the period before peacekeepers deploy and are a practice described by many Liberians as “Operation Pay Yourself.”

Deployment of the additional 7,000 U.N. peacekeepers and 1000 police officers remains the most urgent priority to improve protection of civilians. The additional troops are also urgently required if the considerable challenges posed by disarmament, demobilization and rehabilitation of the estimated 38,000 fighters are to be adequately addressed. Despite the presence of U.N. peacekeepers, the fragility of Liberia’s peace was amply demonstrated in Monrovia in two separate incidents: in October 2003 an armed convoy carrying LURD Chairman Sekou Damale Conneh entered a government-controlled part of Monrovia, provoking a clash with government fighters, and in early December 2003 government fighters rioted and embarked on a looting spree at the beginning of the disarmament process.

In addition, sustained international support—both financial and political—will be required to rebuild the country’s infrastructure, social services, and government systems, all of which have been comprehensively destroyed by the cycle of violence that has gripped Liberia for fourteen years. Ensuring accountability for the horrific atrocities and other abuses that have characterized Liberia’s internal conflict and rebuilding the country’s nonfunctional judicial system, are of paramount importance if Liberians are to have a future based on respect for human rights and the rule of law.

II. BACKGROUND

From 1989 to 1997 Liberia was engulfed in a devastating civil war, which ended following a peace agreement and the subsequent election of former warlord Charles Taylor as president. In 2000, civil war broke out again when rebels from the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) went to war to unseat then President Taylor. As in the previous war, the renewed conflict was characterized by egregious abuses against civilians by all sides including summary executions, forced recruitment, widespread use of child combatants, rape and sexual violence, internal and external displacement, looting and banditry.

The past year has witnessed enormous changes in Liberia. The beginning of 2003 saw an upsurge in the three-year old conflict between Charles Taylor's government forces and the LURD. The Guinea-based and supported LURD movement made significant gains in the north and western provinces of Lofa, Bong, Gbarpolu and Bomi counties in the first four months of the year. A second rebel group, the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL), emerged in early 2003 as a result of a split within the LURD. MODEL draws its membership largely from the Krahn ethnic group and operates along the Ivorian border with support from the Ivorian government. The Ivorian government supported MODEL in exchange for their help in fighting Ivorian rebel groups operating in western Cote d'Ivoire. By June 2003, MODEL controlled most of south-eastern Liberia, including Grand Gedeh, River Gee, Grand Kru, Sinoe and Maryland counties.

The intensification of the conflict throughout the first six months of 2003 culminated in the summer siege of Monrovia in June and July 2003, which, together with the June 2003 unsealing of an indictment for war crimes by the Special Court for Sierra Leone against then President Charles Taylor, finally drew the eyes of the international community to the conflict. LURD forces launched three attacks—locally dubbed World Wars I, II, and III—and indiscriminately shelled the capital with mortar rounds, resulting in hundreds of deaths and over 2000 wounded civilians.¹ In the wake of the calamitous events in Monrovia, regional troops from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) intervened in early August to enforce a ceasefire agreed upon in June 2003 during ECOWAS sponsored peace talks in Ghana. Days after the arrival of the first West African troops, president Charles Taylor stepped down and departed for Nigeria where he had been offered a safe haven. One week later, on August 18, 2003, all three warring parties signed a peace agreement providing for a two-year transitional government, disarmament and demobilization of the fighting forces, and elections in 2005.

¹ See "Weapons Sanctions, Military Supplies, and Human Suffering: Illegal Arms Flows to Liberia and the June-July 2003 Shelling of Monrovia," a Human Rights Watch briefing paper, November 3, 2003.

In September, the United Nations Security Council authorized the deployment of a 15,000 member peacekeeping force under Resolution 1509.² The mandate of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) is to support the implementation of the ceasefire agreement and the peace process; protect United Nations staff, facilities and civilians; support humanitarian and human rights activities; and assist in national security reform, including national police training and the formation of a restructured military. The UNMIL force is scheduled to reach 15,000 including over 1,100 U.N. policemen, by early 2004. These events, and particularly the heightened international attention to Liberia, have made many Liberians optimistic that their country is facing its first real opportunity for peace in fourteen years.

Despite the positive developments, most people interviewed by Human Rights Watch voiced serious concerns that without sustained international attention on various fronts, including the immediate commitment of additional peacekeeping troops and sustained funding for the disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration process (DDRR), the current window of opportunity could be lost. The security situation in Liberia remains extremely precarious. Disarmament and demobilization of the estimated 38,000 mostly ill-trained and ill-disciplined fighters would present huge challenges even in the most conducive environment. Without the full U.N. force, these crucial programs may falter, undermining even the fragile security in Monrovia. A failed DDRR process would also have serious implications for the region. The war in neighboring Cote d'Ivoire, which has served as a magnet for fighters from the wars in both Sierra Leone and Liberia, could well pull in hundreds of Liberian youth from both the government and rebel sides. Guinea and Sierra Leone remain unstable and additional potential targets for Liberian arms and mercenaries. As one international humanitarian aid worker noted: "I fear for the future if DDRR doesn't happen and more troops don't come in to stabilize the country. [I fear] that LURD and MODEL will split further. Everyone has a gun still. Anything can happen."³

Most international attention has been focused on Monrovia over the past few months, and the situation there has generally improved since the deployment of the ECOWAS and then the U.N. peacekeepers. However, outside of Monrovia, the humanitarian and human rights situation remains alarming. The recent deployment of peacekeepers to additional major towns such as Tubmanburg, Buchanan, Tappeta and Gbarnga is encouraging, yet thousands of undisciplined fighters continue to hold sway in the territory under their control. Many of them have known little but war and rely on their guns as a way to ensure survival. As one long-time resident of Liberia observed, "Take their guns away, that's their credit card. If we don't replace them with anything then what are they going to do?"⁴ Many of the rural areas have been decimated by the years of war; thousands of civilians were displaced even in the past year, and many towns have been virtually totally destroyed by the fighting. As

² S/RES/1509 (2003).

³ Human Rights Watch interview, Monrovia, October 22, 2003.

⁴ Human Rights Watch interview, Monrovia, October 21, 2003.

