

**BACK TO THE BRINK
WAR CRIMES BY LIBERIAN GOVERNMENT AND REBELS
A Call for Greater International Attention to Liberia and the Sub Region**

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I. SUMMARY

Liberian government forces fighting against rebels from the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) have committed war crimes and other serious human rights abuses, including summary executions of scores of civilians, widespread rape of girls and women, and looting and burning of villages. Hundreds of civilians have been forcefully conscripted and sent to the battlefield in an arbitrary manner, without advance notice or any set procedures, and often with little or no military training. The LURD forces have also carried out serious abuses, although to a lesser extent, including summary executions of alleged government collaborators, rape, and the forced recruitment of civilians, including child soldiers.

Only five years after Liberia began a shaky transition to peace, the country is once again immersed in war. Tens of thousands of Liberians have been forced to flee their homes as fierce fighting continues in the northwest, where a rebel incursion began in July 2000. This incursion sparked the fifth serious outbreak of violence since the national elections of 1997 that ended a seven-year civil war. Rebel attacks closer to the capital, Monrovia, in early 2002 caused new outflows of refugees and internal displacement. This prompted President Charles Taylor to declare a state of emergency on February 8, 2002, and precipitated the arrest of hundreds of suspected LURD supporters in Monrovia.

Scores of testimonies taken by Human Rights Watch from June 2001 through March 2002 in Liberia and neighboring Sierra Leone and Guinea, provide compelling evidence that both Liberian government forces and LURD forces have committed war crimes and other gross abuses of human rights against civilians. In researching this report, Human Rights Watch interviewed more than three hundred victims and witnesses of the abuses, as well as Liberian army and Ministry of Defense officials and LURD commanders.

The picture that emerges is one of government troops and pro-government militias summarily killing, torturing and abusing civilians, raping women and girls, and abducting civilians for forced labor and fighting in the northwest. They have systematically looted and burned towns, and in some cases government troops at checkpoints have blocked displaced civilians from moving to safety. Government soldiers systematically extort money and other goods from those seeking refuge. Citing the rebel threat, the Liberian government is remilitarizing society—remobilizing ex-combatants, and permitting the proliferation of militia groups. The government has forcibly recruited hundreds of young men in a manner not consistent with their rights. There are no publicly established and clear criteria and procedures governing conscription, while recruits are not given any advance warning of conscription, any indication of how long they will be forced to serve, nor any idea of where they will be taken for training or for combat. In many cases, they effectively receive no training before they are deployed. In the course of combat, they are often ordered to commit human rights violations.

LURD rebel forces have also committed gross abuses against civilians, including summary killings, abduction, rape, abuses in the context of forced recruitment of men and boys, and forced labor. Rebel abuses appear to be less widespread and systematic than those committed by government forces. A large proportion of LURD fighters were previously affiliated to the two factions of the rebel United Liberation Movement for Democracy in Liberia (ULIMO) during the pre-1997 civil war.

After five years in office, President Charles Taylor's government continues to function without accountability, exacerbating the divisions and resentments fueled by the war. Taylor has steadily consolidated and centralized power by rewarding loyalists and intimidating critics. State power is regularly misused by high-ranking officials to further the political objectives of the executive branch, to avoid accountability, and for personal enrichment. State institutions that could provide an independent check on the Taylor administration, such as the judiciary, the legislature, the human rights commission, and the commission on reconciliation, remain weak and cowed. In particular, the National Human Rights Commission, created by the government in 1997, suffers from a lack of qualified personnel, inadequate funding and a flawed mandate. Independent voices in the media and the human rights community are steadily being silenced.

The renewal of war in Liberia threatens to further undermine prospects for sustainable peace in the wider region, known as the Mano River Union, encompassing Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia. Over the past decade, the governments of these three countries have frequently harbored each other's rebel groups and supported cross-border incursions, causing widespread instability. Charles Taylor, both as leader of the former rebel group known as the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) and as president of Liberia since 1997, bears primary responsibility for much of the long-standing aggression and violence in the sub-region, both in Liberia and in particular through his support for the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone. At this time, the government of Guinea is also playing a destabilizing role in providing considerable logistical and some military support to the LURD rebels that operate from Guinea. Guinea's support to the LURD intensified after the Liberian government, assisted by Sierra Leonean rebel fighters and Guinean dissidents, launched a series of cross-border attacks into Guinea in late 2000 and early 2001.

Additionally, as efforts continue to consolidate a fragile peace in Sierra Leone, hundreds of former fighters in Sierra Leone's civil war, both former rebel and government combatants, have been crossing into Liberia to fight as mercenaries either for the Liberian government or for LURD rebel forces. Many former fighters from the Sierra Leonean rebel RUF, which received direct support from Charles Taylor for years despite its grossly abusive record, are now integrated into the Liberian government forces and have been implicated in atrocities against Liberian civilians. Since at least January 2001, as the civil war in Sierra Leone has gradually come to an end, hundreds of former fighters from the Sierra Leonean government-affiliated civil defense militias (such as the ethnic Mende militia known as the Kamajors), from the former members of the Sierra Leonean army who rebelled to form the West Side Boys militia, and even from the RUF, have been recruited as mercenaries for the LURD. As a result, the border area between Liberia and Sierra Leone threatens to become increasingly unstable. There is an urgent need to ensure border security to prevent the movement of combatants between Sierra Leone and Liberia, while allowing refugees fleeing the Liberian conflict to cross and obtain effective protection in Sierra Leone.

The spreading conflict in Liberia presents an ominous prospect for the year ahead. The present situation raises concerns that there will be a further escalation in human rights abuses against civilians as the area of fighting widens, causing more death and displacement in Liberia. Moreover, the fragile peace in Sierra Leone could easily be destabilized as a result of a spillover of the Liberian war, as growing numbers of Liberian refugees and combatants cross into neighboring countries. This is a dire prospect indeed for the people of a region that has already suffered so much war, wanton abuse and human suffering over more than a decade.

Human Rights Watch is calling for urgent and sustained action by the international community to help resolve the current conflict, and to insist on respect for human rights, before Liberia's war spirals to consume new areas and destabilizes the wider region.

In particular, two significant developments could play an important role in determining how the next chapter of this sub-regional conflict unfolds: In May 2002, the United Nations (U.N.) Security Council will determine whether to renew an arms embargo and sanctions against the Liberian government imposed one year ago in response to Liberian government support for the RUF in Sierra Leone. Also in May 2002, the United States (U.S.) government will commence a military assistance program of U.S. \$3 million to the government of Guinea.

Human Rights Watch did not investigate current links between President Charles Taylor's government and the RUF in Sierra Leone, which were the basis for the U.N. sanctions imposed against Liberia. However, we have documented in this report very serious abuses carried out against the civilian population of Liberia both by Liberian government security forces and by the LURD, as well as the detrimental impact of the Liberian conflict on sub-regional peace and security. For this reason we believe that, the arms embargo against the Liberian government should be maintained, and extended to cover the LURD. In addition, the U.N. Security Council should renew the mandate of the Panel of Experts established in 2000 to monitor violations of the arms embargo imposed on the RUF, and extend its brief to investigate all illicit arms flows into the sub-region.

Our report also raises serious concerns about Guinea's support of the LURD, and we urge the U.N. Security Council to mandate the Panel of Experts to investigate Guinea's role in destabilizing Liberia and to make recommendations as to measures to end their support for armed insurgents, including the possibility of an arms embargo. Human Rights Watch also believes that all military assistance to Guinea, such as that planned by the U.S. to commence in May 2002, should be conditioned on an end to support for the LURD.

II. THE LIBERIAN GOVERNMENT

Abuses by Liberian Government Forces and Militias

Liberian government forces and militias have committed widespread abuses against civilians, particularly in Lofa and Cape Mount counties in the country's northwest. These forces include the regular army, known as the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL), as well as the paramilitary Anti-Terrorist Unit (ATU) and various militia groups (see below). According to numerous victims and witnesses interviewed by Human Rights Watch, the abuses usually follow a similar pattern. After driving LURD forces from an area, government forces hunt down and detain local people whom they find hiding in the bush, including civilians. Those they suspect of supporting the LURD are then beaten, tortured, or summarily executed, in some cases by being confined in houses that the soldiers set on fire, burning the victims to death. Young women and girls are often raped and forced to become "wives" to the soldiers; young men are subjected to forced labor, being made to carry looted goods and captured weapons; and villages are systematically razed to the ground. Government forces violently round up civilians fleeing from the fighting, and separate and conscript young men in a manner which violates human rights. Sometimes those conscripted include boys. The conscripts are then sent to the front, often without any proper training.

