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LIBERIA: A HUMAN RIGHTS DISASTER

Violations of the Laws of War by All Parties to the Conflict

INTRODUCTION.....	1
BACKGROUND TO THE CONFLICT.....	2
VIOLATIONS OF THE LAWS OF ARMED CONFLICT.....	4
Violations of the Laws of Armed Conflict by the Insurgents.....	5
A. Killings of Civilians.....	5
B. Executions Committed by Prince Johnson.....	8
C. Torture, Ill-treatment, and Executions of Detainees.....	9
D. Conscription of Children.....	10
E. The Taking of Hostages.....	11
F. Rebel Killings of Fleeing Soldiers.....	11
Violations by the Liberian Army.....	12
A. Killings of Civilians.....	13
B. Torture, Inhumane Treatment, and Execution of Detainees.....	14
C. Looting, Pillaging, and Abuse.....	16
THE HUMANITARIAN NEEDS OF THE REFUGEES.....	16
A. Harassment of the Refugees.....	19
B. Medical Care.....	19
HUMANITARIAN NEEDS WITHIN LIBERIA.....	20
U.S. POLICY.....	21
A. Relief Assistance.....	22
B. Liberian Refugees in the U.S.....	23
C. Travel Documents For Liberian Refugees in West Africa.....	23
D. Increased Refugee Slots for Liberians.....	24
E. Screening of Human Rights Abusers.....	24
F. U.S. Pressure on Human Rights.....	25
THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY.....	26

INTRODUCTION:

In the course of less than a year, Liberia has become a human rights disaster. Over half its population has been displaced from their homes, including over 500,000 who are refugees in West Africa. All parties to the conflict have committed grave abuses of human rights against civilians, violating the humanitarian standards governing non-international armed conflict.

During a visit to the Côte d'Ivoire from September 11-19, Holly Burkhalter, Washington Director of Human Rights Watch, interviewed newly-arrived refugees in several Ivorian villages in the area of Tabou, as well as refugees who fled in July to the Ivorian department of Guiglo.¹ The following report describes abuses by the Liberian Army, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), and the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL) as reported by the eyewitnesses. A May 1990 Africa Watch report entitled "Flight From Terror" described the wave of human rights abuses committed largely by government forces in the first three months of the conflict. This update includes extensive new information on abuses by the NPFL, as well as additional material on abuses by government forces.

A summary of Africa Watch's findings follows:

- * The Liberian Army has committed gross violations of human rights and violations of the Geneva Conventions, including killings of civilians throughout President Doe's ten year rule, and particularly within the past year. Krahn soldiers' widespread killing of Mano and Gio civilians in early 1990 set the stage for extraordinary reprisals by the NPFL against Krahn civilians in mid-1990.
- * The NPFL has violated the Geneva Conventions by committing widespread killing and torture of noncombatants, particularly Krahn and Mandingos. As a result roughly two thirds of Liberia's 125,000 Krahn have fled the country and the remainder are at risk of genocide.
- * Children under the age of 15 are serving with NPFL forces and are engaging in killings and abuse of civilians. The recruitment or enlistment of children violates international humanitarian law.
- * Undisciplined NPFL fighters are engaging in widespread killing and looting throughout Liberia.
- * Prince Johnson, the head of the INPFL, is himself implicated in the murder of

¹ During part of the visit, Ms. Burkhalter accompanied a delegation from Refugees International and Project Mercy, which visited the Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea to assess the humanitarian needs of the refugees. Refugees International is a refugee policy organization based in Washington D.C.; Project Mercy is a humanitarian organization based in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

civilians, and he and his forces are responsible for the murder in custody of President Doe and his entourage, in violation of humanitarian law.

