

LIBERIA: FLIGHT FROM TERROR
TESTIMONY OF ABUSES IN NIMBA COUNTY

An Africa Watch Report

May 1990

**485 Fifth Avenue
Third Floor
New York, NY 10017
(212) 972-8400**

**1522 K Street, NW
Suite 910
Washington, DC 20005
(202) 371-6592**

**90 Borough High Street
London SE1 1LL
United Kingdom
(71) 378-8008**

**(C) 1990 by Human Rights Watch
All rights reserved
Printed in the United States of America
and the United Kingdom**

ISBN 0-929692-58-6

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 90-82266

THE AFRICA WATCH COMMITTEE

Africa Watch was established in May 1988 to monitor and promote respect for internationally recognized human rights in Africa. The Executive Director is Rakiya Omaar; Richard Carver is the Research Director; Janet Fleischman and Karen Sorensen are Research Associates; Jo Graham and Ben Penglase are Associates. Africa Watch is part of **Human Rights Watch**.

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

Human Rights Watch is composed of five Watch Committees: Africa Watch, Americas Watch, Asia Watch, Helsinki Watch and Middle East Watch.

Executive Committee: Robert L. Bernstein (Chairman); Adrian DeWind (Vice Chairman); Roland Algrant; Peter Bell; Dorothy Cullman; Jonathan Fanton; Jack Greenberg; Alice H. Henkin; Stephen L. Kass; Marina P. Kaufman; Jeri Laber; Aryeh Neier; Matthew Nimetz; Bruce Rabb; Kenneth Roth; Nadine Strossen.

Staff: Aryeh Neier, Executive Director; Kenneth Roth, Deputy Director; Holly J. Burkhalter, Washington Director; Ellen Lutz, California Director; Susan Osnos, Press Director; Joyce Mends-Cole, Washington Counsel.

Africa Watch

Rakiya Omaar
Executive Director

Americas Watch

Juan E. Méndez
Executive Director

Asia Watch

Sidney Jones
Executive Director

Helsinki Watch

Jeri Laber
Executive Director

Middle East Watch

Andrew Whitley
Executive Director

Human Rights Watch

485 Fifth Avenue
Third Floor
New York, NY 10017
(212) 972-8400
(212) 972-0905 (fax)

1522 K Street, NW
Suite 910
Washington, DC 20005
(202) 371-6592
(202) 371-0124 (fax)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
I. INTRODUCTION.....	2
II. BACKGROUND	4
III. ABUSES BY THE LIBERIAN ARMED FORCES	9
Extra-judicial killings.....	10
Fleeing from attacks by soldiers	13
Arrests and beatings of suspected rebels	14
Lootings and burnings.....	15
Harassment of Gios and Manos since 1985	16
IV. REBEL ABUSES.....	19
V. THE ROLE OF THE UNITED STATES.....	23
VI. AFRICA WATCH'S RECOMMENDATIONS.....	27
Recommendations to the Government of Liberia	27
Recommendations to the U.S. Government	28

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report is based on research undertaken in late February 1990, in Côte d'Ivoire. Africa Watch is grateful for the cooperation of the Ivorian authorities responsible for the coordination of the relief efforts. In particular, we would like to thank Medecins sans Frontières, the French medical relief organization, for their invaluable assistance.

I. INTRODUCTION

A small group of rebel insurgents attacked the Liberian border town of Butuo in late December 1989, killing an undetermined number of soldiers and immigration officials. The government of Liberia responded to the attack with a show of force, sending two battalions to Nimba County, where Butuo is located.¹⁰ The army used brutal counterinsurgency tactics in its efforts to crush the rebellion, indiscriminately killing unarmed civilians, raping women, burning villages and looting. Most of the victims of the army abuses were of the Gio and Mano ethnic groups, who traditionally inhabit Nimba County.

The rebel insurgents initially targeted soldiers and local government officials, but later killed several members of the Krahn ethnic group, in retaliation for the army massacres (General Samuel Doe, the head of state, is Krahn). They also killed at least seven Mandingos for allegedly informing the government about their activities.

Over 160,000 people fled the violence into neighboring Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire, where they have ethnic and family ties.¹¹ Another 135,000, according to the United Nations Disaster Relief Organization (UNDRO), are displaced within Nimba or have fled to other counties and Monrovia, the Liberian capital city, leaving large areas of the county deserted and the population depleted.

The situation is reminiscent of 1985, when hundreds of Gio and Mano soldiers and civilians were killed by government soldiers in the aftermath of an abortive coup attempt by former General Thomas Qwiwonkpa, also from Nimba. Qwiwonkpa had been one of the original 17-man junta who seized power in 1980. He served as Commanding General until October 1983, when General Doe began to view him as a possible rival and attempted to demote him. Subsequent allegations

¹⁰ *There is no standard spelling for many of the towns in Liberia. This is due to the fact that these are words in African languages being translated and spelled phonetically.*

¹¹ *The Gio ethnic group is present in Côte d'Ivoire and is called Yacouba, while the Krahn are known as Guere.*

against Qwiwonkpa forced him into exile in the United States. He returned to Africa two years later and attempted, unsuccessfully, to overthrow Doe, only to be captured and killed. In the aftermath of the coup, Doe's army loyalists engaged in bloody reprisals against real and suspected opponents. Most of those targeted were Mano and Gio soldiers and civilians.