In conducting research for this report, Human Rights Watch obtained first hand testimonies about many incidents in which Liberian government forces committed gross abuses. Some of these are briefly described here; extracts from testimonies obtained from eye-witnesses to some of the events recorded are also included in the last section of this report:

- In April 2001, AFL troops raided a small clinic in Sasahun and executed six adults, including one patient recovering from an appendix operation.
- In July 2001, AFL troops rounded up hundreds of civilians and burned at least fifteen of them to death in Kamatehun.
- In September 2001, scores of ethnic Gbandi civilians who had been captured in the bush by AFL troops were taken to Kamatehun, where the troops forcibly confined some thirty of them in four houses and burned them to death. The troops killed another fifteen civilians by cutting their throats.
- Also in September 2001, three youths accused of supporting the LURD were detained by AFL soldiers in Masambalahun and later killed.
- In October 2001, AFL soldiers forced civilians whom they caught hiding to carry boxes of ammunition to Vahun and then lined up and shot six of them, and confined six others in a house and burned them to death.
- In December 2001, AFL soldiers who had driven LURD forces from Kolahun, fired indiscriminately into houses in the town, killing civilians, and gang-raped six women and girls, including a twelve-year-old girl and a woman who was pregnant. When the soldiers left the town, they forced civilians to carry the goods they had looted to Foya, two and a half hours' walk away.
- That same month, between Yenahun and Kamatehun, government soldiers raped a number of women, and executed a family who tried to leave, as a warning to others.
- In January 2002, at Sawmill, AFL soldiers shot a thirty-year-old woman pointblank in the forehead, killing her, and wounded her four-year-old son, when she opened the door to her house.
- In February 2002, ATU officers in Klay detained and tortured three men whom they accused of being rebels, before releasing them the following morning.

Government soldiers and militias have also been responsible for widespread looting, both in towns and villages that they occupied and at checkpoints on the roads. Local residents are often forced to carry looted belongings and captured weapons long distances by the army. As civilians flee conflict areas, they are repeatedly made to pay government soldiers in order to pass through checkpoints to safety, and in order to cross the border into Sierra Leone.

Although both the deputy minister of defense and the commander of the AFL denied it to Human Rights Watch, hundreds of civilian men—and sometimes boys—are being forced to fight for the government. There are no publicly established and clear criteria and procedures governing conscription, while recruits are not given any advance warning of conscription, any indication of how long they will be forced to serve, nor any idea of where they will be taken for training or for combat. Human Rights Watch obtained a copy of an October 2001 “activities report” by a Captain Bill Dunbar (Jungle Lion Special Operation, Foya), confirming a policy of forced conscription by the AFL in Lofa County. The report stated that: “... the young men among the civilians retrieved from the bushes are selected and recruited and sent to base [to] be thoroughly screen[ed].” Attached to the report were the names of some 350 civilians captured by the government.

Forced recruitment by the government of young men, and sometimes boys, is often accompanied by abuses such as arbitrary detention and mistreatment, and recruits are then deployed without any prior notification to themselves or their families, and with little or no training. In February 2002, after President Taylor accused people in certain areas of Monrovia of harboring rebels, the Special Operations Division (SOD) police conducted house-to-house searches, systematically rounding up men. Hundreds of young men, and in a few cases boys, were arbitrarily detained, beaten, and accused of being rebel supporters. Many were given the choice of paying a bribe or being sent to the war front. Some who could not pay were forcibly recruited. Human Rights Watch interviewed one Liberian refugee who had recognized five civilians who had been rounded up and detained in Monrovia before being deployed at government checkpoints along the road in Cape Mount County without any opportunity to notify their families and without any training appropriate for their duties. Human Rights Watch documented other cases where internally displaced persons fleeing from the fighting had been abused and violently rounded up in the forest or at checkpoints. The young men were then separated from their families and taken away for recruitment into the army.

In the face of renewed rebel action and negative international publicity, the Taylor government has become increasingly intolerant of dissent. In particular, it has intensified its harassment and intimidation of the independent press, civil society groups, and legitimate political opposition groups. Since imposing a state of emergency in February 2002, the government has carried out a spate of arrests, clearly intended to silence criticism:

- Journalists Stanley Seekor, J. James, and Ellis Togba from *The Analyst* newspaper were threatened and briefly detained after their newspaper published an article discussing the state of emergency.
- The authorities also detained Frances Johnson Morris, director of Liberia’s Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, for several hours among male inmates at the police prison at the Police Headquarters in Monrovia ostensibly on grounds of “mistaken identity” only days after she had made a public presentation questioning the state of emergency.
- On March 27, Nipla Wiaplah, chair of the New Deal Movement party, was held for several days in police custody without charge as police determined whether an article in *The News* that he had authored on the war posed a national security threat. *The News* editor-in-chief Jerome Dalieh and acting news editor Bill Jarkloh were also held briefly without charge for publishing the article.
- After the National Human Rights Center of Liberia, an umbrella organization comprising nine nongovernmental human rights groups, issued several press releases protesting government abuses, five of its members—Aloysius Toe, Tunny Zeogar, Peter Nickoson, John Okai, and Sam Nimely—were arrested on March 28 and held without charge for several days. Although they were released after a court order was filed, they were rearrested shortly after, and charged with “criminal malevolence” and “preventing arrest and discharge of other duties.”

- Augustine Toe of the Justice and Peace Commission was arrested on March 28 and held without charge for several hours.
- On April 24, human rights lawyer, Tiawan Gongloe, was arrested without charge by the police, and beaten so severely that he was unable to stand and required hospitalization. He had been speaking out against security force abuses and other human rights violations. *The Analyst* newspaper, which had just reported on a statement recently made by Gongloe at a conference on peace in the Mano River Union, was ordered closed.

Disturbingly, the conflict also has taken on an ethnic dimension, with the Taylor government indiscriminately accusing ethnic Mandingo, Krahn, and Gbandi citizens of Liberia of supporting the rebel incursion. Members of these groups, as a result, face growing discrimination, arbitrary arrests, and violence at the hands of the government and its supporters, based on their ethnicity. Many LURD fighters are ethnic Mandingo or Krahn, and many reportedly fought with the two former ULIMO rebel factions during the pre-1997 civil war. As a result, other ethnic Mandingos and Krahns, as well as ethnic Gbandis, are clearly considered suspect by the government and have been accused of being rebel supporters. For their part, LURD forces have committed some of their worst abuses against ethnic Kissi civilians, perhaps because the RUF rebel group in Sierra Leone, which had a longstanding alliance with the Taylor government, formerly had its stronghold in an ethnic Kissi area in Sierra Leone. Human Rights Watch learned of a number of cases in which AFL fighters had escorted ethnic Kissi civilians, fleeing fighting, to safety over the Sierra Leone border.

Government Forces Responsible for Abuses

One of the most important steps for Liberia's reconstruction after the seven-year-long civil war ended in 1997 was to have been the restructuring and retraining of the country's armed forces and law enforcement agencies. The existing Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) had a long history of abusing human rights both before and during the civil war, and there were thousands of ex-combatants from all sides in the war to be demobilized and reintegrated into society.¹ Under the Abuja Peace Accords that signaled the end of the conflict, the restructuring was to have been conducted by the Nigerian-led West African peacekeeping force ECOMOG (the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group), and the newly reconstituted Liberian armed forces and police were to be drawn from all the disbanded factions.

However, one of President Taylor's first policy decisions was to refuse to allow ECOMOG to be involved in this process. Instead, he reconstituted the security and police forces using his own ex-combatants, purged and marginalized troops from the existing AFL that had opposed him during the war, and created new security forces that reported directly to him. Liberians began to have problems with the new security and police forces almost immediately.