Liberian civilians and fighters alike await the full deployment of the U.N. troops, Liberian fighters on all sides continue to take advantage of the lull in deployment to loot and rape civilians and pillage remaining communities and infrastructure.

III. CONTINUING INSECURITY

Despite the peace agreement and the ceasefire, skirmishes among the three warring parties took place in at least three areas of the country since October 2003, mainly where the warring parties hold territory adjacent to each other. Ongoing abuses stem mainly from two sources.

First, some abuses are linked to ongoing fighting and changes in the frontline, particularly where the factions commit reprisal attacks on civilians in newly captured areas previously controlled by their opponents. There have been many such incidents documented over the years of the conflict. In a recent example during the June and July attacks on Monrovia by the LURD forces, civilians in Bushrod Island, a suburb of central Monrovia, suffered rape, sexual violence, assault and other threats from government forces⁵ each time the LURD forces retreated and government troops re-occupied the area. As one witness described it, “After we returned to [the IDP camp], the government forces also came back and they were worse than ever: looting, stealing, and even killing people for ‘supporting LURD.’”⁶ Government troops consistently accused victims of being supporters of the rebels, and sometimes targeted specific groups, such as Sierra Leonean refugees, due to the presence of Sierra Leoneans among the LURD troops.

This pattern of targeting suspected opposition collaborators has been repeated by all of the fighting forces in recently-captured areas. Human Rights Watch documented a similar pattern of violence against civilians by LURD forces entering the Gbarnga area in Bong county in 2003—Gbarnga having been traditionally a Taylor stronghold. Numerous civilians fleeing LURD-controlled areas around Gbarnga described to Human Rights Watch investigators how they had witnessed summary executions, shootings, rape and forced labor in the period from April through November 2003. Several civilians described targeted attacks by LURD forces in which local men were tied up, beaten and according to one eyewitness, executed, very likely for their perceived opposition to the LURD.⁷

⁵ During former president Charles Taylor's regime, government forces included several different types of armed units. The national army, known as the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) was marginalized during Taylor's rule because of its ethnic composition and ties to former President Samuel Doe. Taylor promoted an alternative security apparatus composed of paramilitary groups such as the Anti-Terrorist Unit (ATU) and Special Operations Division (SOD), and numerous militia groups. Paramilitary groups tended to be better trained, organized and paid than militia groups. Militias, of which there were many operating under names such as Jungle Fire, Jungle Lion, Marines, Navy Command and Army Division, were sometimes composed of forcibly recruited and hastily trained civilians, including many children, and members were rarely paid, surviving instead through looting of civilian property. In this document, the term “government forces” refers to the paramilitary and militia groups, not the AFL, unless otherwise specified.

⁶ Human Rights Watch interview, IDP camp, November 5, 2003.

⁷ Human Rights Watch interview, IDP camp, September 9, 2003.

The second main source of abuses stems from the economic motivations of the fighters on all three sides. The Liberian conflict has been partly perpetuated by the poverty, high unemployment and lack of opportunity for Liberian youth throughout the country. For many young fighters, joining a warring faction presented one of the few opportunities to gain assets—even if through force and violence. Many child soldiers from the first civil war in the 1990s quickly remobilized when the conflict reignited because of lack of employment and education. Potential loot has therefore been a key incentive to become a fighter. Unpaid and ill-disciplined, predatory fighters from all three factions continue to carry out widespread looting and forced labor of civilians, partly in order to accumulate as many assets as possible before U.N. peacekeepers fully deploy to and take control over the areas now under their respective control. Sexual violence (see section below) also continues to be a consistent feature of the conduct of all of the factions, despite the peace agreement and the ceasefire signed by all three parties.

All parties to the civil war in Liberia are bound by article 3 common to the Geneva Conventions of 1949, which Liberia ratified in 1954. Common article 3 applies during situations of non-international (internal) armed conflict. It expressly binds all warring parties, including insurgents although they do not have the legal capacity to sign the Geneva Conventions. Common article 3 requires parties to the conflict to treat civilians and captured or injured combatants humanely and prohibits summary executions, mutilation, cruel treatment and torture, taking of hostages, outrages upon personal dignity, and imposing sentences except by a regular court meeting international fair trial standards.⁸

Also applicable is the Second Additional Protocol of 1977 to the Geneva Conventions (Protocol II), which Liberia ratified in 1988.⁹ Protocol II applies to internal armed conflicts in which organized armed groups are under a responsible command and control territory such that they are able to conduct sustained military operations. In addition to the common article 3 obligations, Protocol II expressly prohibits rape, enforced prostitution and any form of indecent assault; pillage (looting); acts of terrorism; collective punishments; and, starvation of the civilian population.¹⁰ It provides for impartial humanitarian agencies to provide relief to the civilian population who are suffering undue hardship owing to a lack of food and medical supplies essential for survival.¹¹

⁸ Geneva Conventions of August 12, 1949, 75 U.N.T.S. 31 et seq., entered into force Oct. 21, 1950, art. 3.

⁹ Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of August 12, 1949, and Relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (Protocol II), 1125 U.N.T.S. 609, entered into force Dec. 7, 1978.

¹⁰ Id., art. 4.

¹¹ Id., art. 18.

Nimba county: “the key to reconciliation?”

Nimba county has many historical ties to the conflict.¹² At present, all three factions have a presence in the county which borders Cote d’Ivoire to the east and Guinea on the northwest. LURD forces continue to control the northwestern edge of Nimba along the Guinean border, while MODEL forces captured the south-eastern part of the county from their stronghold in Grand Gedeh, which lies to the south. As of January 2004, MODEL forces continued to use Tappeta, in southern Nimba, as a base, and clashes with government forces took place north of this town in late-2003. U.N. forces recently deployed to Tappeta, an encouraging sign given the potential for conflict in this area.

Former government forces continue to control central Nimba and are reportedly a mixture of members of the paramilitary Anti-Terrorist Unit (ATU), government militias, and remnants of the Sierra Leonean Revolutionary United Front (RUF) forces previously led by indicted war criminal Sam Bockarie.¹³ Government forces in Nimba are led by several ex-NPFL commanders and Taylor supporters such as Adolphus Dolo (a.k.a. General Peanut Butter).