Africa Watch visited the Côte d'Ivoire in late February and conducted interviews with refugees from the Mano, Gio and Krahn ethnic groups. At the end of March there were 63,000 refugees in the area bordering Liberia. The interviews were conducted in the villages of Kpantuopleu, Binta, Glan-Houye, and Gapleu in the Danane prefecture; and the villages of Klaon and Kpabli in the Toulepleu prefecture. The refugees are scattered in approximately 80 villages along the border in the Danane and Toulepleu prefectures. All spoke of a deep longing to return home, but said they were not sure they would ever be able to do so. They described the hardship of living in unfamiliar surroundings, exacerbated by the fact that often they had to sleep in shifts, because of a lack of houses. Many were forced to sleep in the open. But they said that any hardship in Cote d'Ivoire was infinitely preferable to the terror which had caused their flight.

II. BACKGROUND

April 12, 1990 was the tenth anniversary of the coup that brought General Samuel Doe to power. Doe's ten years in power have been characterized by a wide range of abuses, including extra-judicial executions of civilians and soldiers, torture, arbitrary arrests, detention without trial, convictions on false charges after trials that lack due process, constraints on freedom of association, a judiciary subordinate to the executive and the suppression of press freedom.

The present conflict erupted between December 24 and December 26, 1989, when a small group of rebel insurgents attacked the border town of Butuo, killing a number of soldiers and immigration officials. The attack at Butuo was apparently designed to procure arms for the rebels, who fought initially with a variety of weapons, including knives and machetes. Additional small bands of rebels are alleged to have previously infiltrated Liberia and attempted to reach predesignated points, where they hoped sympathetic soldiers would either join the insurgency or provide weapons. According to a report in Jeune Afrique, the attack on Butuo had not been previously planned, but information about the arrests of a number of their colleagues in Monrovia created pressure on the rebels to acquire arms.¹²

According to reliable reports, information about a rebel presence, prior to the attack at Butuo, was first given by members of the Mandingo ethnic group living in Nimba, who, in mid-December, reported suspicious activity to Nimba government officials and to the Minister of Interior (himself a Mandingo) in mid-December.¹³ The reports were discounted by both the Minister and the Superintendent of Nimba County. In a statement reported in the local Daily Observer, on December 20, then-Superintendent Daniels assured Vice-President Harry Moniba that

¹² Jean-Baptiste Placca, "Liberia, Journey into the rebel stronghold," Jeune Afrique, March 12, 1990.

¹³ *Despite the fact that the Mandingo people have always been present in Liberia, they are still perceived as foreigners. That perception is underscored by the fact that they are Muslims in a largely animist society and by their success as traders, which has created animosity among other groups. In addition to this, the leaders of the community have traditionally aligned themselves with the government in power. At this time, when General Doe has alienated large sections of the population, this has created friction with other Liberians.*

the citizens of Nimba would not "subvert the government." He also appealed to the central government to exercise restraint when it heard "false alarms" from Nimba. Both the Minister and the Superintendent were subsequently dismissed by Doe for failing to alert the government to rebel activity. Superintendent Daniels, a member of the Mano ethnic group, was replaced by Jackson Paye, a Krahn.

For the most part, the initial attempts by the rebels to acquire arms from sympathetic soldiers appear to have been unsuccessful. A small number of men reached Monrovia, only to be arrested or forced to escape when they were unable to implement plans for acquiring arms. The arrest of three men suspected of being rebels may have led to the secret executions in January of at least two military officers. The three men, Samuel Dahn, Augustine Gonkanu and George Nuahn allegedly confessed their involvement in the insurgency, described training received in Libya, and implicated Lt. Monroe Railey Sayenneh of the Bomi Hills military detachment and Major Gaye of Camp Schiefflin, who were subsequently arrested. Africa Watch has been contacted by relatives of the two men, who say they have not been able to trace their whereabouts and presume that they are dead.

Several of the rebels crossed over into Guinea, only to be expelled later. General Conte has adopted a hard-line stance with regard to the Liberian rebels, consistent with his expulsion two years earlier of a number of dissidents from Nimba who had sought refuge there. Informed observers believe that President Conte is concerned that the overthrow of the Doe regime could encourage attempts by those with grievances against his own government. In addition, he is engaged in negotiations with Doe concerning future mining of the iron-ore rich range of mountains which are located in Guinea on the other side of the almost depleted Liberian Nimba range. An agreement would allow Guinea to utilize the railroad left in place by LAMCO, a Swedish-American-Liberian consortium whose concession rights expired in 1989.¹⁴ Without the use of the

¹⁴ *Bethlehem Steel, a major partner before the coup in 1980, withdrew, after selling its shares at a reduced rate to the Liberian government.*

LAMCO railroad to carry the ore to the Liberian port of Buchanan, Guinea would be faced with prohibitive costs of transportation.

The rebels do not appear to have been organized under a central command. Rather, reports suggest that Charles Taylor, a former government official under Doe, was instrumental in organizing and providing training for some of the rebels. He subsequently sought to unify the scattered forces, giving them the umbrella name, the National Patriotic Front. Taylor does appear to have an undetermined number of men under his direct control and is responsible for the logistics and the provision of arms to those men. Others engaged in the fighting are loosely linked to Taylor through their common objectives. They include men and women who joined the insurgency after the army massacres of Gio and Mano civilians. A recent article in the Washington Post described the present situation as "a burgeoning uprising that has become the greatest challenge to President Samuel K. Doe in his ten years in power."¹⁵

Clearly this is no longer only an incursion, as many of those now engaged in attacks against the army and other targets are villagers who have taken up arms either to protect themselves or to retaliate for the murders of their relatives. Familiar with the terrain, they and the insurgents have been able to mount a serious challenge to the Doe regime's control of Nimba County.