- * The "peacekeeping force" from the Economic Community of West Africa (ECOWAS) is including in its ranks soldiers from the Liberian army as well as the INPFL. Liberian army soldiers continue to loot, raid, and harass in Monrovia.
- * Liberian refugees in Sierra Leone, Guinea, and the Côte d'Ivoire are in need of greater food and medical assistance from the international community.
- * Africa Watch calls upon the United Nations Secretary General to appoint a special representative on Liberia to help negotiate an end to the conflict and coordinate emergency assistance to civilians within Liberia.
- * Africa Watch calls upon the Bush Administration to increase relief aid to the refugees, to permit more Liberian refugees to enter the United States, and screen out known human rights abusers from those Liberians permitted to enter the United States. The United States has a special responsibility for Liberia, not only because of long-standing historical ties, but also because support for the Doe government helped lay the groundwork for the human rights abuses being committed today.
- * Western European governments seem to regard the Liberian crisis as a "U.S. problem." Increased contributions for relief assistance to the refugees and to Liberia itself are needed, and Western European governments should press the issue of Liberia at the United Nations.

BACKGROUND TO THE CONFLICT:

The current crisis began when a small group of rebel insurgents attacked the Liberian border town of Butuo, in Nimba County, in late December 1989. The Liberia army conducted an extremely brutal counterinsurgency operation in the area in early 1990, in which soldiers killed civilians indiscriminately, burned whole villages, looted, and rampaged. The majority of the victims of this period were Manos and Gios, who have been regarded with hostility and suspicion by the government since an abortive coup attempt in 1985, led by a former officer from Nimba county, which is populated by Manos and Gios.

The army's atrocities against civilians in Nimba County was so vast that within four months, some 160,000 Liberians had fled into neighboring Guinea and the Côte d'Ivoire. The greater portion of the first large wave of refugees to flee in the January - May period, however, appeared to be Mano and Gio people escaping abuses by government soldiers.² Some, however,

²For a more complete description of the background to the conflict and abuses by Doe's troops in Nimba County, see

were Krahn civilians escaping gross abuses by the NPFL forces, which killed noncombatants from that ethnic group who were encountered in the area.

The atrocities committed by the Liberian army in Nimba County and other areas of Liberia intensified the insurgency, which had begun with only a few hundred rebels. Many of the new recruits were children from Nimba County whose parents had been killed by soldiers in the first months of the conflict. As Charles Taylor's NPFL grew, control of those forces evaporated. By July, the NPFL was committing abuses on a massive scale against the Krahn, mirroring, in intensity if not in numbers, Liberian Army abuses against the Mano and Gio people of Nimba County. The brutality of rebel troops is clearly motivated, though in no way excused, by the desire to avenge the abuses of 1985 and early 1990.

The abuses by NPFL forces and by government soldiers against innocent combatants from rival ethnic groups (described below) are not the inevitable consequence of communal hatred. Liberians of various ethnic groups lived together peaceably for decades, and, indeed, intermarriage between ethnic groups (including Americo-Liberians -- the descendants of freed American slaves who settled in Liberia in the 1800s) was common.

It was not until Samuel K. Doe took power in a bloody military coup in 1980, and began a policy of rewarding his own people, that ethnic differences developed into a political problem. By surrounding himself with soldiers and cronies from his own group, the Krahn, promoting and providing economic and educational opportunities for them at the expense of others, and permitting and even encouraging egregious abuses against civilians by Krahn military and police, President Doe's policies sowed the seeds of hatred and set the stage for a civil war that has in the course of nine months reached near-genocidal proportions.³

The situation in Liberia today clearly reflects a high degree of violence motivated by ethnic tensions. But even after extraordinary abuses by both sides to the conflict, Liberian noncombatants, living in refugee camps and left to their own devices, have shown that they can live together in peace.

Africa Watch's May 1990 report, Liberia: Flight From Terror, Testimony of Abuses in Nimba County.

³A report issued by the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights in 1986 noted, "Liberia is rife with talk of revenge. The possibility of massive reprisals against the Krahn if President Doe is violently removed from power is conceded by all sides. The Krahn themselves are living in fear." Liberia: A Promise Betrayed, page 5.