Nimba is also strategically important due to its location along the Ivorian and Guinean borders, a location that permits the flow of arms, ammunition and supplies. In early November, MODEL advances from Tappeta towards Saclepeia resulted in the displacement of an estimated 10,000 civilians into Saclepeia. According to witnesses who visited the area and were interviewed by Human Rights Watch, several villages were burned, and there were allegations that MODEL committed atrocities against civilians, although Human Rights Watch was not able to verify the accusations.

The Nimba situation presents the most worrying potential for atrocities against civilians. Called by some observers the “cradle of the war,” Nimba county has long been among Charles Taylor’s strongholds, and it contains ethnic fault lines created over the decades in Liberia. The dominant ethnic groups in Nimba – the Gio and Mano -- have serious fears of the potential for ethnic reprisals by the LURD and MODEL forces. For most civilians, there are few good options for flight if LURD or MODEL forces advance. As one well-informed resident from Nimba told Human Rights Watch, “People in Nimba ...don’t want to go into exile again. They know that Liberians have been killed in Côte d’Ivoire, they don’t want to go to Guinea because they are not welcome there—the Guineans say that war follows them.”

¹² Charles Taylor launched his initial rebel movement from Danane, the Ivorian town across the border from northern Nimba, and drew on considerable support from the Gio and Mano groups in Nimba who had been subjected to terrible abuses by the Samuel Doe regime following an attempted coup in 1985.

¹³ Sierra Leonean Sam Bockarie, commonly known as Commander Mosquito, was at one time the second in command of the Sierra Leonean Revolutionary United Front (RUF.) After falling out with RUF leader Foday Sankoh in December 1999, he fled to Liberia where he worked closely with former president Charles Taylor, particularly in helping direct the Anti-Terrorist Unit (ATU). Bockarie was indicted for war crimes and crimes against humanity by the Special Court for Sierra Leone in March 2003. In May 2003 Bockarie was gunned down in Liberia and in December 2003, following positive identification of his body, the SCSL indictment was withdrawn.

Ensuring that Nimba's people—and Liberia's borders with Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea—remain protected should be a key deployment priority for UNMIL.

Clashes in other areas of Liberia

Clashes have also taken place in Bong county along the frontline between LURD and government forces, and in September 2003 led to the flight of thousands of civilians. More recently, in River Cess in October 2003, near the county border with Grand Bassa, tensions between a government militia and MODEL forces caused hundreds of civilians to flee their villages. The government militia, led by a commander named General Koffi, was based in Yapatown, with MODEL forces surrounding the area. Despite attempts in September to mediate the friction between the two sides, fighting broke out again in late-October, displacing most of the residents of several small towns and villages to Buchanan. The fighting was accompanied by reports of looting, rape and forced labor, as civilians were yet again caught between the fighting forces on both sides. Human Rights Watch interviewed several witnesses to the events around Yapatown, and was able to verify a consistent pattern of forced labor on the part of the MODEL forces. Accounts of further ongoing abuses by MODEL in River Cess were received, but verification of these accounts was not possible.

IV. ABUSES BY ALL THREE FACTIONS

With the U.N. peacekeeping forces only deployed in parts of the country, all three warring factions continue to commit rape, looting and forced labor of civilians in areas under their control. The importance of the U.N. deployment in deterring abuses cannot be overstated. Where U.N. peacekeepers have deployed, such as along the main roads from Monrovia to Totota, Buchanan, and to Bomi county, abuses appear to have diminished. However, off the main roads, where fighters are beyond the eyes and ears of international peacekeepers, abuses continue with full impunity.

Forced labor

Human Rights Watch documented a widespread pattern of forced labor by all three warring factions in various areas of the country in October and November 2003. Civilians are routinely forced to porter goods that have been looted from villages and towns, including material from public and private buildings, such as zinc roofing, domestic items, generators and other equipment, and food. Civilians are also forced to work their own fields and harvest crops, and then carry the loads of rice and other food to towns. Women are frequently forced to pound harvested rice and cook the food for the fighting forces.

In Sanoyie, the town in Bong county where an estimated 5,000 government militia members were located, civilians complained that harassment by the militia was forcing many civilians to leave the area, and over 2,000 people fled the area in

September 2003. Even when people want to escape, they are forced to pay. A 26-year-old farmer told Human Rights Watch:

I left Sanoyie yesterday. The militia are giving people a hard time...beating people, taking things. We've got the Marines there, the ATU, the Cobra battalion. Even if you don't want to, they force you. Twice last week some of them came to my farm and took rice from me and I was forced to tote [carry] that rice....They don't kill but they beat you, and if they beat you they don't let the person come to this side and show the marks. They make you pay to come out because they don't want people coming out and explaining what's happening.¹⁴

Displaced civilians who had fled LURD-controlled areas in Bong county also complained of widespread forced labor and violence in October 2003, and of LURD forces denying people passage out of their areas. Civilians fleeing villages around Gbarnga told consistent accounts of LURD forces coming to the villages, forcing people to harvest their own rice and then carry it to Gbarnga to feed the fighters and their families. Witnesses also described cases of people forced to carry sacks of hot peppers on their heads, and "if there is sweat or rain falling, it comes through the plastic and starts to burn people's heads and eyes."¹⁵ Some of the goods looted from the villages were used for immediate consumption, while the remaining food and goods were loaded into vehicles in Gbarnga and taken to Guinea.¹⁶

An employee of a church group noted that "There's a lack of food in the area to feed the fighters, that's why this forced labor is happening. If people refuse, they are humiliated—beaten, tied, and tortured."¹⁷ A thirty-two-year old woman who was forced to work for LURD in Gbarnga town in October 2003 complained of their treatment of civilians:

The LURD forces chased us and we never wanted to lay eyes on them again. Everyday we toted their loads and they take the people's food, even their slippers [flipflops]....They tell you to go cut grass, if you don't cut grass they beat you. They made me tote a serious bag of rice and I was sick at the time. They took all the zinc [roofing] from the houses and they made my husband tote zinc from the village to Gbarnga—all day. They made us come to Gbarnga. They made us beat the rice for them and they give us one cup. They send us to draw water. We cook for them and our children eat crusts.¹⁸

¹⁴ Human Rights Watch interview, Totota, November 5, 2003.