The county has been deeply affected. A curfew was imposed in early January, requiring residents to remain indoors from dusk to dawn. The most recent accounts tell of the closure of a major portion of the county highway, putting further limits on the operations of a number of logging companies operating in the forests of Nimba. Several of those companies had already virtually ceased their activities, due to the fighting. On April 6, the rebels attacked the train used to carry iron ore from the Nimba mines to the port of Buchanan. Three passengers, including a British journalist, were held briefly and then released. The attack disrupted the transport of iron ore, and

¹⁵ Jonathan C. Randall, "Army rampage said to spark resistance," Washington Post, March 19, 1990.

two weeks later, the expatriate workers at the mines were evacuated.

Due to the flight of Mano and Gio women, most markets in Nimba are now run by Mandingo women who close their stalls in the early afternoon in order to be home before the curfew. Lebanese shopowners also close in the afternoon to reduce the chances of being harassed by soldiers. A recent robbery attack by a soldier on a Lebanese woman was protested by Lebanese shopowners, who closed their shops until guarantees were given by the army authorities that further harassment would be dealt with severely.¹⁶

The tension is not limited to Nimba. In Monrovia, there is no formal curfew, but few people venture out after dark. Fear of the military was exacerbated by the brutal killing on January 4 of Robert Phillips, an engineer who was briefly active in opposition politics and was tried for treason after the 1985 coup attempt. Although several witnesses are said to have seen men in uniform leaving Phillips' home on the night of his murder, no official investigation is being conducted to find the perpetrators.

In another incident attributed to the security forces, the offices of the Daily Observer, an independent newspaper which has been under constant attack by the government, were severely burned in the early hours of March 17. The security guard at the offices reported four armed men setting fire to the building, after warning him that "this will be the last time they will publish our secrets." This is the second act of arson against the Observer, the first having occurred in 1986.

In response to local and international pressure, and perhaps in an effort to divert attention from the major problems his regime is encountering, General Doe recently announced the release of a number of prisoners, including Gabriel Kpolleh and Caephar Mabande, leaders of the banned Liberia Unification Party. Kpolleh, Mabande and eight others had been convicted on charges of conspiring to overthrow the government and were sentenced to ten years imprisonment. Their trial

¹⁶ Lebanese people have lived in Liberia for many years. They came as traders and gradually became the dominant force in commercial activity in the country. The 1970's saw a tremendous increase in their numbers, not only in Liberia, but in the whole of West Africa.

had lacked due process and in December, the Supreme Court granted them a new trial. In addition to the 10 political prisoners, the government released 65 persons who had been convicted on charges ranging from murder to theft. The government also announced the lifting of the bans on Radio ELCM (the radio station of the Catholic Church), and two newspapers, Footprints and the Sun Times. Radio ELCM had been banned since June 15, 1989, after a news story about alleged deaths at the Monrovia football stadium during a stampede. The two newspapers had been closed on several occasions, most recently since April, 1988, after stories deemed critical of government policies.

III. ABUSES BY THE LIBERIAN ARMED FORCES

The refugees began to flee into Guinea and Cote d'Ivoire soon after the government sent reinforcements into Nimba, at the end of December, to crush the insurgency. The soldiers, a combination of troops from the Special Anti-Terrorist Unit, an elite force, and the 1st infantry battalion from the Schiefflin barracks, brought in mounted machine guns and opened fire on unarmed civilians in a number of villages. As they moved from village to village, they shot people indiscriminately and burned huts and houses, after stripping them of their contents.

Africa Watch received testimony from refugees in the Côte d'Ivoire which clearly indicates that the government forces targeted people of the Gio and Mano ethnic groups, killing them in retaliation for the rebel attacks and burning their villages to prevent them from being used as safe havens by the rebel forces. In several accounts by the refugees, the soldiers are said to have told villagers that they had "come to finish what they started in 1985", a reference to the bloody aftermath of a failed coup attempt by former Peoples' Redemption Council member, Gen. Thomas Qwiwonkpa.¹⁷ Qwiwonkpa was from Nimba and government forces killed hundreds of Gio and Mano soldiers and civilians in retribution for the attempted coup. The refugees fled to Guinea and Cote d'Ivoire, the majority leaving most of their possessions behind.

¹⁷ *The People's Redemption Council (PRC) was the name of the military junta which ruled Liberia from 1980 to 1985. The 1985 elections were supposed to have ushered in a civilian government, but the results were fraudulent and Samuel Doe, a member of the PRC retained power and became head of the new government.*

Africa Watch received testimony of the following abuses by government soldiers.

Extra-judicial killings

Several refugees were eyewitnesses to killings. Interviewed in Kpantuopleu, Siapla George Tuazama told of soldiers entering his town of Bahn in late January, firing into the air. They then rounded up the community leaders and asked for money. Tuazama heard one of the soldiers say "If you don't pay, we will kill you!" He then saw the soldiers shoot and kill three men, whom he named as Nuahn Poquie, the clan chief (in his 60's), Nuahn Quoimie, a town quarter-chief (in his late 50's) and Toziah Gbeagbay, also a town quarter-chief (age unknown).¹⁸

Many refugees spoke of relatives and friends being killed, "just because they were Gio or Mano." Ex-lieutenant Hargana Pouden came from Karnplay, where he said soldiers killed his uncle and his friend:

I lost an uncle and a friend. My uncle, McGill Kerlehkarbah and my friend, John Nuneh, were both killed by Krahn soldiers because they were Gio. No-one is safe from the army, if they are Gio, not even old people. If you and I go to Liberia now, they will put you to one side and then take me and kill me.