Shortly after his inauguration in 1997, President Taylor created two elite paramilitary security forces, the Anti-Terrorist Unit (ATU) and the Special Security Service (SSS); these units report directly to Taylor and commit abuses with impunity. The ATU is headed by the president's son, Charles Taylor, Jr., and the SSS is led by Benjamin Yeaten. Neither of these forces is established by law, nor are their operational costs included in the state budget. There is no effective mechanism for victims of abuse by these forces to lodge a complaint with any government structure and obtain redress. Both forces have become notorious for abuses, including abuse of civilians, extortion, and looting. There have also been reports of extrajudicial killings and torture by the ATU, particularly at its base at Gbatata. Victims of torture by the ATU have been held in water-filled holes in the ground, burned with molten plastic, beaten and sexually abused, and forced to drink urine and eat cigarette butts. Additionally, within the Liberian National Police, headed by Paul Mulbah, an elite Special Operations Division

¹ The six factions of the seven-year civil war in Liberia were: the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) headed by Charles Taylor; the former government Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL); two rival factions of the United Liberation Movement for Democracy in Liberia (ULIMO), one led by Al-Haji Kromah representing ethnic Mandingo interests, and the other headed by Roosevelt Johnson representing ethnic Krahn interests; the Liberia Peace Council (LPC); and the Lofa Defence Force (LDF).

(SOD) was created after Taylor came into office, made up largely of former Taylor-faction fighters; this police unit has also been responsible for arbitrary arrests, mistreatment, and extortion.

The Ministry of Defense, headed by Daniel Chea, oversees the now marginalized AFL, but also appears to have some measure of control over militia groups. Although it has had some new recruits, the AFL still includes many soldiers who served under the government of former president Samuel Doe (1980-1989), perhaps to secure their loyalty to the Taylor government. For that reason, the AFL is not fully trusted by the government, and its soldiers are neither well equipped nor regularly paid. Even so, the AFL remains the largest government fighting force and the Taylor government has sent a large number of AFL troops to oppose the rebel incursion. These soldiers are effectively given free rein to pay themselves through looting. In particular, Human Rights Watch heard consistent testimonies of abuses by soldiers, especially those serving in the AFL Jungle Lion Operation, often wearing yellow t-shirts.

Human Rights Watch heard many disturbing reports that the Liberian government has, since the LURD incursion began, established a number of new militia groups, whose numbers, structures, and leaders remain unclear. Both the AFL command and Ministry of Defense officials told Human Rights Watch that the Taylor government's frontline troops are drawn not only from the AFL but increasingly include militia groups largely made up of remobilized men who fought with Charles Taylor's NPFL during the civil war. Hundreds of former combatants, many of them originally recruited as children, are being regrouped, organized, and supported by Taylor's former commanders, such as Roland Duo, chief of security of the National Port Authority, who reportedly commands a militia group in Lofa County; Melvin Sobandi, the deputy minister of transport; Siaffa Norman, and Adolphus Dolo. The militia effort against the LURD appears to be under the supervision of long-time Taylor ally, Kuku Dennis, a businessman with timber interests in Nimba County. In March 2002, Human Rights Watch interviewed three young men, formerly part of an NPFL "Small Boys Unit" (SBU) who were undergoing training for a new militia group, which they called the Executive Mansion Special Operations Unit. The militia groups are also believed to include former members of Sierra Leone's RUF rebel group, many of whom crossed into Liberia during and after the disarmament process in Sierra Leone.

The various security agencies and militia groups have extensive powers, poorly defined mandates, and overlapping functions. This situation has resulted in a jockeying for power between the various groups and a complete lack of accountability. The state security apparatus as it exists today in Liberia undermines any possibility of respect for human rights and the consolidation of peace in Liberia.

III. THE LURD FORCES

In existence since 2000, LURD is made up of a coalition that includes members of former anti-Taylor rebel factions from the Liberian civil war, as well as various political figures and leaders. The military side of the movement includes former members of the various rebel groups that fought during the Liberian civil war, particularly ethnic Mandingo and ethnic Krahn members of the former ULIMO factions, as well as combatants from the former warring factions in Sierra Leone. Human Rights Watch has interviewed numerous Sierra Leonean ex-combatants from the Kamajors, the West Side Boys, and RUF who have been recruited by the LURD as mercenaries since January 2001.²

Formed in Freetown, Sierra Leone, in February 2000, the LURD does not appear to have a defined political program, other than to remove Charles Taylor from power. The organization has been plagued with internal power struggles, political rivalries and corruption, and there also appears to be some division between the Guinea-based political side of the movement, and its field based military commanders. There seems to be little clarity or

² In response to the RUF rebel threat, the Sierra Leonean government supported the rise of government-allied civil defense force militia groups, such as the Kamajors (the largest and most powerful, drawn from the Mende ethnic group). The West Side Boys Militia comprised former Sierra Leone Army soldiers who, as part of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) led the 1997 coup against elected president Tejan Kabbah. The West Side Boys were responsible for widespread atrocities.

consensus on key political issues, such as whether or not to seek a negotiated settlement with the Taylor government, or what kind of government should replace Taylor in the event of a LURD military victory. In March 2002, at peace talks brokered by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in Abuja, Nigeria, LURD did not send official representation that could speak on behalf of the group.

Some observers accuse the Taylor government of exaggerating the LURD threat in order to divert attention from the failure of its domestic policies, and to justify its call for the lifting of United Nations sanctions imposed in May 2001. Some sources have alleged that certain attacks carried out closer to Monrovia and attributed to LURD by the government may actually have been either fabricated attacks by government forces or the result of skirmishes between government security and militia forces. The absence of a credible and articulate LURD leadership has contributed to a blanket dismissal of the LURD's existence by some Liberia-based international observers, who explain away the rebel group as "roaming bandits" or the result of fighting between different sections of the government's forces. It is clear, however, on the basis of the research undertaken by Human Rights Watch in Liberia and neighboring countries, that the LURD is an organized fighting force, and does pose a real threat to peace and security in Liberia.

After a series of hit-and-run raids in 2000, LURD forces launched more concerted offensives in 2001. From February 2001, LURD forces repeatedly attacked Lofa County, sometimes allegedly from Guinea. During months of heavy fighting and numerous government offensives to recapture the area, LURD forces were able to secure control of a number of key towns, including Kolahun, Foya, and Voinjama for extended periods. In November 2001, LURD forces launched a new offensive, westward into Bong, Cape Mount, and Bomi counties. In the first quarter of 2002, LURD forces also took the strategic Lofa County town of Zorzor, attacked the town of Sawmill, and reportedly also attacked the towns of Klay, Suehn, and Kakata, some fifty miles from Monrovia.

Abuses by LURD Forces

Though apparently less widespread and systematic than those committed by Liberian government forces, LURD combatants have also been responsible for serious human rights abuses, including rape and summary executions of suspected government collaborators. These abuses are detailed in some of the testimonies obtained by Human Rights Watch that appear in the last section of this report. Scores of boys and young men have also been forcibly recruited into LURD's fighting units, civilians have been forced to act as porters of food and ammunition, and LURD forces have restricted civilians' freedom of movement.

Numerous witnesses reported to Human Rights Watch that when they enter captured towns LURD rebels conduct limited political sensitization efforts and attempt to reassure local civilians that the government forces, not they, were the target of the attack. Witnesses also described how on several occasions LURD combatants had sought to minimize harm to civilians by allowing them to leave, and in some cases had escorted civilians out of an area of conflict. In one case, LURD commanders gathered together tens of children who had become separated during an attack and later facilitated reunification with their parents.

The leadership of the LURD also appears to be making some effort to ensure that their combatants respect the rights of civilians. LURD leaders whom Human Rights Watch interviewed in December 2001 in Guinea said that all LURD military units were headed by commanders who had been given strict orders not to abuse human rights. The LURD leaders also said they were trying to establish a system of civil administration in the areas over which they assumed control, and had appointed a provost marshal with responsibility for addressing cases of abuse of authority in such LURD-held areas of Liberia. Several combatants described being briefed by their field commanders on the LURD's Standard Operating Procedures, which reportedly forbid rape, looting, and the summary execution of civilians, and indicated that steps had been taken to discipline offenders on several occasions—though some of the methods used to punish soldiers, including summary execution, clearly breach international human rights standards. Human Rights Watch was not able to obtain a copy of the Standard Operating Procedures, despite several requests to LURD leaders.