VIOLATIONS OF THE LAWS OF ARMED CONFLICT:

Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions (the rules of war governing non-international armed conflict) requires that rebel forces and government forces alike take steps minimizing harm to civilians.⁴

The presence of foreign forces from the Economic Community of West Africa (ECOWAS) does not change the relevance of Common Article 3 to the conduct of the rebel and government forces. As a human rights organization, Africa Watch does not take a position on the presence of ECOWAS military forces (known as ECOMOG) but we are concerned about allegations of abuses by these forces. We have received credible reports that ECOMOG has rocketed some civilian areas of Monrovia and its suburbs, and that ECOMOG soldiers have looted and stolen. Africa Watch has not been able to conduct its own investigation to substantiate these reports. However, in light of frequent reports from various sources, Africa Watch is calling upon ECOWAS to confine ECOMOG's role strictly to a peacekeeping function and to take measures to prevent and to punish abuses against civilians, and conduct that violates humanitarian law.

Africa Watch has received reliable and credible reports that the remnants of the Liberian army are fighting alongside ECOMOG against the NPFL. According to a Liberian civilian who recently came to the U.S. from Monrovia, Liberian army soldiers are being used as guides to assist ECOMOG in flushing out NPFL rebels. This witness estimates that approximately 2,000 Liberian troops and about another 1,000 civilians -- most of whom are family members of the Krahn soldiers or Mandingos -- are housed at Doe's executive mansion. They emerge, heavily armed, from the mansion to raid areas within Monrovia for food.⁵

Africa Watch is concerned about such reports of collaboration between the ECOMOG forces and the brutal and discredited soldiers from the Liberian army, whose participation in gross abuses of human rights is well known. We are also concerned about the participation of INPFL soldiers in ECOMOG operations. The INPFL, like the Liberian army, has consistently violated, and continues to violate human rights. There should be no place for such forces in the ECOMOG "peacekeeping" force.

Article 3 requires that persons taking no active part in hostilities, or combatants who have laid down their arms or are wounded or sick, shall be treated humanely "without any adverse distinction founded on race, color, religion or faith, sex, birth or wealth, or any other similar criteria." Summary executions, cruel treatment, the taking of hostages, and humiliating and

⁴In some non-international armed conflict situations, Protocol II of the Geneva Accords also applies, which imposes an even stricter standard on parties to the conflict. Protocol II does not bind Liberia, because the government of Liberia did not ratify it.

⁵Interview in Washington D.C., October 17, 1990.

degrading treatment are strictly prohibited, and the wounded and sick are to be collected and cared for.

Violations of the Laws of Armed Conflict by the Insurgents:

The insurgent forces have consistently violated these standards from the outset of the insurgency in late December. Charles Taylor is the commander-in-chief of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) which comprises the bulk of rebel strength. Prince Johnson was a NPFL commander with Charles Taylor until he broke off in February to form the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL). Johnson's forces, thought to number no more than 500 fighters, are based in Monrovia, and control several parts of the city, including Bushrod Island. Troops under both commanders have engaged in violations of the laws of armed conflict, including executions of civilians and captured soldiers, torture, and mutilation.

Gross abuses against civilians by the rebels have accelerated in the course of the conflict. In the period since late June, when rebel forces began to make significant inroads into the Krahn stronghold of Grand Gedeh, and violations reached staggering proportions.

The Mandingo people, a mercantile tribe considered too accommodating to Doe, have also been singled out for persecution and death by rebel troops. Because they have tend to be more wealthy than other Liberians, they have been perceived as having profited from their relationship with the authorities. Many of the refugees pouring into Guinea in recent months are Mandingo business people from Nimba County fleeing the NPFL.