Old Man Bhar Sebo underscored the ethnic component to the conflict when he talked about the soldiers killing three old men in his home town of Lapeah. He said their names were Quemie Qruah, Louah Qruah and Woumen Pea and he wondered what they could have done to deserve being killed, besides being Gio.

¹⁸ *The chieftaincy system is an administrative system established by the Liberian government in the early 1900's. It is an adaptation of the traditional administrative system previously used in many parts of the country. The basic administrative unit is the town which is divided into quarters - residential areas inhabited by people of related households. Quarters usually are headed by the elders of the combined households. In some areas, the leading elder may be referred to as the quarter chief. Town chiefs are normally elected from among the male elders (On rare occasions, women have been chosen to serve). Clan chiefs are also elected from the male elders of the towns which constitute the clan. Although there are few formal criteria for eligibility, traditional norms are usually applied. In some cases, for example, the town chiefs may only be chosen from particular quarters.*

For some refugees, there will never be peace. One interviewee described herself as "in distress and too sad to think about the future." Meah Boapea had been in Kpantuopleu since early February, after fleeing atrocities by government forces in her home town of Glalay. She recounted hiding in the bush and seeing her mother, still alive, being wrapped in a gasoline-soaked mattress and burned to death. She said she continued to hear gunfire for a long time after she went deeper into the bush, and presumes that other people were also killed.

Cooper Martor came from Boa-Kparlay and told of coming to Nimba from Monrovia in early January, only to "meet the trouble in my home-town." He said he was forced to sleep in the bush for three days while he tried to reach the clan headquarters at Bonglay. He arrived there on January 17, in the wake of soldiers who had killed five people, whose bodies remained where they had been shot. Cooper was unable to name the dead persons but described them as two old women, one middle-aged woman, an old man and a little girl. The army soon returned and the villagers fled, running past the burning villages of Tonwia and Kparlay before they crossed into the Côte d'Ivoire.

Daddah Leahmah, a teacher at Kahnplay Elementary School, spoke of fleeing Kahnplay for the relative safety of Pealal. He said when he first heard gunfire, he thought it was the army, since "they used to shoot into the air when they were happy or drunk." The shooting got louder and then he saw a soldier running, without shoes or gun. Leahmah then ran to Pealal, where he met many people from Kahnplay. People continued to come and told him that rebels had entered the town, but that they had not killed anyone. Leahmah remained in Pealal for several days. On the fourth day, more Kahnplay residents arrived. These arrivals were eyewitnesses to killings by the army, which had pursued the rebels. They told of the killings of Laurence Flomo, Bishop Gono (an old man), Benjamin Tuo, Patrick Lealah, William Duo and "Lean." The last four were young men, ranging in age from 14 to 23. They had been on their way from Zoktarpa to Zorgowee and they ran into soldiers coming from the LAMCO mining concession area. Patrick Lealah, a soldier himself

but in civilian clothes, introduced himself. However, the soldiers allegedly told him that he must have come to help the rebels and they would show him no mercy. They then ordered the four to lie down and shot them in the back. Leahmah said:

When I heard this from the people who saw it happen, I was afraid and I came to the Côte d'Ivoire. I also heard that the soldiers brought a caterpillar (tractor) and used it to bury the four men.

Isaac Deemie, from Zeanlay, described seeing

soldier

enter

his

home

town

and

begin

to

shoot

at

people.

He

told

Africa

Watch:

I was in town when the soldiers came and I saw them shoot my brother when he tried to run out of a burning house. My brother was called Henry Deemie and he was about 28 years old.

He also told of the soldiers arresting and tying up another brother, Yormie Deemie, who was the town chief. However, they later released him and he fled to the town of Bin-Houye in the Côte d'Ivoire. Isaac also fled, bringing his wife and six children to Glan-Houye. He expressed concern about two children he had left behind in Sanniquelle and about the loss of his two houses, which he said had been looted and destroyed by the soldiers.

The testimony of the refugees made it clear that many people lost their lives because they were unable to flee from the soldiers. Beatrice Geh, a woman in her early 20's, spoke of the army's behavior in her town of Kialay:

I left Kialay on January 1 with my two children, because the army came and started shooting and burning houses. I saw the soldiers shoot and kill my grandfather, Bishop Barnh (about 75 years old) and one old paralyzed woman - Old Lady Sanman. When I saw them do that, I ran into the bush and stayed there until I came to Glan-Houye. My whole village was burned down, so I couldn't bring anything with me. I only have what I'm wearing.

Fleeing from attacks by soldiers

George Myker, 53 years old, was living near Butuo (the scene of the first attack) and had to leave his town on January 5. He said he had been a teacher in Gblorlay for thirteen years, but had moved to Lepulah and recently been elected as a clan chief. Although he did not witness any violence himself, he fled into the bush on December 26, after hearing accounts of heavy fighting in Butuo. He was later told that his house in Gblorlay had been burned by soldiers and that two old blind men, one known as Old Man Suomie, had been burned alive in their hut, also by soldiers.