Witnesses on several occasions said that LURD commanders had intervened to stop the rape or killing of civilians, and LURD commanders stated that they had punished wrongdoers within their forces. One mid-level

LURD patrol commander told Human Rights Watch that he had executed several Sierra Leonean former members of the West Side Boys who were fighting for LURD and who had perpetrated atrocities against civilians in a village near Voinjama Town. Two other LURD commanders described punishing violators by sending them as “cannon fodder” during a frontline attack; at least one of the offending combatants was apparently killed as a result.

Despite this, LURD forces have committed a range of abuses:

- In July 2001, a LURD combatant raped a woman in a village near Foya, and other LURD fighters, according to a member of their unit later interviewed by Human Rights Watch, raped two fifteen-year-old girls and a woman in July and August 2001. The LURD forces that carried out these latter rapes also abducted some thirty civilians in the same period while on food-foraging missions around Kolahun.
- In October 2001, LURD forces near Foya summarily executed six men and two boys, whom they accused of collaborating with government forces.
- In January 2002, a LURD commander forced several men from Kolahun to porter ammunition then shot two of them in the leg for not walking fast enough, fatally injuring one.
- In February 2002, a driver with an international aid organization was killed in an ambush near Klay Junction, some thirty miles from Monrovia (although there is much contention around whether the attack at Klay was LURD or the result of inter-agency government fighting, Human Rights Watch interviews with several sources confirmed that a small group of LURD fighters was responsible).
- In March 2002, LURD forces killed an elderly woman, stabbed a thirteen year-old girl, and abducted ten men to act as porters during a food raid on Baladu village in Sierra Leone.

Several LURD combatants told Human Rights Watch that while they were ordered not to abuse civilians’ rights, some abuses, notably rape and looting, were regularly overlooked. They also admitted abducting young men and forcing them to join LURD’s forces, but denied recruiting child soldiers. While scores of young men reportedly joined the LURD voluntarily, forced conscription by the LURD was nevertheless the most frequently reported abuse received during Human Rights Watch interviews.

IV. PROSPECTS FOR SUSTAINABLE PEACE IN THE MANO RIVER UNION

The Sub-Regional Dynamics of the Conflict

The current conflict in Liberia is all the more complex because of the web of shifting military and political alliances, based on ethnicity and other factors, that have been established over recent years among the governments of Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea and the various armed opposition groups. As a result, the conflicts in all three countries have been intertwined and have shown a ready potential to overflow and destabilize neighboring countries.

Charles Taylor, both as leader of the NPFL and as president of Liberia since 1997, bears much of the responsibility for instigating the long-standing aggression and violence in the sub-region, both in Liberia and in particular through his support for the RUF in Sierra Leone. During the pre-1997 Liberian civil war, Taylor’s NPFL provided significant military and logistical backing to Foday Sankoh’s RUF to assist it to wage war against the government of Sierra Leone. The RUF committed widespread atrocities against Sierra Leonean civilians, murdering and mutilating thousands and establishing amputation of the hand as its signature abuse. Taylor continued to give the RUF support even after he became Liberia’s president in 1997, in breach of U.N. arms embargos against both Liberia and the RUF. In return, when Taylor’s government came under armed attack from Liberian dissidents in 1999, 2000 and 2001, RUF forces assisted in expelling them from Liberia.

Taylor’s support for the RUF was countered by Sierra Leone and Guinea. Together with the Nigerian-led West African peacekeeping force ECOMOG, they supported the formation of an anti-Taylor rebel faction, the United Liberation Movement for Democracy in Liberia (ULIMO), during the Liberian civil war. ULIMO forces entered Liberia through Sierra Leone and relied heavily on Sierra Leone for logistic support. In turn, ULIMO fighters helped the Sierra Leone government in its conflict with the RUF.

LURD fighters based in and funded by Guinea have launched repeated hit-and-run attacks against towns in northwest Liberia since June 2000. In retaliation, from September 2000 to April 2001, combined forces of Liberian government troops, RUF fighters, and Guinean dissidents, launched cross-border raids into Guinea, where they attacked towns and refugees camps containing Sierra Leonean and Liberian refugees, causing thousands to become further displaced and killing and wounding hundreds of refugees and Guinean civilians.

These Liberian-led incursions into Guinea were opposed by Guinean government forces, backed by members of Sierra Leonean civil defense force militias and Guinea-based LURD fighters. They pushed back the Liberian and RUF forces, and the Guinean army also carried out helicopter, artillery and ground attacks into RUF-held areas of northern Sierra Leone, killing scores of civilians and burning villages.

As the conflict in Sierra Leone has reduced, with the large-scale deployment of U.N. peacekeeping forces, demobilization of combatants, and elections scheduled for May 2002, the conflict in Liberia itself has been exacerbated since September 2001 by the arrival of many former fighters from Sierra Leone's civil war crossing over to fight as mercenaries. These include former member of the RUF, the civil defense forces (primarily Kamajors), and the West Side Boys (comprising former soldiers in the Sierra Leone army), who have been signing up to fight either for the Liberian government or for the LURD.

Civilians have borne the brunt of the violence and abuses arising from the conflicts in Liberia and the other countries of the Mano River Union, and it is clear that they will continue to do so if the current conflict is allowed to spread. It is imperative, therefore, that all possible efforts are made by the international community to bring an end to the fighting and to establish the conditions for a sustainable peace and the protection of human rights.

In this context, it should be a priority to maintain and strengthen existing U.N.-mandated controls on the flow of weapons that could destabilize the sub-region, and to establish the institutions and mechanisms necessary to break the cycle of impunity and ensure that those responsible for abusing human rights are held to account. To achieve this, the international community will need to adopt a comprehensive sub-regional approach if there is to be any hope for sustainable peace in Liberia.

Guinea and the Liberian Conflict

The government of Guinea is currently fueling the Liberian conflict by providing logistic and some financial and military support to the LURD rebels; although LURD fighters complained to Human Rights Watch that what they received from Guinea was inadequate. Evidence indicates that this support is being given with the knowledge and support of high-ranking Guinean officials. The LURD leader Sekou Conneh, a Liberian Mandingo, has access to Guinean President Lansana Conteh, through his wife Ayesha Conneh, who has been the president's spiritual advisor since she foretold a 1996 coup attempt. Human Rights Watch interviewed some fifteen LURD recruits from Sierra Leone, who, after arriving in Conakry by boat, described being picked up at the wharf by men in Guinean military uniform. They then described being housed in "safe houses" which were frequented by men in military uniform. Most described being transported across Guinea to Liberia in military convoys, where they received new uniforms and guns, said, by their commanders, to have come from Guinea. A few recruits described seeing men dressed in Guinean military uniform going in and out of LURD camps around Kolahun and Voinjama. Numerous civilians used by the LURD as porters described to Human Rights Watch how they were forced to walk to the Guinea border where they were ordered to carry arms, ammunition and supplies back to LURD bases in Lofa County. Wounded LURD soldiers and Liberian civilians described being evacuated from towns around Lofa County to hospitals in Conakry for treatment.

In view of the close links between the Guinean government and the LURD rebel forces in Liberia, the participation of Guinean troops in the U.N. peacekeeping mission in Sierra Leone, UNAMSIL, should give cause for concern. The Guinean contingent of UNAMSIL is currently deployed in Sierra Leone's Pujehun District, which borders Liberia, raising fears that this area too could become a base of operations for the LURD, enabling them to strike into Liberia from two directions. Already, some problems have been reported. On February 27, 2002, some thirty Guinean UNAMSIL troops, under the command of Captain John Fadika, entered the Jimmi

Bagbo Liberian refugee camp in Sierra Leone “on a mission,” interrogated the Liberian refugees about the nature of the camp population, and ordered the refugee women to cook for them. The incident, which frightened the Liberian refugees, was a breach of UNAMSIL practice and of international refugee protection standards, which guarantee the civilian and humanitarian nature of refugee camps, and was carried out without prior notification of the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which runs the camp. Although immediate steps by UNHCR and UNAMSIL were taken to reprimand the Guinean troops, the incident underscored the ease with the Guinean UNAMSIL contingent could misuse its position to access or intimidate Liberian refugees in Sierra Leone.