A. Killings of Civilians:

Africa Watch interviewed a large number of mainly Krahn refugees in the Côte d'Ivoire who had fled from Grand Gedeh in late June to escape rebel abuses. The majority had come from neighboring villages in Liberia, a walk of approximately three hours, and are concentrated in the Ivorian department of Toulepleu. According to relief personnel, the level of violence against Krahn noncombatants from June to the present has been so great that the Krahn have poured out of Grand Gedeh at the rate of 1,000 per day. At this time, U.S. officials and relief personnel estimate the number of Krahn refugees in the Toulepleu area to be approximately 75,000 to 80,000.⁶ This represents a significant portion of the total Krahn population of Liberia, estimated at 4% of the national population, or approximately 125,000 people.

Liberian refugees in the Ivorian village of Pahoubli had entered Côte d'Ivoire at various

⁶When Africa Watch visited Côte d'Ivoire in late February, there were approximately 63,000 refugees there. By now, the numbers have reached 162,000. The increase is largely from civilians fleeing starvation, or Krahn people fleeing rebel soldiers.

times since July. One group crossed the border about a month ago. They fled their village of Gbarzon in Grand Gedeh when rebels attacked them in the middle of the night. Witnesses described how the rebels rocketed houses and shot people in their beds. Sick people or the elderly who couldn't run were killed, and virtually the entire village fled into the forest. When asked how many had lost family members, the group of approximately 50 adults all raised their hands, stating that they didn't know if their family members were dead, still in Liberia, or somewhere else in the Côte d'Ivoire.

One refugee, Harris B., a junior high school teacher and a former commissioner (superintendent) of his district in Liberia, described how rebels entered Grand Gedeh on June 27. His account follows:

The rebels entered Grand Gedeh on June 27. They killed everybody in the area -- Krahn, Mandingo, and Bassa. They didn't try to choose between the groups, but killed everybody because they thought they were all Krahn in Grand Gedeh. I saw them kill a mother and her three-year old twins, and two others. My two brothers are missing, and three other members of my family. I don't know where they are because we fled in all directions when the rebels attacked. So many people died that you don't have enough paper to write down all their names.⁷

According to this witness, there were soldiers in the town, "but not enough to protect us, they were all killed." Under humanitarian law, the presence of soldiers in an area inhabited by civilians does not permit the rebels to attack the village indiscriminately. The armed soldiers themselves are permissible military targets but civilians and civilian structures such as homes and schools may not be targeted as such. The combatants have the duty to avoid or minimize harm to civilians even when attacking soldiers who may be in the vicinity. That is, it is not permissible for them to shoot into a crowd of civilians because they think that a few enemy soldiers are among them.

Refugees interviewed in the Ivorian town of Pekan Houebli in the Toulepleu area had much the same experiences. Rev. Peter D. fled Duegee Town on June 14th when rebels entered the town and shot and killed civilians and rocketed homes. Rev. Peter D. saw a seventeen year old boy shot and killed with no questions asked. Jackson T., aged approximately 60, also fled from Duegee Town at the same time. Two of his sons, Ricky and Arthur, who were unarmed, were killed by the NPFL.⁸

Another of the refugees, Harry P., also fled Duegee Town when the NPFL attacked. His account follows:

⁷Interview in Pahoubli, September 16, 1990.

⁸Interview in Pekan Houebli, September 16, 1990.

I fled Duegee Town when I saw soldiers and rebels fighting. I saw rebels shooting people indiscriminately, including women and children. I can't tell you their names because I was running, I just saw them drop when hit by soldiers, and I couldn't go back to identify them.⁹

Africa Watch is extremely concerned about the failure of NPFL leader Charles Taylor to take any measures to prevent such gross abuses against noncombatants. In particular, we are concerned about the killings of civilians targeted solely on account of the fact that they are Krahn or Mandingo.