¹⁵ Human Rights Watch interview, Monrovia, October 27, 2003.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Human Rights Watch interview, Monrovia, October 27, 2003.

¹⁸ Human Rights Watch interview, Monrovia, October 29, 2003.

MODEL forces also forced civilians to perform labor for them. Human Rights Watch documented an ongoing pattern of forced labor by MODEL forces in Grand Bassa county after MODEL captured Buchanan in late-July 2003. An elderly Bassa woman who lived in a village near Buchanan town described the arrival of the MODEL forces and her experience when she was captured:

We were in the village that evening in July. Armed groups were exchanging fire nearby, the shooting was terrible, and some government forces came and told us to leave because MODEL was coming. But then the MODEL overpowered the government fighters and they came in and said we were government sympathizers. They arrested all the men. They made the women sit down and they took our lappas [cloth wraps used by women as clothing] away and one fighter said, 'Let the old woman pound rice.' But I didn't have the strength to pound 150 kilos of rice. I was with them two weeks as a slave and they would beat me to pound the rice for them.¹⁹

Civilians told Human Rights Watch that as of October 2003, in other villages around Buchanan, MODEL organized a system of weekly contributions by the villages, forcing each village to bring a designated amount of foodstuffs to the MODEL fighters on a specific day of the week. As with the other armed groups, MODEL routinely forced civilians to porter quantities of food and other goods for them. One woman interviewed by Human Rights Watch stated, "They make men and women tote loads. They can take a woman from her husband and make her cook for them. They don't pay, they see you and they say come....Sometimes rice, some plantains, oil, any kind of foodstuff, they can make you tote it."²⁰

Looting

For many fighters on all sides, looting has been an essential means of surviving, and in many cases, a prime incentive for joining the warring parties. This motive was explained to Human Rights Watch by a fighter who had been with two government militias—Jungle Fire and Navy Command—and then joined LURD in mid-2003 who said, "You have to loot to get your daily bread. There's no pay, and you don't have anything to eat."²¹ The widespread and systematic looting of property from civilians by members of all warring factions both within their towns and villages and as they attempted to flee to safety, has been extensive. Dozens of civilians interviewed by Human Rights Watch described having been looted by one or more of the warring parties in numerous areas of the country. Looting remains an enormous problem for civilians in all areas of the country, particularly because many

¹⁹ Human Rights Watch interview, Fendell, October 28, 2003.

²⁰ Human Rights Watch interview, Buchanan, November 3, 2003.

²¹ Human Rights Watch interview, Monrovia, October 25, 2003

civilians have been repeatedly displaced and have lost not just their homes and crops, but virtually all assets in their flight.

Looting is also often accompanied by violence, particularly if civilians resist. Human Rights Watch documented incidents of killing, rape, shooting, and beating of civilians by members of all three warring factions who were looting the victims' homes or farms at the time of the attacks. For instance, a thirteen-year-old boy was shot in the arm by a group of LURD fighters who attacked his family's rice farm in Bong county in mid-October, 2003 while he and his family were harvesting their crop. The LURD fighters shot him from behind as he fled.²²

Rape and sexual violence as a weapon of war

Rape and other forms of sexual violence²³ have been pervasive during both the first phase of the Liberian war, from 1989-1996, and in the resurgence of the conflict, since 2000. Abductions of women and girls for sexual and domestic services have been a regular feature of the recent war, as have acts of rape and sexual violence of women and girls of all ages, from young children of less than eight years old, to older women in their seventies. Human Rights Watch has documented numerous reports of rape by combatants from all warring factions even after the August signing of the peace accord. Rape and sexual violence towards men—while apparently occurring—is much less known and recorded, partly due to the deep cultural taboos on homosexuality.

Estimates of the total number of victims of rape and sexual violence are impossible to obtain given that some areas of Liberia remain inaccessible to medical and humanitarian assistance, and thus large numbers of victims remain unrecorded. In addition, rape is habitually under-reported given the social stigma attached to the crime. Rape and other forms of sexual violence have been reported in virtually all areas of Liberia, by all the warring parties and have clearly been used to humiliate, intimidate and dominate civilians and as a means of penalizing civilians perceived to be sympathetic to the opposition. Every time an area changes hands, or fighters embark on a looting spree, rape has become the near-inevitable, violent accompaniment to other activities.

Patterns of sexual violence appear to be worse when any of the warring factions enter new areas previously held by one of the opposing groups, or where any of the warring factions encounter civilians of ethnicities perceived to be allied with their opposition. As an experienced counselor who works with dozens of rape survivors in and around Monrovia told Human Rights Watch, "[Rape] is a weapon. It happens

²² Human Rights Watch interview, Monrovia, October 27, 2003.

²³ Article 4 of Protocol II expressly forbids "outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment, rape and enforced prostitution and any form of indecent assault." According to the ICRC Commentary, this provision "reaffirms and supplements Common Article 3 ... [because] it became clear that it was necessary to strengthen ... the protection of women ... who may also be the victims of rape, enforced prostitution or indecent assault." *ICRC Commentary on the Additional Protocols of June 1977 to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949* (Geneva: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987), p. 1375, para. 4539.

when they take over a place and they want to prove they are in control. They even rape in front of the husbands, they tie them up and make it a powerless situation, and sometimes afterward they kill the husbands in front of the wives.”²⁴

Government forces

LURD retreated from Bushrod Island after their first and second attacks on Monrovia in June, at which point government forces moved into the area and began systematically harassing residents of the area, accusing them of collaboration with LURD forces. Human Rights Watch estimates that during this time, hundreds of women were raped, many of them multiple times, by government forces. An elite paramilitary unit within the Liberian Police force called the Special Operations Division (SOD), was frequently implicated in incidents of sexual abuse. Attacks took place in private homes, in public buildings where displaced persons had fled for shelter, and in the camps for internally displaced persons in Montserrado county.