Sierra Leone and the Liberian Conflict

Growing numbers of Liberian refugees and combatants are crossing into Sierra Leone. At the same time, LURD fighters are clandestinely recruiting and establishing a supply line along the Sierra Leone/Liberia border, despite the Sierra Leone government’s refusal to allow the LURD to operate from its territory. This could compromise the safety and security of the Liberian refugees, and destabilize the fragile peace in Sierra Leone.

As of February 2002, UNHCR had registered some 10,000 Liberian refugees in Sierra Leone in camps, and estimated that another 10,000 were living without international assistance in border towns. UNHCR anticipates that this number will grow significantly, and are planning for the arrival of a further 50,000 Liberian refugees in Sierra Leone in the coming year. Efforts are underway to move refugees away from the border areas in accordance with international refugee protection standards.

In addition to refugees, both Liberian government troops and LURD rebel soldiers often cross from Liberia into Sierra Leone for the purpose of looting, to sell on looted goods, to buy provisions, to escape fighting, and, in a few cases, to abduct people who are then forced to work as porters for them. In February 2002, for example, AFL soldiers appeared in Batwono and Bobu, on the Sierra Leone side of the border, and forced local residents to buy their looted goods. In March 2002, LURD forces attacked Baladu village in Sierra Leone, killing one civilian and abducting ten as porters. Liberian army deserters are also to be found on the Sierra Leone side of the border, where they could present an additional security threat. There appears to be no consistent policy on the part of either the Sierra Leonean government or UNAMSIL on how to address this problem. In the first quarter of 2002, Sierra Leone police detained at least ten AFL soldiers, including one lieutenant-colonel.

There is an urgent need for border security to be strengthened, including by screening to ensure that combatants are clearly distinguished and separated from civilians seeking refugee protection in Sierra Leone. The Sierra Leonean government needs to establish an adequate police presence along the border areas, establish a status determination body to screen combatants from refugees. Additionally, there is a need for improved policing to ensure that refugees are adequately protected and to guarantee the civilian nature of all refugee camps.

V. THE ROLE OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

During the past decade, the international community’s interventions in Liberia, largely under the auspices of the U.N. and ECOWAS, have repeatedly focused on restoring a short-term peace, without adequately addressing the long-term causes of the war, including continuing impunity for gross human rights abuses and blatant disregard for the rule of law in Liberia.

Examples abound, including the following: During the pre-1997 civil war, ECOMOG forces in Liberia actively contributed to the proliferation of the anti-Taylor rebel factions that were themselves responsible for serious abuses and are resurfacing today, including among the LURD combatants; the U.N. presence in Liberia during the war was limited to a small observer mission without adequate authority to address regional political interference or abuses by ECOMOG or by Liberian government or rebel forces; the U.N. backed a peace accord that granted a blanket amnesty to faction fighters and did not create any international mechanism to hold violators accountable; fearful of a return to active fighting, the U.N. rushed to hold the 1997 national elections before important provisions of the peace accord were implemented, including the restructuring of the security forces and

the return of refugees; since the 1997 election, the U.N. Peace-Building Support Office in Liberia (UNOL) has remained silent on the continued erosion of the rule of law by the Taylor government.

With Liberia again on the brink, it is vital that the international community makes a much more concerted effort to prevent the war spreading and the emergence of yet another human rights catastrophe in West Africa. The developing crisis in Liberia, if unchecked and unresolved, threatens to erode the fragile peace and stability so painstakingly established in Sierra Leone, and may likely destabilize Guinea and the wider region. International engagement and action, therefore, is urgent, and it should address both the Taylor government's abusive security apparatus and domestic repression, and the regional nature of the conflict.

In May 2002, two significant developments could play an important role in determining how the next chapter of this sub-regional conflict unfolds: (1) The U.N. Security Council's determination of whether to renew sanctions against Liberia; and (2) the commencement of U.S. military assistance to the government of Guinea.

The U.N. Sanctions on Liberia

In May 2002, the Security Council will consider whether to extend an arms embargo and sanctions against the government of Liberia imposed in May 2001, following a determination of whether the government has ceased financial and military support to the RUF and ended imports and sales of Sierra Leone rough diamonds in breach of U.N. sanctions.

Action by the U.N. Security Council to address Liberia's role in destabilizing the sub region was prompted by the findings of the U.N. Expert Panel on Sierra Leone, established in 2000 to monitor violations of an arms embargo imposed on the RUF in 1997 and the links between these arms flows and the diamonds trade out of Sierra Leone.³ In a December 2000 report, the panel found that Liberia provided training, logistical support, a staging ground for attacks, and a safe haven for the RUF to retreat in return for diamonds mined in rebel-held Sierra Leone. The report, documenting violations of the Sierra Leone arms embargo and the link between the arms and diamond trades, noted that: "President Charles Taylor is actively involved in fueling the violence in Sierra Leone. He and a small coterie of officials and private businessmen around him are in control of a covert sanctions-busting apparatus that includes international criminal activity and the arming of the RUF in Sierra Leone."⁴

In response, the U.N. Security Council determined that the Liberian government support to the RUF in Sierra Leone constituted a threat to international peace and security in the region and sanctions against Liberia were imposed on March 7, 2001. In May 2001, the Security Council imposed a ban on Liberian diamond exports (believed in fact to derive mostly from Sierra Leone), an arms embargo on Liberia, and a ban on foreign travel by President Taylor and senior government officials and their families.⁵ On October 26, 2001, the U.N. Panel of Experts found "significant signs of improvement" in the region's security situation since the sanctions—

³ Security Council resolution 1132 (1997) prohibited arms sales to Sierra Leone; Resolution 1171 (1998) renewed the embargo, while stating that it applied only to nongovernmental forces in Sierra Leone.

⁴ Report of the Panel of Experts Appointed Pursuant to U.N. Security Council Resolution 1306 (2000), para. 19, in relation to Sierra Leone, December 2000, para. 212, available at <http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/1195.pdf>

⁵ U.N. Security Council resolution 1343 (2001) imposed on Liberia:

1. an arms embargo on the export of arms and related material to Liberia including weapons, ammunition, military vehicles and equipment, paramilitary equipment, and spare parts, as well as a ban on the provision to Liberia of related technical assistance and training relating to the manufacturing, provision, or maintenance of these items;
2. a ban on the import of any rough diamonds from Liberia, whether or not such diamonds originated in Liberia;
3. a travel ban on senior members of the Liberian government and military and their spouses, as well as any other individuals providing financial and military support to armed rebel groups in countries neighboring Liberia, as designated by the U.N. Sanctions Committee.

This resolution replaced the former arms embargo imposed during the civil war on all rebel groups by U. N. Security Council resolution 788 (1992). The arms embargo and the ban on the provision of related technical assistance and training entered into force immediately for a period of fourteen months. The diamond embargo and travel ban entered into force two months later on May 7, 2001, for a period of twelve months.

particularly the restoration of peace in Sierra Leone and the resumption of dialogue between Liberia and Guinea over cross border attacks. The report concluded that while Liberia had taken some steps to comply with U.N. requirements, particularly the grounding of Liberian aircraft suspected of sanctions busting, diamond sales and arms imports continued despite the prohibitions. The panel found that “a steady flow of new arms continued to enter into the country” in violation of the arms embargo, and provided detailed accounts of several embargo violations in 2001.

The Liberian government dismissed the findings during the Security Council debate on November 5, 2001, stating that the alleged violations had occurred prior to the imposition of the sanctions, and that the U.N. was not taking into account Liberia's new national security needs in light of the LURD attacks. In a legal opinion issued after the debate, the U.N. determined that the panel's findings were valid and met the terms of the investigation.