An interview with a Liberian religious minister reveals the seriousness of this lack of command and control. Rev. A., aged 60, lived in Buchanan where his wife and children remain. He was captured by the rebels five separate times in the period of April through July. According to his testimony, he was singled out in part because he had been appointed by the Doe Government (against his will) in April to be a public safety commissioner and receive arms from rebels turning themselves over to the government. He fled Buchanan for Monrovia in April when rebels came looking for him, then walked from Monrovia back to Buchanan several months later (about 60 to 70 miles.) His account follows:

All along the way I saw dead bodies lining the road. I was stopped at many rebel checkpoints -- at least 50. At every stop the rebels would ask people to speak Mano or Gio. If they couldn't, they were led away. The rebels took them behind buildings, and I heard shots. Then the rebels would come back, and boast "I killed five," or "I killed 10." This happened once at a checkpoint on July 27. The rebels took away three men just behind a nearby house. I heard three shots, and the rebels returned and said they had killed the three. There were no Liberian army soldiers in the area when these incidents happened; the victims were noncombatants.¹⁰

Africa Watch has also received reports that there were many army deserters in this area who were also killed by the rebels, along with noncombatants, as described by Rev. A. The killing of captured soldiers, or soldiers who have laid down their arms is a violation of the Geneva Conventions.

Rev. A. witnessed the execution of two men, a Krahn named Frederick Tokpah, and Wilbert Matalay, aged 60, a member of the Bassa ethnic group. Wilbert Matalay was grabbed by rebel soldiers on July 27, who accused him of being a government agent, and shot him, though he had not worked for the Doe Government. He was apparently suspected of government ties because he had worked for the Tubman Government, many years before Doe took power.

⁹Interview in Peka Houebli, September 16, 1990.

¹⁰Interview in Abidjan, September 13, 1990.

The execution of Wilbert Matalay demonstrates another group of civilians who were at risk of rebel reprisals: persons on lists compiled by the rebels who were believed to be affiliated with the government. Persons on rebel lists were killed regardless of their ethnicity. Thus Wilbert Matalay, a Bassa, was executed for his wrongly presumed political allegiance, rather than rebel hostility against the Bassa per se.

Another example of rebel hostility to presumed authorities is Rev. A. himself:

I was stopped at a rebel checkpoint and I thought I would be killed this time for sure. A rebel brought a knife to my throat when I said I was a minister, and said "we are looking for ministers, I will kill you." I told him I was a minister of the gospel, and the rebel laughed and told me I should call myself a pastor in the future.

Rev. A. was urged to leave Liberia by an acquaintance working with the rebel forces, who said that Charles Taylor could not control his troops. He told Rev. A. that they would kill him before they found out who he was. Rev. A. escaped Liberia on August 31 through the intervention of a Catholic priest, who brought him to Abidjan.¹¹

B. Executions Committed by Prince Johnson:

As Prince Johnson's small force of approximately 500 fighters are based in Monrovia, it is the forces answerable to Charles Taylor (who may number as many as 10,000) who are responsible for most of the rebel abuses outside the capital city. Prince Johnson's forces engage in abuses within Monrovia, however, and the rebel leader himself has murdered innocent civilians in full view of the international press. On August 3, for example, Prince Johnson shot and killed a relief worker accused of profiteering from rice sales, while the victim was handcuffed to a Frenchman working for Catholic Relief Services. The execution was carried out before photographers, and the international press carried photos of a gun-toting and grinning Prince Johnson pointing at the dying victim as he lay on the ground.¹² Another incident was witnessed by a group of Nigerian journalists in mid-September. The journalists reported that Johnson sprayed a car with bullets, killing the driver. A German woman passenger was wounded and taken away by rebels. In another incident, Johnson accused a woman of stealing rice and shot her in the face.¹³

¹¹Interview in Abidjan, September 13, 1990.

¹²"Marines Evacuate 21 More in Liberia," New York Times, August 8, 1990

¹³"Ghana is Said to Strike Liberian Rebels." New York Times, September 17, 1990.