Victims of these attacks described to Human Rights Watch how rape often accompanied looting by these armed groups. A displaced woman living in an IDP camp near Monrovia described how her home was visited three times in one night in mid-June by two different groups of armed government militias, and how she was raped by one of the fighters:

Late that night I went to bed and locked the door. That night, armed men came all over the house with flashlights....They said, ‘Where’s the money, the cell phone?’ I said there was no money and no cell phone. They said they would kill me and they began to take all the things in my house. After they took all the things, there was one child soldier. He was saying ‘Don’t take the goods from the ma.’ I was crying and talking in Kpelle. He came and knelt down in front of me and patted me and said in Kpelle, ‘We’re not the LURD rebels, ma, we’re government militia.’ After the boy said it, they left and went to VOA [another IDP camp in the area]. But we couldn’t lock the door.

One soldier came back. The soldier that came back—I was lying there and he put on the flashlight and told me to get up. I said, ‘Brother, I’m your ma,’ and he said, ‘Join me.’ I started to cry—the people around were begging. He said he would carry me unless I gave him money. He pushed me and hit me on the back with the gun. When he carried me outside, I asked him his name and he said, ‘What do you want to know my name for? You want to carry me to LURD rebels?’ Then I kept crying and he started firing and said I was causing noise.

Sometimes I don’t like to remember these things. He pushed me and I fell down. He tore my panties and what he wanted to do, he did it. Then

²⁴ Human Rights Watch interview, Monrovia, October 31, 2003.

he took my jacket and used my jacket to clean himself. I cried because that never happened to me before. Sometimes I can laugh and not think of it. These government militias are a wicked set of children....One thing, maybe if that boy didn't rape me, he'd have killed me. Then I would never have seen my children again.²⁵

Government forces also set up checkpoints along the main road through Bushrod Island towards Monrovia, ostensibly to monitor movements between LURD's attacks. In reality, however, these checkpoints became the sites of serious abuses against civilians, including rape and other forms of sexual violence and systematic looting of civilian property. A twenty-five year-old displaced woman who was seven months pregnant at the time she was gang-raped by several SOD members described to Human Rights Watch what happened at one of these checkpoints in early June, after she fled the displaced camps towards Monrovia:

We were walking on the way and at the New Georgia junction there was a gate. The government forces had put up a checkpoint and they were looking at people and taking people's things. They were all wearing black uniforms—SOD—and they were in a group, calling people. They were calling a lot of people, "You there, come here, come here." There were plenty SOD, plenty all over, catching people, calling people.

They caught me and they told me to go in a house near the gate. They told me to enter in a room and take off my clothes. I said, 'You want me to take off my clothes? Look at my condition.' He said, "Lay down." Then he lay with me. Then another one came. The men who took me were ageable [older] men. The first one was maybe forty. The second one maybe twenty-seven or thirty. They were four in number that went with me, all of them in black SOD uniforms.²⁶

The SOD and government militias were also responsible for rapes of Sierra Leonean refugees living in the camps near Monrovia, particularly in June 2003 after LURD's first attack on Monrovia, in which dozens of witnesses identified Sierra Leonean and Guinean nationals among the LURD troops. Several women interviewed by Human Rights Watch described how government militia and SOD fighters entered the refugee camps after LURD retreated and accused the refugees of supporting the rebels, saying "You people, you are the same citizens coming to fight against us." One woman who was gang-raped by four government militia fighters told Human Rights Watch, "It was difficult for us here because the Liberian government says we're the ones who brought the war. They were killing our people, refugees in the camp."²⁷

²⁵ Human Rights Watch interview, Monrovia, September 6, 2003.

²⁶ Human Rights Watch interview, Monrovia, September 8, 2003

²⁷ Human Rights Watch interview, Monrovia, November 11, 2003.

Even refugees who fled, as many did, into central Monrovia's Mamba Point area continued to face intimidation from government forces. Hundreds of refugees moved into the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR) building near the U.S. embassy, seeking protection from both the indiscriminate mortar attacks and the targeted militia harassment. Some were evacuated under emergency circumstances due to the gravity of the situation.²⁸

According to reports received by Human Rights Watch in October and November 2003, rape by government forces continued to take place even after the signing of the peace agreement in August 2003. For instance, close to 5,000 government militia fighters were moved to the town of Sanoyie in Bong county by U.N. forces in order to separate LURD and government forces. These fighters then began harassing local villagers and farmers, causing many civilians to flee the area and seek refuge within the displaced camps in nearby Totota. A displaced woman from Sanoyie told Human Rights Watch, "Day and night people are leaving from [Sanoyie and Boyema], that's the problem our people are facing. They took all the ex-combatants and put them there. There's plenty rape, as soon as a woman sees someone pass that she doesn't know, she runs away."²⁹ Other civilians described incidents of forced labor and looting.

LURD forces

Women were also raped during LURD's offensives into newly captured areas. A witness told Human Rights Watch that when LURD forces entered her village in a diamond mining area near Vai town in Cape Mount county in July 2003, they accused the villagers of collaborating with the government by giving information. The LURD troops knocked on people's doors and told them to come out, then systematically stripped all the civilians of their clothes and forced them to lie on the ground. They raped several of the girls and women. An ethnic Kpelle woman in her fifties described her experience: "A little boy fighter took off my clothes. I was naked. I tried to put my hands over my privates and they took my head scarf and everything. One of the fighters said, 'That's my wife,' and started raping my little nine-year-old granddaughter in front of me. Four men had her and I was crying. They said, 'If you're crying over your granddaughter, then we'll do the same thing to you as to your little daughter.'"³⁰

LURD forces also committed reprisal attacks, including abductions and rape, on civilians in the Monrovia area during their offensive on the capital in June 2003. Human Rights Watch documented several incidents in which LURD forces raped and killed those they suspected of being government supporters. For instance, a young woman who lived near Po river was gang raped by seven LURD fighters in front of her husband and three children after being accused of supporting the

²⁸ "UN Agency prepares to evacuate Sierra Leonean refugees in Liberia," UN News, June 30, 2003 at http://www.un.org/esa/africa/UNNews_Africa/prepares.htm (accessed December 18, 2003).

²⁹ Human Rights Watch interview, Totota, November 5, 2003.

³⁰ Human Rights Watch interview, Fendell, October 28, 2003.

government in June 2003. Two men held her feet and two held her hands and they took turns raping her until she bled. Then they killed her husband in front of her, cutting his throat with a knife. Numerous other women were raped by LURD fighters during their Monrovia offensive, not all of them due to suspected government collaboration, as sometimes force was used to settle personal grudges.