On April 11, 2002, the Panel of Experts submitted their second report to the U.N. Security Council. The Experts Panel recommended that the arms embargo against Liberia continue and be regularly monitored, because there is “credible evidence” that the government continued to violate the arms embargo. However, the panel stated that other sanctions against Liberia should be reviewed, in light of the positive peace process in Sierra Leone and the weakened links between the Liberian government and the RUF. The panel also recommended that all arms-producing and exporting countries should abstain from supplying weapons to all the Mano River Union countries, and that an immediate embargo be imposed on all non-state actors in the Mano River Union, including LURD. This report will be used by the U.N. Security Council in its deliberations on whether to continue the arms embargo and sanctions against Liberia beyond May 7, 2002.

U.S. Military Assistance to Guinea

The U.S. now has an important role to play vis-à-vis Guinea's support for the LURD. At this writing, the U.S. is about to begin a long-delayed training program for the Guinean military, focusing on border security. In June 2001, the Bush administration notified Congress of its intention to provide U.S. \$3 million in non-lethal training and equipment to the Guinean military to assist that country in defending against the destabilizing activities of the RUF and Charles Taylor in Liberia. Congressional concerns about abuses by the Guinean military led to additional reporting and monitoring requirements. The program was delayed, in part because the U.S. Special Forces trainers were deployed instead to Afghanistan in late 2001, but is scheduled to go forward in May 2002. State Department sources indicate that the training is designed in four six-week segments for four companies, but will pause after the first two to conduct an impact assessment, which will include monitoring of the troops' behavior once they are deployed on the border, as well as a human rights assessment. These sources further state that the U.S. has urged President Conte to curtail his support for the LURD, and that the second phase of the U.S. training will be predicated on a cut off in all Guinean support for the LURD. In addition, for fiscal year 2002, Congress approved U.S. \$26 million for the West African Stabilization Program, part of the U.S.'s voluntary peacekeeping operations budget, which includes \$8 million in additional training and equipment for the troops trained for peacekeeping in Sierra Leone, known as Operation Focus Relief.

U.S. pressure on the Liberian government to address human rights abuses has been strong. Most recently, the U.S. ambassador in Monrovia issued a March 1, 2002 statement condemning the renewed fighting in Liberia, and calling on the Liberian government to take steps to respect human rights and the rule of law. Although the statement stopped short of naming Guinea, the statement did call on “all parties in the region to cease supporting any group that seeks political change through violence and to respect their neighbor's borders.”⁶ Relations between the U.S. and Liberia deteriorated as President Taylor's role in fueling the war in Sierra Leone became more evident. In accordance with the U.N. sanctions imposed in May 2001, the U.S. prohibited the importation of Liberian rough diamonds. The Bush administration continued the Clinton policy of isolating Taylor politically and diplomatically, although less publicly. Administration officials have stressed that until Taylor ceases efforts to destabilize the sub-region, including his support for the RUF in Sierra Leone, U.S. policy will remain unchanged. Although the U.S. has expressed concern about the human rights situation in Guinea in its annual

⁶ U.S. Embassy Office of Public Affairs, “Statement Regarding Renewed Fighting in Liberia made by U.S. Ambassador Bismarck Myrick at the American Embassy,” March 1, 2002.

human rights report to the U.S. Congress, the U.S. has not made public statements expressing concern about Guinea's role in supporting the LURD incursion.⁷

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

To the Liberian Government

- Immediately cease all violations of international human rights and humanitarian law against civilians and civilian objects, including summary executions, rape, the burning of hospitals, and forced labor.
- Investigate all allegations of abuse by combatants, and put in place properly constituted disciplinary procedures and criminal sanctions, respecting the requirements of due process, to respond to allegations of abuse and to bring perpetrators to justice.
- Provide clear instructions to combatants ordering them to respect international human rights and humanitarian law, to ensure that combatants respect the rights of civilians.
- Guarantee the freedom of movement of all civilians, including those seeking to flee areas under attack.
- The Liberian security forces, including the ATU and SSS, and the police force should be made subject to clear and public directives governing the duties of its officers and should be subject to oversight by properly constituted civilian authorities. Human rights components should be integrated into all levels of training for state security officers, and effective disciplinary and other enforcement mechanisms should be put in place to respond to allegations of human rights abuse. All appropriate U.N. guidelines should be incorporated into security and police regulations, including the U.N. Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials, the U.N. Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials, and the U.N. Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under any Form of Detention or Imprisonment.

To the LURD

- Immediately cease all violations of international humanitarian law against civilians and civilian objects, including summary executions, rape, the burning of hospitals, and forced labor. Investigate all allegations of abuse by LURD combatants, and put in place properly constituted disciplinary procedures, respecting the requirements of due process, to respond to allegations of abuse, including killings, rape and other abuses cited in this report. Those found to have committed abuses should be removed from positions of responsibility and not permitted any contact with the civilian population.
- Provide clear instructions to combatants regarding international human rights and humanitarian law, to ensure that combatants respect the rights of civilians.
- Allow for freedom of movement of all civilians seeking to flee areas under attack.

⁷ In its annual 2001 human rights report on Guinea, the U.S. State Department noted: "Members of the security forces frequently committed serious human rights abuses, although there were fewer reported abuses than in previous years ... Serious human rights abuses include: Extrajudicial killings; disappearances; use of torture, beatings, and rape by police and military personnel; and police abuse of prisoners and detainees. Soldiers, police, and civilian militia groups killed, beat, and raped citizens, as well as refugees from Sierra Leone and Liberia. Security forces used arbitrary arrest and detention. Members of the security forces committed abuses with impunity. Prison conditions were inhuman and, combined with inadequate medical care, life threatening. Prolonged pretrial detention was a problem..." available at <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/af/8383.htm>.

To the Guinean Government

- Cease all military, logistical or other support to the LURD.

To the United Nations

To the Secretary-General

- Work with all relevant parties in the international community to bring sustained pressure to bear on the Mano River Union countries to prevent and punish war crimes and other abuses, to respect the rule of law and human rights, to end cross-border attacks, and to cease support for armed rebel activity. In particular, call on the Liberian government to take steps to restructure its security forces to ensure greater accountability, and on the Guinean government to end its support for the LURD.
- Recommend the replacement of the Guinean forces in the UNAMSIL operation in Sierra Leone with non-West African troops that are not implicated in the sub-regional conflict. At a minimum, the Guinea battalions should be removed from Pujehun District, and not be deployed near the Sierra Leone/Liberia border where the likelihood of their involvement in Liberian rebel support and/or refugee intimidation is higher. Work to secure and get commitments for the deployment of an adequate number of troops along the Sierra Leone/Liberia border to prevent cross-border attacks.

To the Security Council

- Maintain the arms embargo against the Liberian government, and extend the embargo to cover both sides to the conflict, thus including the LURD. Renew the mandate of the U.N. Panel of Experts, which has played a useful role in curtailing cross-border support for rebel groups in Sierra Leone. Extend its brief to enable it to continue to monitor illicit weapons flows into the sub-region, and to examine Guinea's role in the Liberian conflict, in order to make recommendations to the U.N. Security Council on measures that should be taken to establish sustainable peace in the sub-region, including possible further extensions of the arms embargo.
- Mandate the placement of international military observers and human rights monitors along the Guinea/Liberia and Sierra Leone/Liberia borders to monitor and investigate cross-border attacks.

To UNHCR

- Place all Liberian refugee camps away from the neighboring borders, and ensure as a priority the civilian nature of the refugee camps. Work closely with neighboring host governments to establish screening mechanisms at the border to separate Liberian combatants from refugees.

To the United States

- All U.S. military assistance to Guinea, scheduled to begin in May 2002, should be conditioned on an end to Guinean support for the LURD rebels.