The most dramatic case of rebel atrocities against prisoners is that of Samuel K. Doe himself. Doe was captured by Prince Johnson's forces when he came out of the Executive Mansion with 65 of his bodyguards on September 10, apparently to negotiate his departure from Liberia with the ECOMOG forces. According to eyewitnesses, Doe was mutilated horribly before he finally died, and his body was displayed and desecrated by the rebels at the Island Clinic.¹⁴ Such treatment, including desecration of the corpse, is strictly prohibited by humanitarian law.

C. Torture, Ill-treatment, and Executions of Detainees:

Budu W., a 21-year old student from Harper City fled Liberia on July 17 to escape recruitment by the rebels. On Tuesday, July 11, Budu witnessed the execution of a Krahn man in the Liberian town of Pleebo:

I saw them kill a Krahn man. He was an older fellow, about 45 years old. The rebels were young kids, about 13 or 14 years old. They stripped him in the middle of town in front of everybody. They cut off his ear. Then they gave him a glass of water to drink. Afterwards they shot him dead.¹⁵

Representatives of an international humanitarian organization in the Côte d'Ivoire described the case of a young woman who was brought by her mother to their food warehouse in late August. She was a Krahn who had been captured by rebels in Grand Gedeh about a month previously along with an unidentified number of other Krahn civilians. According to testimony that she provided to relief workers, the rebels kept the prisoners with them as they marched. They attempted to determine which of their captives was Krahn by beating them to see if they would cry out in the Krahn language. When they did, they were slain on the spot. If other captives expressed emotion at the sight of the killings, this was taken as evidence that they also were Krahn, and they too were killed. She was beaten every day. At a moment when security was lax, she escaped, and managed to find her mother amongst the refugees of Toulepleu. The relief workers concerned said that she was apparently injured from the beatings, incoherent, and in a state of shock.

D. Conscription of Children:

A number of witnesses described seeing heavily-armed children with the rebels. According to another witness:

¹⁴"Bloody end of a butcher," The Observer [London], September 23, 1990.

¹⁵Interview in Tabou City, September 14, 1990.

When the Krahn entered Nimba [County] all the kids' parents died. Now the kids want revenge. This is the concept in their minds. They are so little that I could shake them till they drop, but the guns give them courage.¹⁶

Two nurses from New Zealand working for a French medical organization within Nimba County in Liberia reported that they recently saw a rebel as young as 7 or 8 years old, staggering under the weight of a Kalashnikov automatic rifle which was as tall as he was, and menacing people with it.¹⁷

A Kenyan nun, Sister Josephine, who was in the Côte d'Ivoire for the Pope's recent visit, stated that her order had operated four schools in Buchanan for elementary and secondary students with over 3,000 students. By June, only 1,000 students were left in school; the remainder had joined the rebels. She reported that children as young as 10 years old -- fifth and sixth graders -- enthusiastically joined the rebels. Those too small to carry guns carried grenades. According to Sister Josephine, Charles Taylor was not recruiting the children, they had joined enthusiastically of their own volition.¹⁸

Whether or not the children joined the rebels voluntarily, their presence with the fighting force is a serious violation of humanitarian norms concerning children in warfare. International standards prohibit the conscription or recruitment of children under the age of 15. For example, article 4(3)(c) of Protocol II to the 1949 Geneva Conventions, although not signed by Liberia, states that "Children who have not attained the age of fifteen years shall neither be recruited in the armed forces or groups nor allowed to take part in hostilities."¹⁹

E. The Taking of Hostages:

The taking of hostages is strictly forbidden by Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions, and is binding on rebel and government forces. Yet foreign civilians in Liberia have been attacked by both government forces (see below) and by the NPFL. Charles Taylor has admitted to taking at least 1,000 Nigerians, Ghanaians, and Guineans hostage in Buchanan, where, according to some

¹⁶Interview in Tabou City, September 14, 1990.

¹⁷Interview, September 17, 1990.

¹⁸Interview in Abidjan, September 11, 1990.