Some fighters targeted displaced women who were temporarily sheltered in public buildings during the fighting. A thirty-year old woman told Human Rights Watch of her ordeal when she fled one of the displaced camps after the July attack:

I was in one of the district school buildings, and in the night they came in and pulled us out. They had red head ties, each night for three nights they pulled us out. They were boys, wearing clothes like LURD forces wear. They said that if I hollered they would kill me. They tied my mouth. I was crying and crying, I was dry that day and I bled a little. Some were standing over me and kicking me. They come in with a flashlight and pull you outside, different men each night.³¹

Other women who fled from Gbarnga and other areas controlled by LURD in Bong county in September and October 2003 described similar patterns of LURD forces routinely selecting women in villages and from groups of displaced people fleeing in the bush for rape and other forms of sexual violence. A woman who had fled Gbarnga days before told Human Rights Watch, “We are praying for UNMIL to deploy. They [LURD fighters] rape you—they grab your husband and lay your husband down, they lay you down on top and then have you.”³²

During the course of the recent civil war, LURD was also responsible for a pattern of abductions of women and girls, sometimes for sexual services, sometimes for domestic labor such as cooking, cleaning, and fetching water. Human Rights Watch received testimony from girls as young as fourteen who had been captured and forced to remain with LURD forces. A girl who had been captured in 2002 during LURD’s offensive into Cape Mount county told Human Rights Watch:

They tied my eyes. At that time I was a virgin. They went out with me and when they untied my eyes there were three I saw. [They] said, ‘You must be our woman until the war is over, if not we’ll kill you.’ It was more than a month I was with them, staying as a wife for the three of them. They were still catching girls while I was there.³³

LURD’s policy of capturing young girls and forcing them to be wives for soldiers was acknowledged by several LURD fighters interviewed by Human Rights Watch. Indeed, a woman fighter who fought in one of LURD’s women’s units stated that

³¹ Human Rights Watch interview, Monrovia, November 7, 2003.

³² Human Rights Watch interview, Monrovia, October 29, 2003.

³³ Human Rights Watch interview, Samuel K. Doe Stadium, Monrovia, September 8, 2003.

her unit sometimes captured girls specifically for the purpose of making them act as “wives” to the male soldiers.³⁴ This was confirmed by witnesses who noted that when LURD entered her village, “a lady fighter picked among the girls and selected who goes to which man. She was pointing and saying, ‘You, you go with him....’”³⁵

MODEL forces

Human Rights Watch documented a similar pattern of rape and sexual violence committed by MODEL forces, at least in Grand Bassa county in the period following the arrival of the MODEL forces in July. A displaced woman who lived near the county border with River Cess described MODEL’s behavior towards civilians in October 2003:

We were in the bush because MODEL was suffering the people. MODEL called all the people to come back into town and then they started doing all the bad things—taking people’s things and sleeping with their children. They were making people tote loads, even a small boy this high [*points to a child about three or four-years-old*]. They come and wake you in the middle of the night and take the women and go out with all the women. Old women, young women, there was one small five-year-old girl they almost raped to death.³⁶

V. PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS AND UNMIL

In early August 2003, the first West African peacekeepers entered Monrovia to monitor the ceasefire and by late September, approximately 3,000 ECOMIL peacekeepers were in place. On the first of October, the official start of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), the West African peacekeepers were incorporated into the U.N. Mission. That same day, the last of 2,000 U.S. forces which had been stationed in battleships off the Liberian coast since August 2003, left. Despite the fact that U.N. troops on the ground numbered less than one-third of the total mandated force, the U.S. troops were leaving because they had, in the words of a U.S. spokesman, “fulfilled their mission.” The start to the U.N. mission on October 1 should have been full of promise—a symbol that Liberia’s years of agony might be ending. Instead, the day resulted in deaths, looting and rape of civilians due to the readiness of Liberian forces on all sides to exploit a badly planned ECOWAS initiative and attack civilians

The October 1 incident

On October 1, 2003, LURD Secretary General Sekou Conneh travelled to Monrovia from his base in Tubmanburg in northern Bomi county, to meet with acting

³⁴ Human Rights Watch interview, Plumcor displaced camp, October 26, 2003.

³⁵ Human Rights Watch interview, Fendell displaced center, October 28, 2003.

³⁶ Human Rights Watch interview, Buchanan, November 3, 2003.

president Moses Blah under an ECOWAS-brokered arrangement. Conneh and his entourage, which consisted of scores of vehicles and armed guards, had left Guinea some days earlier and on their way to Liberia, transitted through Sierra Leone. The U.N., due to begin deployment that day, were apparently not informed of the planned meeting, nor were other international agencies or diplomatic institutions.³⁷

According to numerous witnesses, when the LURD convoy came down the main road from Tubmanburg before noon, there were several dozen cars in the convoy, including vehicles belonging to the ECOMIL peacekeepers escorting the convoy. One witness said, “LURD had everything displayed: guns, grenades; they were being escorted by ECOMIL at the front, and there were a huge number on foot.”³⁸ They were shouting “No Monkey,” a reference to former president Charles Taylor. According to consistent accounts, the convoy was permitted to pass through several ECOMIL checkpoints without any difficulty. None of the ECOMIL forces attempted to stop the convoy. When the convoy reached Red Light—a crowded market junction within government-controlled Monrovia, and an area known for its pro-Taylor proclivities—violence erupted.

Exactly what provoked the clash remains unclear. One source told Human Rights Watch that the market people at Red Light, many of whom are from the Taylor stronghold of Gbarnga, began throwing stones at the LURD convoy after LURD fighters told people to move away from the sides of the road. It appears that the LURD forces began firing and apparently some government fighters responded. At least three civilians were killed, although later reports put the number at nine dead from the shootout, including several of the LURD fighters. There were also allegations that one of the LURD fighters threw a grenade into the crowd, although Human Rights Watch was not able to verify this point. ECOMIL forces eventually forced the convoy to turn around and backtrack to Tubmanburg.