VII. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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TESTIMONIES

Human Rights Abuses by Liberia Government Soldiers

- A thirty-year-old Gbandi man from Popalahun described how scores of Gbandi civilians hiding in the forest were rounded up by AFL soldiers in mid September 2001, and later killed in nearby Kamatehun; over thirty were burned in houses and some fifteen were executed on the orders of Commander “Zizemaza,” allegedly the commander of the “Jungle Force” AFL Division. He described how Gbandi people were targeted for their perceived support of the LURD:

We’d been living with the LURD people from March through August [2001] without too much trouble. In early September, we were attacked by the AFL and fled into the bush. A few days later, the AFL caught us and brought about eighty-five of us to Kamatehun where we were brought before Commander Zizemaza. He pointed at us and said: “You Gbandi people are the brothers and wives of the dissidents. We told you to go to Monrovia but you didn’t agree. We’ll kill any Gbandi person we see—so kill them.” There were over one hundred AFL soldiers; some RUF people were among them. Then thirty or so people, including my mother and sister, were tied with rope and put inside three houses. They begged, but the soldiers slapped them and told them to shut up. Then the soldiers lit the houses on fire, and stood guard at the doors to make sure our people didn’t escape. After that Zizemaza ordered about fifteen people to be killed—their throats were cut in the middle of the town square. They took the rest of us to Vahun and along the way set many villages on fire.⁸

- A Sierra Leonean refugee living in Liberia was caught hiding in the forest in October 2001 by AFL troops, and later taken to Vahun. He described how six men were executed for refusing to join the government forces, and six others burned in a house, again on the orders of Commander Zizemaza:

After catching eighteen of us, the AFL troops gave us ammunition to carry and we walked for three hours before reaching Vahun. There, we saw hundreds of troops in yellow t-shirts with ‘Jungle Lion’ written on them. The commander was one Zizemaza. They separated us by tribe: Kissis, Gbandis, and Sierra Leoneans. Then he ordered the heads of many of the young men to be shaved and told them they were going to be soldiers. I tried to defend myself by saying I was a Sierra Leonean and six others protested, saying they didn’t want that life. Hearing that, Zizemaza said: “You’re the ones who brought war to Kolahun. Take them behind the house and finish them.” We heard the “pa, pa, pa” of the gun six times and a later saw them lying dead. A few minutes later, six villagers, including women, were dragged inside a house and burned alive. We heard the soldiers saying: “Get rid of these Gbandi people.”⁹

- Two brothers, twenty-nine and seventeen years of age, from Kolahun, Lofa County, were caught in fighting as their town fell several times to rebel control. In December 2001, after government forces retook Kolahun, the two brothers witnessed AFL violence, rape, forced recruitment, and looting:

The AFL troops rounded everyone up and brought us into the town. The commander was Col. Stanley. They took everything from us—money, clothes, documents. They beat people and threatened to kill them, calling them rebel sympathizers. They were opening doors of houses and shooting at people in their houses. They were also burning houses. We were taken as a group and locked in one house at night. Three soldiers took six women—one was a young girl of

⁸ Human Rights Watch interview, March 21, 2002 (names and locations have been withheld to protect the safety of the victims).

⁹ Human Rights Watch interview, March 20, 2002.

twelve and another was pregnant—they were raped until about 4:00 a.m. We could hear them crying in the other room. In the morning they were brought back. They were weak. They told us: “They used us last night. We can’t do anything.” The pregnant woman told me that three men had raped her. The next day, the rebels attacked. The AFL soldiers made us carry their looted goods and flee with them to Foya, which was two-and-a-half hours away. Even the raped women were made to carry things for them. At Foya, we were made to take up arms for the AFL. They forced all the men to take up arms or be killed. We were finally able to escape on February 3, 2002 when rebels attacked again.¹⁰

- A twelve-year-old-boy who was also present when government forces recaptured Kolahun described how he was wounded, and at least five others killed, when AFL soldiers opened fire indiscriminately on civilians in December 2001:

The LURD told us the AFL were on the way and it was best for us to stay hiding in our houses. Then on Christmas day it happened. The fighting was heavy, and after several hours, the AFL captured the town. About twenty of us were hiding in one house. We heard a soldier yell, “give us the money,” and then without giving us time to respond, they walked in and started spraying us with bullets. There was blood everywhere and five people were killed. I had been hit in the leg. There were so many others killed by the soldiers that day in Kolahun.¹¹

- A thirty-five-year-old Gbandi woman from Kolahun witnessed AFL soldiers abducting women and girls, burning people in houses, and looting:

I was captured by the AFL on December 23, 2001. I was with my daughter and my sister’s daughter. My sister had gone to look for food for us. The soldiers told me to come with them. I told them that I couldn’t carry two babies, so they threatened to kill one of them. So I picked them both up and carried the two babies. I was beaten with the back of their guns for not walking fast enough. They took me, and about seventy others, to Yenahun. Before getting into town they separated all the young girls of about ten years old and up. I was almost taken, but I begged, saying I had two small children. So I was left. I know one woman in her twenties who was raped and then brought back. We were taken to Kamatehun with the AFL. We were too scared to leave—I saw them shoot one family, a man, wife, and their son, for trying to leave. While I was there with them, the women were made to look for food to cook for them. I saw four big houses there—burned down. Inside were burned bodies of all sizes. They had burned people alive. The AFL commander there was Col. Zizemaza. The AFL was stealing the zinc roofing from the buildings and making us carry it over the Sierra Leone border to sell it for them. I carried ten sheets, and when I got to Sierra Leone, I was able to escape. Both my baby and my sister’s baby died of sickness. I am here as a refugee alone.¹²

- A seventeen-year-old girl from Polmawan was abducted and raped by an AFL soldier around December 2001. She said:

I had been fleeing fighting for a year, living in the bush after the rebels attacked Foya. My father and brother were shot. Eventually, my mother and I were found hiding by government AFL troops. When they found us, they rounded up a group of us, and then escorted us to the Sierra Leone border. But as we were about to go over, one AFL soldier Daniel Madamooka, a

¹⁰ Human Rights Watch interview, March 18, 2002.

¹¹ Human Rights Watch interview, March 20, 2002.

¹² Human Rights Watch interview, March 18, 2002.

bodyguard of the AFL commander Mummy Wata [the name of a powerful mythical West African goddess], separated me from the rest of the crowd. My mother was crying, begging for him to let me go. I was crying. He took me back to Foya with him. I was made to cook, wash clothes, and collect food for him. For two nights he tried to sleep with me, and I refused. Finally, he forced himself on me. I cried because it hurt. I saw other girls like myself. When they capture you, they say: “You are my woman.” He did this to me for five nights. After some time, the rebels attacked Foya and I was able to escape to Sierra Leone in February 2002.¹³

- A twenty-six-year-old Kpelle man was in Sawmill when the AFL retook the town in January 2002. He was sleeping in a house with his thirty-year-old sister and her small son. Upon hearing noise outside early in the morning, his sister awoke, took her son by the hand, and went to the door to look out. One of a group of AFL officers standing outside shot the woman pointblank in the head. The brother said:

I heard the shooting and I rushed to the front door. I found my sister lying dead at the entrance. Her forehead was blown off. I tried to come out to get her son who had darted into the garden, but the AFL soldiers were shouting: “Don’t come out.” I called for her son to come back in. He finally ran in. He had been shot in his right hand. The bullet had passed right through his hand. I could hear the group of about thirty AFL soldiers talking outside. One of them was saying: “Who told you to fire. The damn girl has died.”¹⁴

- A twenty-six-year-old man in Klay was detained with three others by ATU officers in February 2002; they were accused of being rebels and tortured:

They arrested us in the evening around 8:00 p.m. at the joint security office at the Klay gate. They made us stand for one hour upside down against the wall, on our hands with our feet against the wall. Then they beat our hands with their gun butts whenever we put a foot back on the ground. They put a gun in my mouth and they said, “Eat Charles Taylor’s biscuit.” I was then put into a cell and held overnight. The next morning, we were made to clean up the area, cut the grass and bush, and then released.¹⁵

- A Mandingo shop owner from Masambalahun described how AFL soldiers detained three youths in September 2001 whom they accused of being LURD supporters and later killed. He fled to Sierra Leone in December 2001, after his forty-three-year-old brother was killed by AFL soldiers as they looted his shop:

I’m a businessman and also a Mandingo—which is not easy these days. On September 2, 2001, things were pretty tense and there were rumors of a rebel attack. In the afternoon, as several of my friends had gathered around the shop to talk, three of them—two Mandingos and one Gbandi—were arrested by AFL Lt. Mustapha who accused them of waiting for the rebels to come into town. He said, “Don’t worry, we’re going to kill you before your brothers [the LURD] come in to town.” Later that night we heard cries coming from the AFL headquarters, and the next morning the AFL told us to come and get the body of M. He was bleeding from his mouth and nose, and had marks all over his body. Later we saw the other two being put on a truck and driven away, and the next day a friend coming from Vahun said he’d seen their bodies lying on the road. I finally decided to leave on December 18, 2001 after the AFL attacked and looted all the

¹³ Human Rights Watch interview, March 20, 2002.