¹⁹While Liberia has not signed Protocol II, it is clear that customary international law prohibits the introduction of children into hostilities. Moreover, Article 38 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the United Nations last year, states that: 1. States Parties undertake to respect and to ensure respect for rules of international humanitarian law applicable to them in armed conflicts which are relevant to the child. 2. States Parties shall take all feasible measures to ensure that persons who have not attained the age of 15 years do not take a direct part in hostilities. 3. States Parties shall refrain from recruiting any person who has not attained the age of 15 years into their armed forces. States Parties shall endeavour to give priority to those who are oldest.

reports, they are being kept in appalling conditions.²⁰ However, other reports received by Africa Watch indicate that some of the foreign nationals are being held in "protective custody" under what appear to be adequate conditions, but are not permitted to leave. Hundreds of foreign nationals from governments which have sent troops to participate in the ECOMOG force fled to their embassy compounds in Monrovia, and apparently when Charles Taylor controlled these parts of Monrovia he prevented them from leaving. He was reported as saying that "Nobody will leave Liberia until the conflict is over... Remember what the Americans did with the Japanese living in the United States in World War II. They put them in concentration camps."²¹

F. Rebel Killings of Fleeing Soldiers:

Relief personnel and the Ivorian authorities are concerned about fleeing army soldiers who have been pursued by rebels into the Côte d'Ivoire. The Ivorian authorities, working through the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), have initiated a policy of disarming rebel soldiers within the Côte d'Ivoire and exchanging their uniforms for civilian clothes. To prevent hostilities from spilling onto Ivorian soil and to keep them from menacing the Mano and Gio refugees, they are then relocated away from the border to the Toulepleu area. The Ivorians have also placed military personnel on the Liberian border to guard against rebel incursions in pursuit of fleeing soldiers.

One such incident took place on September 5 in the Ivorian town of Bliheron when rebels from Charles Taylor's force crossed over to the Côte d'Ivoire, and shot and killed eight soldiers who were attempting to swim across the Cavalla River, which runs between the two countries. The rebel soldiers claimed that they thought they were in Liberia, but turned themselves over to the Ivorian authorities. Refugees interviewed by the delegation in Bliheron witnessed the executions, and were terrified.

Again, it should be noted that soldiers who had deserted or abandoned hostilities are protected under the provisions of Common Article 3 of the Geneva Accords. From our interviews, it seems fairly clear that the soldiers attempting to swim across the Cavalla River were deserting. If they were deserting, rather than fleeing from actual combat, their murder is a violation of this provision of humanitarian law.

Violations by the Liberian Army:

The Liberian army has long been associated with grave abuses against civilians. The

²⁰The exact number of hostages taken by Charles Taylor's forces known. The U.S. State Department did not have an estimate of the number.

²¹"Nigerians Discuss Situation at Monrovia Embassy." AFP, August 23, 1990.

same rules of non-international armed conflict apply to government forces as to rebels, and the indiscriminate executions and abuses committed by the Liberian Army are strictly forbidden.

The death of Samuel K. Doe on September 10 did not mean the dissolution of his army. The army is now commanded by General David Nimley, who took over following Doe's murder. Nimley has been implicated for years in gross abuses of human rights against Liberian civilians, and is widely thought to have organized a death squad within the armed forces this year. (See below.)

At the time of this writing, at least 1,000 heavily armed government soldiers are in control of certain areas of the country, and the army continues to abuse, loot, and kill with impunity.

A. Killings of Civilians:

Africa Watch's May 1990 report, Liberia: Flight from Terror describes in detail the atrocities committed by the Liberian army in its counterinsurgency campaign in Nimba County. Abuses included indiscriminate killing of men, women, and children. Soldiers torched huts with the sick and the elderly inside. Civilians were killed merely on the suspicion that they were of Mano or Gio ethnicity. In the words of a former soldier from Karnplay, ex-lieutenant Hargana Pouden, "No one is safe from the army, if they are Gio, not even old people."²²

In the months before Doe's death on September 10, the group of Krahn soldiers surrounding the president in Monrovia engaged in gross abuses in the capital, including regular executions of captured civilians and the large-scale murder of unarmed displaced persons. Government soldiers outside the capital continued their practice of killing non-Krahn and suspected political opponents.