Meanwhile, word of the events spread to LURD fighters in the Bushrod Island neighborhood of Monrovia and adjacent Bomi county, who began gathering their guns, shooting in the air, and threatening to march to Monrovia to assist the convoy. For over twenty-four hours there was extensive shooting and looting by fighters in both the government- and LURD-controlled areas. According to witnesses interviewed by Human Rights Watch, dozens of U.N., non-governmental organization (NGO) and private vehicles were commandeered by LURD fighters that afternoon, sometimes violently. Several aid agencies reported that staff members were beaten with guns and forced to leave their vehicles, which were then taken up to the LURD stronghold in Bomi county. Some observers estimate that over two hundred cars were looted that day by LURD fighters in the Bushrod Island area alone.

³⁷ Human Rights Watch interviews with Jacques Klein, U.N. Special Representative for Liberia, Monrovia, November 10, 2003, and with U.S. Ambassador John Blaney, Monrovia, November 7, 2003.

³⁸ Human Rights Watch interview, November 8, 2003.

During the evening hours of October 1, LURD fighters went on the rampage in several displaced camps along the main road from Monrovia to Tubmanburg, less than thirty kilometres from central Monrovia. Fighters looted homes and raped at least a dozen women in one camp. An elderly woman in her late-sixties who was raped by five men that night told Human Rights Watch, “they kicked open the door. They were holding RPGs [rocket-propelled grenades] up and threatening me. They took everything. I opened my lappa to show that I got nothing and they pushed me on the bed. Five men, they raped me, an old woman like me. They took all my things, my bag of rice, everything.”³⁹ The LURD fighters also looted the displaced civilians and accused them of harboring government fighters, according to one former government militia fighter who spent three nights hiding after the incident.⁴⁰ Government fighters were also reportedly responsible for rapes of women in government-controlled parts of Monrovia,⁴¹ although Human Rights Watch was not able to verify these allegations.

Within a day or so after the incident, the ECOMIL forces, newly designated as U.N. forces, established additional checkpoints around the town and calm returned to the capital. However, for many Liberians, confidence in both the U.N. force and in the progress of the peace process was badly shaken. For many observers, the incident also demonstrated the limitations of the peacekeeping force, which despite having virtually its entire force in Monrovia, remained unable to secure peace even there. Above all, the incident showed anew the vulnerability of Liberian civilians to attacks by any or all armed groups, and the need for a substantial peacekeeping force, not only to maintain peace in the capital, but also to expand to the rural areas.

The inadequacy of the U.N. force was highlighted again in early December, when UNMIL began disarmament.

The disarmament debacle: December 8-9

Disarmament of the estimated 38,000 fighters began on December 8 but was suspended until January several days later after the first two days of the process resulted in riots and looting by fighters in and around Monrovia. Twelve people, some of them ex-combatants, were killed during the looting on December 8-9, 2003. For many Liberians and observers, the events were an ominous start to the DDRR process.

The disarmament program began in Camp Schieffelin, a military barracks outside of Monrovia, aimed at government fighters. The disarmament plan was for UNMIL to register fighters who turned in their weapons and pay each individual \$300 in several installments as they progressed through demobilization and rehabilitation. Despite

³⁹ Human Rights Watch interview, November 1, 2003.

⁴⁰ Human Rights Watch interview, IDP camp, Bomi county, October 31, 2003

⁴¹ “Sporadic night gunfire and looting in Monrovia,” IRIN, October 2, 2003, at <http://www.reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf/3a81e21068ec1871c1256633003c1c6f/f328a6dddfa97d0b85256db30065f1bb?OpenDocument> (accessed December 17, 2003).

the fact that U.N. forces were yet to deploy in most of the LURD and MODEL territory, the decision was made to initiate disarmament of the government fighters on December 8. The first day of the program, over 2,000 ex-combatants arrived at the barracks to turn in their weapons, a larger number than was anticipated. The situation quickly deteriorated when fighters learned that they would not immediately receive the first half of the \$300 allotted to each fighter. Two days of looting and violence commenced, and a curfew was imposed on Monrovia.

Several observers have blamed UNMIL for insufficient preparation of the DDRR process. For instance, fighters had apparently received little or no information about the precise sequence and content of the DDRR process. Special interim care centers for child and female combatants had not been prepared, and cantonment centers had not been adequately staffed or provisioned. There are numerous valid criticisms of the events of December 8-9 that can be directed at both the UNMIL leadership and the staff charged with implementing the disarmament process. It must be recognized, however, that UNMIL was under serious pressure to begin the program given that significant numbers of fighters, including child soldiers, had been “spontaneously demobilizing”: leaving their units (although not necessarily the command structure), retaining their weapons, and integrating into displaced or homecommunities in the previous months. Programs for these individuals were virtually nonexistent. In addition, UNMIL’s capacity to properly address the DDRR process has been hampered by insufficient numbers of troops.

Without sufficient UNMIL deployment throughout the country and security for expanded humanitarian operations, a flawed DDRR process is likely to persist—presenting serious threats to future stability in Liberia and the region. The incident reflects yet again the necessity of increasing the number of U.N. troops deployed in Liberia. In December 2003, an additional 2000 Ethiopian and Pakistani troops arrived, a hugely welcome addition to the U.N. force, and one which enabled the U.N. to deploy its first troops to Tubmanburg, Gbarnga, and Tappeta. Still, sufficient U.N. troops must be deployed so that all areas of the country become secure enough for not only for the DDRR program, but also to guarantee the essential humanitarian programs serving civilians. As of January 2004, while the number of peacekeepers is finally on the increase, less than ten percent of the police force is in place, and these forces are also essential to improve law and order in towns and displaced camps.

VI. AFTER THE PEACE AGREEMENT: THE WAY FORWARD

Despite signing a peace agreement on August 18, 2003, none of the warring factions have yet lived up to their commitments to promote respect for human rights among their members. Fighters on all sides continue to commit abuses against civilians with full impunity. Article IX of the Liberian peace accord commits all warring parties to

release prisoners, non-combatants, and abductees,⁴² something which has yet to happen. Despite commitments to facilitate access of humanitarian organizations, fighters have also attacked and obstructed the work of aid agencies. LURD's formal three-day denial of humanitarian access to Tubmanburg in late-October was the most blatant example of such obstruction, but LURD's looting of NGO and U.N. vehicles on October 1 has also contributed to the limited humanitarian presence in parts of the LURD-controlled territory.⁴³

While UNMIL has certainly had positive effect in the areas in which it has deployed, these remain too few. UNMIL is seriously hampered by its size. The full 15,000 troops mandated by the U.N. Security Council are urgently required in order to establish security throughout the country and permit a serious DDRR program to take place. In addition, coordination with neighboring peacekeeping forces in Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire will be needed to ensure that guns and mercenaries do not spill across borders and undermine the fragile stability of Liberia's neighbors.