Interviewed in Kpantuopleu, in the Côte d'Ivoire, he lamented his fate:

We want to go home because it is home and although we are well taken care of here, we had established ourselves in Liberia. I had to leave my coffee, cocoa and oil palm farms.

When questioned about whether he would ever feel safe enough to return, he responded:

We trust the BBC and if they say it is safe to return, then we'll go back.

Several refugees said that they had not seen any violence themselves, but had fled when they heard shooting and saw the inhabitants of nearby villages running for cover. A teacher, resident in Kahnplay, told of hearing heavy gunfire on January 1:

All I heard was heavy shooting and I saw people running, so I fled into the bush. I couldn't even go to my house, so I brought nothing. I didn't see rebels or soldiers, but I heard the fighting. During the time in the bush, I heard gunfire all day. One time it stopped and I wanted to return, but people were still leaving, so I ran too.

An old man, Bhar Sebo, described having been forced to leave his home-town of Lapeah on January 1:

I saw what the war did, but not the people in the war. I was on the farm and my children came to tell me that there was war in the village, so we took refuge in the bush. I never saw rebels or soldiers, but my children used to go and spy and they saw soldiers setting fire to my houses and the whole village. The soldiers were dressed in uniforms and fatigues. I don't understand anything about this war, nothing.

Daniel Gblowon was a nurse's aide in the Nyorbutuo clinic:

One morning, I saw people running and I asked what was happening. The people said they didn't know, but they heard gunfire. When I reached the town, I saw only a few people left there. I packed my things and we began to hear gun sounds at about 6:00 in the evening. We went into the bush and turned on the radio. But it didn't tell us anything. Then someone came and said it was serious. One of my uncles tried to go back to town, but ran back when he heard gunfire. We crossed over into the Côte d'Ivoire on December 31st. Where I am sleeping, there are 37 in the house. There used to be 12.

Arrests and beatings of suspected rebels

A resident of Bahn, 20 year-old Dekurah Mah, said he had been at the creek in Leahkplay (a nearby town) when he saw soldiers entering the town. The soldiers forced a number of men to lie on the gravel-strewn ground and "swim." Many of the men injured themselves in their attempts to follow the soldiers' orders. He ran home to Bahn and grabbed his father's hunting rifle, in an attempt to protect himself, only to be disarmed by soldiers, who accused him of being a rebel. They

beat him and slashed his head with a bayonet but released him after his father paid them some money.

Jessie Miamie, a 30 year-old teacher of English, came from Sanniquellie (the administrative capital of the county):

I heard on the radio that rebels had entered the county, but I didn't believe it because the soldiers were always saying that dissidents were coming. But this time, the soldiers continued to speak about fighting at Butuo and Kahnplay and one day, they arrested my friend and me, saying we were rebels. I had been staying at home for more than two weeks, because only women could move about freely. The Gio and Mano men were afraid to go out. I was lucky, because one of my friends knew the soldiers and they paid to get me released. I left for Guinea immediately afterwards. The very day I left, six soldiers came to my home to look for me. The girl staying in the house sent me word to remain in Guinea.

Kargo Faryen said he left the town of Biplay in early January after having been arrested by the army and forced to repair bridges and dig ditches. He said the soldiers came in trucks and also had an armored tank, which they were having difficulty moving over the fragile bridges. They arrested a large group of men and made them repair a bridge and provide them with food. The soldiers then attempted to forcibly recruit the men to fight against the rebels, but allowed them to remain after they received some money.

Lootings and burnings

Most refugees arrived in the Côte d'Ivoire with only the clothes they were wearing. They said the soldiers had come into their towns and looted their homes and then set fire to many of them. In one typical scenario, the soldiers entered the town of Souplay on January 6. Although they did not kill anyone, they burned many houses and took anything of value with them. Gweh Leaman told Africa Watch that the soldiers destroyed the town, including his two houses and his rice kitchen.¹⁹

¹⁹ *Rice kitchens are the places where harvested rice is stored.*

Moses Beongor, a carpenter, described his experience:

I saw people running from Lapeah No 2 and I saw a lot of smoke from burning houses. When I went to look at my house, it was not burned but the soldiers had taken all my tools and everything I owned. I don't think anybody was killed, but I came to the ivory Coast without anything.

Old Man Gbarlor was the chief of Gbalortown. He said that he jumped into the bush when soldiers fired at him. He escaped but returned to the town, only to see that the houses had been reduced to shells.

I have never had any previous experience like this. The soldiers used to come before and take my goats and chickens, but this time they took everything. Since 1985, there have always been soldiers in our area. I am happy to be safe, but the journey was difficult and caused me aches and pains.

Julius Tiahton was living in Karnplay, where he had moved after twenty-four years of working at the LAMCO mines. He said that he had invested his considerable retirement benefits in a number of businesses. He owned three houses, two taxis, a car for his personal use, a bus and a video recorder, which he used to copy tapes to rent. In a matter of hours, he lost everything:

The rebels came first and when they left, the soldiers followed. We hid in the bush, because we heard a lot of shooting. Someone had a small radio and I heard that General Smith, (the former commander of the government forces in Nimba) was telling everyone to collect their things from Karnplay and go elsewhere. I did not go back but those who did said they saw soldiers riding in my car and that they had taken all of my property and burned some of my houses. I told them it is alright, as long as my family is safe. But here, I just sit and think and tears come to my eyes. Not even my eyeglasses could I bring, nothing, nothing. What did I do to deserve this?