¹⁴ Human Rights Watch interview, March 18, 2002.

¹⁵ Human Rights Watch interview, March 18, 2002.

property from my shop, and beat my elder brother to death for refusing to tell them where we'd hidden the generator. I'd had enough.¹⁶

- A surgical nurse who operated a small make-shift hospital in Sasahun, watched as AFL troops under the command of Colonel Stanley, looted the village and summarily executed his wife and five others, including a patient recovering from an appendix operation, in April 2001:

After nearby Kolahun fell to the dissidents, the retreating government soldiers flooded into our town. They were on the rampage—looting, beating, swearing. I guess they were angry because they'd been forced out by the dissidents. About fifty of them surrounded the clinic, and tied me and six others up. They stripped us, poked us with bayonets and beat us until we were all bleeding. They said, "You're all dissidents—you want to stay here and support your Mandingo, Muslim brothers." They asked my wife for money. She gave them some, but kept our savings hidden. They eventually found it and were so angry that they shot her in the back right in our bedroom. Then Stanley said: "They're our enemy, kill the others." Three AFL soldiers; Dragon, Digger, and Rasta, shot the other five including one of my patients. I escaped several hours later and eventually found my children hiding in the bush. I gathered them together and had to tell them that their mother was dead. We all cried together and after that I decided to flee.¹⁷

- A twenty-six-year-old man traveling through checkpoints in Cape Mount County in March 2002 saw five men from his neighborhood that he knew who had been forcibly conscripted. Although not uniformed, these men were armed and guarding the government army checkpoints. He said:

After the president made a speech in February [2002] saying certain areas in Monrovia were harboring rebel collaborators, hundreds of men were arrested. Street boys were also being rounded up. The SOD [Special Operations Division] police arrived heavily armed in landcruiser jeeps. Men in my neighborhood of Duala were arrested and taken to the national police headquarters. I slept in the ceiling that night. Before I could leave the house the next morning, the security forces entered and arrested my brother and his friend (a Sierra Leonean refugee). They were taken to the National Police headquarters, where some people were beaten with gun butts and belts. I was lucky that they didn't find me hiding. My brother was released the next day after paying the police L\$1,000 (approximately U.S. \$17.00). I am still worried about my brother's friend who is a Sierra Leonean refugee, because he had no one to bring money to get him out. One friend of mine who works with the ATU [Anti-Terrorist Unit] told me: "If the rebels continue to advance, this will affect young men." I decided to leave the country. I took transport to the Sierra Leone border; there was heavy security at checkpoints. On the way, I saw friends of mine guarding the road at Klay. They were not wearing uniforms, but they had AK 47 guns. One of them, Eric, who used to grind cassava at the market, saw me and came over to smoke a cigarette with me while we waited for the security check. He told me: "They brought us here by force from the prison. They told the ones that didn't have any money to pay them to join the army or we would be sent to a death camp." I also saw four other people I knew there: Emmanuel, who sold things in Duala market; Samuel, who sold shoes in Duala; Safaa, who used to be a car boy; and Manny, a Kru tailor. At the border checkpoint into Sierra Leone, the Liberian security took L\$250 (U.S.\$4) from me and my Walkman before letting me pass.¹⁸

¹⁶ Human Rights Watch interview, March 17, 2002.

¹⁷ Human Rights Watch interview, November 13, 2001.

¹⁸ Human Rights Watch interview, March 17, 2002.

- A university student described how he was arrested in February 2002 in Monrovia while on a visit to his mother:

I was arrested with two other friends of mine by the SOD police. The police were shouting: “You people are terrorists.” We were taken to the national police headquarters and lined up in front of the building. There were about one hundred other men. A black car with black tinted windows drove by slowly. There was someone inside the car pointing out people; there were about twenty who were taken to one side and classified as terrorists. The rest of us were taken to the cells downstairs and told to pay L\$1,000 (U.S.\$17). Once you paid, you were released, but because the searches were ongoing, you could be rearrested if you were not careful. Some people with ties to the former ULIMO rebel group were being taken in every day for questioning.¹⁹

Human Rights Abuses by Rebel LURD Forces

- A young woman described how her husband and seven other civilians were summarily executed in October 2001 by LURD forces near Foya:

The ULIMO [some interviewees referred to LURD as ULIMO] soldiers collected eighteen of us from the bushes and brought us to their commander, Col. Rambo. They beat us and accused of us giving food and information to the government troops. They separated the men from the women and then the commander said: “These people are our enemy. They should be killed.” My husband, his father and brothers were told to lie down face up, and they were shot one after the other. My mother-in-law watched as her husband and three sons were murdered before her eyes.²⁰

- A woman from Faasa in Foya District, whose husband was killed in 1993 during the last war, described her son’s abduction by the rebels:

LURD forces came into the villages and asked for our sons to fight with them. My son of eighteen was taken from me. We were all crying. They also asked for money. I paid them what I had, but they still would not release my son. I know another woman who was also crying, and so they gave her back her youngest son, her last child who was ten years old.²¹

- A doctor who was serving at Foya Hospital witnessed LURD forces killing, looting, and burning the hospital:

The LURD dissidents attacked Foya first on February 8, 2001. There was a lot of shooting and the dissidents killed two people. The AFL pushed them out of town. On April 2, 2001, there was a second attack. The dissidents burnt down the hospital, looted the town and killed civilians including my mother Masia. The dissidents also took a number of boys away, we don’t know what has happened to them.²²

- A seventeen-year-old woman from Foya, Lofa County was captured and raped by LURD rebels in mid-2001. After raping her, they left her, bleeding from the vagina.

I was caught after I ran away from my home with my grandmother. My grandmother was killed, and I lived for six months in the surrounding bush area. I was captured by two LURD rebels dressed in red t-shirts and red headbands who told me they were fighting the government. They

¹⁹ Human Rights Watch interview, March 17, 2002.

²⁰ Human Rights Watch interview, March 16, 2002.

²¹ Human Rights Watch interview, March 16, 2002.

²² Human Rights Watch interview, March 12, 2002.

told me that they would kill me if I resisted them, and then both raped me. After raping me, they left me bleeding. I was sick for a long time, and did not have my period for six months. Even now, I have pain in my stomach.²³

- A woman from Foya district reported being subjected to forced labor and raped by LURD soldiers:

They made us fetch water, cook, beat rice and go out to the bush to get food from the surrounding villages. Once, sometime in July [2001] one rebel forced me in an abandoned house and told the other two rebels to stand guard at the doors. Then he forced himself on me. What could I do? I was afraid to say anything to the commanders.²⁴

- A man from Masambalahun described the abusive practices of LURD Commander Blackie, who forced men to carry ammunition and looted goods, and then shot two of them for walking too slowly. His twelve-year-old son was forcefully abducted by the same commander.

Everyone knew when Commander Blackie was in control, we should all stay the hell out of the way. He was always forcing the strong men to carry ammunition and goods from Massabalahun to Fassama to Kolahun. Once I saw his people shoot two civilians for walking too slowly. One of them was brought to Kolahun where he later died. In December [2001] those people captured my twelve-year-old son and took him to Foya for training. I later heard they took him to Fassama where there was fighting going on. Of course he wasn't the only boy taken—but he's the one I care about. He was my firstborn son and now he's gone.²⁵

²³ Human Rights Watch interview, March 16, 2002.

²⁴ Human Rights Watch interview, March 16, 2002.

²⁵ Human Rights Watch interview, March 21, 2002.

*Human Rights Watch
Africa Division*

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