European countries have thus far generally contributed only some officers to UNMIL, and those in small numbers. It is hoped that at the donor's conference for Liberia, which will be held in the United States in February 2003, members of the European Union (EU) and other countries such as Canada and Norway will commit significant resources towards the rebuilding of Liberia, and that individual member states of the EU will contribute more significant numbers of troops--as well as financing--to the UNMIL force.

The United States remains the biggest disappointment to many Liberians in terms of its commitment to a once-strategic ally. During his first visit to the African continent in July 2003, amidst the scenes of Monrovia's siege, President George W. Bush raised the hopes of many Liberians with references to a potential U.S. intervention. Despite the arrival of 150 Marines in Monrovia in August, and the off-shore positioning of some 2,000 troops on ships, the United States never fulfilled this promise. The 2,000 troops sailed away on the first day of UNMIL's deployment, the same day that nine people died in Monrovia in the wake of the LURD-government clash. Since then, the United States has committed significant financial inputs—over \$200 million under the recent appropriations bill for Iraq, but no meaningful military assistance.

⁴² Peace Agreement between the Government of Liberia, LURD, MODEL and Political Parties, August 18, 2003, at <http://www.reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf/vID/53E5D6B0A2CF79F1C1256D8900463C0B?OpenDocument> (accessed January 12, 2004.)

⁴³ Under article 18 of Protocol II, parties to an internal armed conflict must allow humanitarian relief to reach civilian populations suffering undue hardship owing to a lack of foodstuffs and medical supplies essential for their survival.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To the leaders of LURD, MODEL and security forces of the former Liberian Government:

- Take all appropriate action to stop forces under your command from committing violations of international humanitarian law, including sexual assault, forced labor, summary executions and looting. Take disciplinary action that respects basic rights against fighters responsible for past abuses.
- Immediately release all civilian abductees in custody; grant full and ongoing access to detention centers to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and other humanitarian organizations; and publish lists of all prisoners and abductees, their ages, where they were captured, where they are being detained, and other relevant details.
- Immediately demobilize all child soldiers under the age of eighteen and turn them over to competent organizations trained in the rehabilitation of child combatants.
- Provide training for all combatants and commanders on standards of international humanitarian law, particularly the treatment of civilians and detainees.
- Follow through with the commitment made and signed on August 18, 2003 in Accra, Ghana to provide security guarantees for safe and unhindered access by all humanitarian agencies to vulnerable groups throughout the country.
- Permit full, unhampered international investigation of grave and widespread humanitarian law and human rights abuses in areas under your control by the United Nations and nongovernmental organizations.

To the National Transitional Government of Liberia:

- Call on all armed factions to immediately cease abuses against civilians and cooperate in the disarmament and demobilization program.
- Thoroughly investigate and prosecute in full compliance with international law, individuals responsible for serious violations of international humanitarian law. Where combatants have committed abuses against civilians, they should be held accountable in a court of law.

- Call on LURD and MODEL forces and order government forces to immediately release all abducted civilians, including women and girls forced to act as “wives” to fighters in accordance with Article IX of the Liberian Peace Accord signed on August 18, 2003.
- State unequivocally that there will be no amnesty for serious abuses of human rights and humanitarian law committed during or since the conflict.
- Ensure that members of the restructured police and military forces of Liberia are fully vetted to identify those with a history of human rights abuses, and those individuals with records of abuses are denied entry into the new Liberian army and police.
- Ensure that an adequate Liberian police presence is established near all sizeable centers for internally displaced persons and refugees.

To the United Nations:

To the U.N. Security Council:

- Oppose any general amnesty for those who have committed gross violations of human rights and humanitarian law and insist on the need for the cycle of impunity to be broken if peace is to be restored to Liberia.

To UNMIL:

- Ensure that an adequate UNMIL police presence is established near all sizeable centers for internally displaced persons and refugees.
- Ensure that UNMIL police units are posted to all major Liberian towns to restore the rule of law as soon as possible.
- Prioritize the deployment of adequate numbers of UNMIL peacekeepers to areas of potential conflict and reprisal attacks, as well as areas of active hostilities between the former warring factions, in order to deter further clashes and cross-border movement of weapons and fighters.
- Ensure that the human rights component of UNMIL is promptly, competently and fully staffed, deployed throughout the country, and provided the authority and resources to investigate, document and publicly report on past and current abuses throughout the country.

- Liaise with the U.N. missions to Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) and Côte d'Ivoire (MINUCI) and with the ECOWAS and French forces in Côte d'Ivoire to ensure that the Liberian borders are adequately patrolled and that weapons, ammunition and fighters are not able to freely cross into neighboring countries.
- Provide moral, financial, and technical support to civil society organizations to assist them in playing an active role in the transition toward a democratic society and in monitoring, lobbying, and campaigning for improved human rights standards.
- Improve the dissemination of information about the DDRR process to combatants and ensure that appropriate programs addressing the needs of child and female combatants are in place prior to cantonment.⁴⁴

To the United States, the European Union and other donor governments:

- Ensure that the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process is fully funded, and that humanitarian programs serving rape survivors and ex-combatants, particularly children, are fully funded and able to prepare for the DDRR.
- Reinforce the flow of bilateral and multilateral aid to the government of Liberia. This aid should focus on human rights and humanitarian needs, including restructuring of the army and police force, and initiatives focusing on such key areas as emergency relief, health, education, shelter, infrastructure, and the rule of law.
- In particular, provide assistance for the reconstruction of the system for the administration of justice, and for other initiatives aimed at the establishment of accountability for crimes under national and international law.
- Provide moral, financial, and technical support to civil society organizations to assist them in playing an active role in the transition toward a democratic society and in monitoring, lobbying, and campaigning for improved human rights standards.

⁴⁴ For further recommendations specific to the DDRR process, please see Human Rights Watch's forthcoming report on child soldiers in Liberia.