Harassment of Gios and Manos since 1985

Many of the refugees spoke of the years of harassment they suffered solely on account of their ethnic identity. For those in the rural areas, their stories reflected harassment by soldiers at checkpoints when they attempted to travel and constant demands for rice, chicken and goats. A recurrent theme among those living in the urban areas was the daily harassment they lived with

since the attempted coup in 1985. Discrimination in the workplace and threats against them by Krahn workmates and bosses were the norm.

Esther T. worked at the customs in Yekepa, the mining concession area. She said her life had been miserable since 1985:

The soldiers used to come to the customs and abuse me and talk about the Gio people, saying that we are all against the government. They used to say that they were sorry that they hadn't killed all the Gio people in 1985, and they were just waiting for the order. From 1985, the Krahn people began to hate the Gio people and it has been that way since. I am happy to be alive, because I don't think that any Gio people can live safely in Liberia. It is too bad there.

An ex-soldier said he was dismissed from the army in 1985 along with 275 other Gio soldiers. Former lieutenant Hargena Pouden said he and 592 soldiers were arrested and detained after the 1985 attempted coup. After his release, he was dismissed and has been unable to find employment since then:

When I heard that the army had entered my town, I fled because I knew the way they would treat me. I was sure that they would kill me, because they had almost done that in 1985.

G. Henry Kahn, the only refugee interviewed by Africa Watch who said he knew Charles Taylor, was bitter about his life since the 1985 coup. He had been visiting relatives in Karnplay when the soldiers came and he fled into Cote d'Ivoire. He recounted his humiliation at work at the General Services Administration:

Prior to going to Karnplay for Christmas, I had had many problems at work. Because of my ethnic background, I always had problems with the authorities. This went back to 1985, when they started calling us trouble-makers. After the coup attempt, they made a survey of all the Gio and Mano people working in the government and put us on a list to be fired. They pretended it was due to financial constraints and a need to reduce the labor force. My boss told me that in order to keep my position, I should give him a cow. But even after I did that, they stripped me of my authority. I was supposed to be Assistant Director for Administration, but they took away my car. Other people who were at my level had cars and other benefits, but I wasn't even allowed to ride the bus which picked up my secretaries. It was very frustrating and unfair. When the rebels came, I was happy because our

lives were miserable under Doe, and power concedes nothing without a demand. I knew Charles Taylor well and he was very nice to me when he was the head of GSA (General Services Administration). We are refugees here and our lives are still frustrating.

IV. REBEL ABUSES

The first attack by the rebels was at the border town of Butuo. In that attack, an undetermined number of soldiers and immigration officials were killed (some sources suggest 16) and their arms captured by the rebels. The rebels, numbering probably no more than 40, then took cover in the dense forest. Their next attack was at Karnplay on January 1 and the third at Loguatu on January 2. From then on the picture is less clear. There continued to be sporadic attacks at a number of small towns, such as Tiaplay and Diolay. The rebels targeted soldiers and civilian government officials, and in a number of cases, killed Mandingo men whom they accused of being informers. In one case, in the town of Tiaplay, the rebels are said to have entered a mosque and shot and killed seven Mandingo men at prayer. A Gio refugee in Cote d'Ivoire also saw them shoot a Mandingo man. He described the killing to Africa Watch:

On January 1, at about 10:00 we heard gunshots at one of the checkpoints of Karnplay. I knew they were rebels because they didn't wear uniforms, only trousers and they covered their bodies with chalk. I saw them shoot one Mandingo man and a police officer who was near me. When I saw that, I ran into the bush and hid. I could hear shooting continue for a long time.

More recently, the rebels reportedly killed a number of Mandingo and Krahn men in Cocopa, a rubber plantation. The rebels went to Cocopa and requested food from the residents. They were fed by some of the Mano and Gio townspeople. Government soldiers reached the town within the next few days and questioned the people of the town about their collaboration with the rebels. Those who had fed the rebels were apparently pointed out by some members of the Mandingo and Krahn communities, and were then shot and killed. Upon hearing of the killings, the rebels returned and targeted a number of Mandingo and Krahn men in reprisal.

The interviews with Krahn refugees took place in the villages of Klaon and Kpabli. Klaon previously had a population of 300, which had increased to 1,036 at the time of the interviews. Most of the refugees were from the neighboring Liberian towns of Blehwalley, Yorpea, Kpabli and

Djukorway, which were attacked on January 14 and 15.²⁰ The rebels targeted those towns because the majority of inhabitants were Krahn. In the case of Blehwalley, it was the home of the father of the present county superintendent, Jackson Paye. Superintendent Paye's father was reportedly killed. Old Lady Wibli, a woman in her early 60's, described seeing three people killed:

On January 14, early in the morning, a group of men and women dressed in red entered the town and began shooting. My husband told me to hide under the bed and went outside to see what was happening. The rebels shot him. I could hear the rebels abusing Krahn people. They said if we were brave enough, we should come out and fight. They said that they would not let themselves be ruled by people who eat coals and that they had come to kill us.²¹ They killed my husband and his brother. They also killed one man called Dekpah, who was hiding under his bed, and Beyan, the physician assistant who was from the Lorma tribe. They also killed one man's wives and his son. They were in their house and the rebels set fire to it. Other people were in the house but they had run out. The ones who died hid under the bed, where they thought they would be safe. Someone told me that the rebels also killed John Paye, his wife Qwinolin, his son and two of his brother's children. The last person I heard about was Old Man Paye, who was left in his house, which was set on fire.

Old Lady Wibli also spoke about the rebels coming into the town and separating the Gio women from the rest of the residents. She said that one young man was killed when he went and sat next to his mother, a Gio woman. The rebels questioned him as to whether he could speak Gio and when he was unable to do so, shot and killed him in front of his mother. His mother cried out in distress, asking the rebels to end her life also. They declined, explaining that they had come specifically to kill Krahn men in retaliation for army massacres of Gio and Mano people.

Alfred Kpato was one of the elders of Djukorway. He arrived in Klaon with his two wives and five children:

We came here because the rebels came to our town. Some wore ordinary clothes, some red. But all had something red around their heads. In our town we have an airstrip and a motor road from Yorpea. The rebels came from Yorpea and opened

²⁰ There is also a town called Kpabli in Cote d'Ivoire. It is not unusual for towns on both sides of the border to have similar names.

²¹ The Krahn people sometimes add coal embers to some of their food.

fire as soon as they entered our town. They were speaking Gio and there was one woman with them. The woman was using medicine to weaken the people in the town²². She scattered medicine in front of the men as they advanced. I knew her from before. The men started killing people and burning houses. I ran into the bush with some other people. We stayed there for a long time. When we came out, we saw several bodies. I saw Old Man Zeatay, who was shot, and Quity, and Gaye, who was crazy and had been tied up. Also they killed Old Lady Deleh and two of her children. They had hidden under the bed in her house and the rebels set fire to it. That's how Esther (nicknamed Mummy) Mator died, because she ran to Old Lady Deleh's house and hid with her. The rebels also shot and killed a young man called Fedesco Dro. It was a terrible sight.

John Karwoeh came from Yorpea Town and saw the bodies of several people killed by the rebels. He told Africa Watch:

When the dissidents came, I saw them from far away. It was January 14, Sunday morning and it was a small group, but they were armed. When they reached the town, they started shooting and killing people. I ran into the bush, but as I ran I saw people falling down near me. Two days later, I went back to my house to get my things. The rebels had taken some and left some. That's when I saw my brother's body. He had been shot. His name was Gaye Karwoeh. I also saw the dead body of George Wea and Augustus Kare. Other people were wounded, but they didn't die.

Charlie Sandy was in Blewalley when the attack occurred. He escaped, but only after the rebels attempted to shoot him in his house:

The rebels came early in the morning. We were asleep and thought it was the army. We heard gunfire and saw some houses burning. We heard them speaking Gio and they told all the Gio women to come out and sit to one side, because they would not harm them. My wives and my children managed to run, but I saw a rebel coming towards my house. But before he could reach [the house], another rebel told him to come back, because I might have a gun. While they went for reinforcements, I climbed into a tree and they didn't see me when they came back. I know they caught Old Man Beh, Old Lady Wibli's husband, and he said he was Gio, but one of the rebels knew him to be Krahn, so they shot him. They also killed Old Man Tounah, who offered them \$400. They told him to get the money, but they still killed him. When I climbed down from the tree, I also saw my father's body lying on the ground. I could only cover it with a chair and then run.

²² A reference to "witch doctors." The Liberian government recently passed an ordinance requiring all "witch doctors," or "medicine men," to be licensed.

Some refugees were able to speak Gio fluently and passed for members of that ethnic group. Marie Gbah is in her early 30's. She managed to bring 25 children with her. The children belonged to a variety of people, but they sent them with her for their safety:

When the rebels entered on January 14, they arrested me and my children. Then they burned my house. They began beating some of the bigger children and they were speaking English. I spoke to them in English and Gio and told them I was from Dioplay and that I was actually Gio. Then they stopped beating the children and told us we could go. They guided us to the road and we didn't stop until we came here. I came with nothing and only have what my relatives have given me. This is my first time seeing this kind of trouble.

V. THE ROLE OF THE UNITED STATES

Founded by freed American slaves, Liberia was the brainchild of the American Colonization Society, some of whose members were looking for a solution to the "problem" of having large numbers of free black people in the United States. Since then, Liberia has had a "special relationship" with the United States, with many Liberians looking to the U.S. for their political and educational systems.

America's influence is visible and considerable. Although increasingly hard to find, the U.S. dollar remains legal tender. Many towns and streets are named after American individuals and places, including the capital, Monrovia, named after U.S. president James Monroe. The relatively large size of the military mission is justified, in part, by the "historical relationship." That relationship was underscored in 1987, when a seventeen-man team was sent by the Reagan administration to manage Liberia's finances. The team's two-year mandate was to crack down on fiscal mismanagement and the nation's endemic corruption, but the members of the team were withdrawn a year early as a result of the Liberian government's lack of cooperation. Leaving aside the implications for Liberia's sovereignty, the U.S. administration's efforts at curbing Doe's looting of the treasury would have been better directed at preventing the gross human rights abuses perpetuated by that government.

During its eight years, the Reagan administration missed many opportunities to promote human rights in Liberia. Many of the official statements appeared to reflect a wilful ignorance of past and ongoing abuses by the regime of Samuel Doe, highlighting seeming improvements in the country while overlooking obvious problems. In 1987, then Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Chester Crocker, described the human rights situation in Liberia in the

following terms:

We believe there has been a movement in a positive direction. If you take a moving picture, it shows a trend which we think is a good one. If you take a snapshot, then in that snapshot you can see problems. Problems are not absent, but the situation has

improved.

This statement was made two years after Doe had used fraud and strong-arm measures to ensure his elections victory and after hundreds of soldiers and civilians had been killed by government forces in the aftermath of an attempted coup. The two years had also seen the continuation of a pattern of repression and brutality which continues to mark the regime.

During the early Reagan years, the U.S. poured money into Liberia. From 1980 to 1985, \$500 million was provided to the Doe regime. In the aftermath of the fraudulent election of 1985 and the subsequent coup attempt, Administration spokesmen, in testimony before Congress, obscured gross abuses of human rights and papered over the election results. Despite their efforts, Congress passed resolutions in 1985 and 1986, characterizing the elections as fraudulent and conditioning further Economic Support Fund assistance on a number of steps, including the release of political prisoners. Congress' action was crucial to winning the release of a number of political prisoners and to ending killings by government soldiers in Nimba county. Despite the demonstrable results of Congress' public position, the Reagan administration pursued a policy of quiet diplomacy, which did not improve the human rights situation. The next five years saw a drastic decline in U.S. assistance, largely because of Congressional pressure. The reduced level of aid was not accompanied by the public condemnation of human rights abuses by the executive.

The success of public statements by Congress in contributing to an improved human rights climate should have served as an important model for the Bush administration. Instead, it has continued a policy of quiet diplomacy. In January, in response to the rebel insurgency, General Doe ordered his troops to shoot on sight anyone they deemed suspicious. As evidence mounted of indiscriminate killings of civilians by the army, the State Department appeared eager to downplay the army's role. On January 11, it issued the following statement:

Regrettably, in responding to the incursion, elements within the armed forces of Liberia are credibly reported to have ignored orders to avoid injury to innocent civilians, a number of which have been killed. We have conveyed to the Liberian government our concern at this breach of discipline and have urged it to redouble its

efforts to see that further innocent lives are not lost.

Since the troops were not ignoring orders, but carrying them out, the U.S. response must be seen as a deliberate attempt at obfuscation of the tragic events and a serious breach of its moral duty to promote human rights.

The close involvement of the United States with the Doe regime was shockingly underscored in late January when two U.S. military advisors were sent to Nimba to accompany the then commander of the forces, General Moses Craig. The Administration insisted that the effort was designed to assist the senior army officers in minimizing abuses by the army and not to offer advice on how to crush the rebellion. However, informed observers suggest that a more compelling motive was provided by the alleged Libyan involvement in the training and arming of the rebels and that the advisors were sent to ensure the success of the government's counterinsurgency strategy. The advisors were removed after protests by human rights groups.

The United States Congress has continued to respond strongly to events in Liberia. A resolution condemning the Liberian army's behavior offered by Congressman Ted Weiss rapidly gained bipartisan support and was passed by the House on April 25. It offers appropriate guidelines for U.S. policy to Liberia. These include the prohibition against the involvement of the U.S. military in the counterinsurgency efforts, a request for a fair and impartial inquiry into human rights abuses in Nimba County, and the cut-off of military aid.

Africa Watch supports these provisions and urges the Administration to increase its involvement in the efforts to provide relief to meet the urgent humanitarian needs of Liberian refugees in neighboring countries. We also urge the Bush administration to review its policy towards Liberia and make respect for human rights an integral part of that policy. The historical relationship between the two countries will be served best by a rejection of the status quo and a distancing, in words and deeds, from a regime which has shown itself incapable of respect for the rule of law and human rights. In continuing its support for General Doe and his government, the

Bush administration serves neither its interests nor those of the Liberian people.

VI. AFRICA WATCH'S RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations to the Government of Liberia

Africa Watch urges the Government of Liberia:

1. To end the indiscriminate killings of civilians by Liberian troops in Nimba County.
2. To take immediate steps to investigate and prosecute those individuals, including members of the Liberian armed forces, guilty of human rights abuses.
3. To institute an impartial and independent inquiry into the killings.
4. To allow international humanitarian agencies and human rights organizations full access to the affected region.
5. To take measures to ensure the safe return of internally displaced persons and refugees.
6. To review past abuses and create institutions and administrative procedures which will bring an end to these abuses and enhance respect for human rights and constitutional rule.
7. To issue clear public instructions to the army, police and all security forces, prohibiting abusive interrogation methods, including both the physical and psychological abuse of detainees.
8. To implement measures which will allow Liberians to enjoy their constitutionally guaranteed rights to freedom of expression and freedom of association, thus creating a climate and circumstances conducive to the holding of free and fair elections in 1991.

Recommendations to the U.S. Government

Africa Watch calls upon the U.S. Government:

1. To convey to the Government of Liberia, in clear and forceful terms, the concerns of the United States about human rights in Liberia since 1980, especially since the recent killings of unarmed civilians during the counterinsurgency.
2. To prohibit further use of military advisors in the counterinsurgency efforts of the Liberian armed forces.
3. To cease all military assistance to the Government of Liberia until it has ended the indiscriminate killing of civilians and has made substantial progress in improving human rights.
4. To suspend all U.S. assistance to Liberia, except humanitarian assistance, until there is a greatly improved human rights climate.
5. To urge the Government of Liberia to create an impartial Commission to undertake an inquiry into the violence in Nimba and past abuses, with the findings made public.
6. To require the Government of Liberia to honor its commitment to hold scheduled elections in 1991 and ensure that circumstances in Liberia are conducive to a free and fair election process.
7. To provide all necessary support to efforts by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees and other relevant international and private voluntary organizations to meet the urgent humanitarian needs of Liberian refugees in neighboring countries.