One particularly grisly incident occurred on July 30 when Liberian army soldiers attacked a large group of displaced civilians who had sought refuge at Saint Peter's Lutheran church. The international press reported that more than 600 men, women, and children were murdered by soldiers who sprayed the church with gunfire. Andrew Voros, an American former Peace Corps volunteer who lived in Liberia for many years, was in Monrovia at the time and tended those wounded in the attack. In an interview with Africa Watch in Washington, DC on August 28, 1990, Voros stated that approximately 185 civilians were killed on the spot when soldiers entered the church and sprayed the men who were sleeping in one room with gunfire, then went to another room where women and children were sleeping and killed them in the same manner. Following the attack, a large group of refugees fled to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) compound and broke down the gates. There were many civilians badly wounded in the attack, according to Voros, who described women and children with hands and

²²Liberia: Flight From Terror, May 1990, p. 10.

feet blown off, and gaping head wounds. A group of Liberian soldiers entered the compound and marched away with about 350 of the civilians. They were taken to the beach near the John F. Kennedy Hospital, where there were reports that the men were separated out and taken away to be killed. Voros speculates that the entire group was actually killed. When this figure is added to the original 185 dead, the total casualties approximate the figure of 600 dead given by French medical groups in Monrovia and reported in the press.²³

Reporters from the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) visited the Lutheran Church in October, where bodies of the victims of the massacre remain in an advanced state of decay. The reporters visited a two-story building next to the church where "people are lined up in their mattresses on which they were sleeping when the massacre happened, still lying there now..."²⁴

Gen. Nimley, the commander of the Executive Mansion forces who with the death of Doe claims to be the President, is reportedly one of the officers responsible for death squad activities by the army. The military death squad began executing Mano and Gio soldiers from the Liberian army early in the conflict, and their bodies, as well as those of Liberian civilians regularly appeared on the streets of Monrovia from February on. The army death squad also murdered homeless and mentally disturbed street people. Some sources have also implicated Gen. Nimley in the brutal murder, on January 4, 1990, of Robert Phillips, a former critic of President Doe.

Africa Watch has also received reports that army soldiers killed civilians indiscriminately in towns which were retaken from the rebels. Rev. A. described how in numerous instances when rebels retreated from a village and soldiers returned, anyone who didn't flee was killed. For this reason, the rebels apparently often evacuated civilians from the areas they left. Rev. A., for example, was evacuated by rebels with a large group of civilians from the ELWA religious mission to the Fendall campus of the University in Liberia.

On October 10, 1990, two reporters from the BBC described a "killing field" at Spriggs Payne Airfield, where President Doe's death squads took their victims:

...the area, which is a swamp area, is now littered with corpses, mostly in skeletal form. They had just rotted away and it is just the skulls and bones left. The killing field -- I suppose that is what it is -- is at the end of the runway... The swamp at the end of the runway is thick with bones and skulls and under every bush there is a sign of killing, skulls that have been smashed, bodies that have been torn apart by either machetes or gunfire and in all we counted up to over a hundred we can see.²⁵

²³Interview in Washington, August 28, 1990.

²⁴"Reporters Visit Monrovia's Airport Killing Field," BBC, October 10, 1990.

²⁵"Reporters Visit Monrovia's Airport Killing Field," BBC World Service, October 10, 1990.

While Africa Watch has not been able to visit Liberia itself, foreign reporters in Monrovia have recently reported indiscriminate shooting and looting in the capital by government soldiers. Agence France Presse reported on September 20, 1990 that a Senegalese jeweller saw four of his countrymen shot and killed by Krahn soldiers.²⁶

B. Torture, Inhumane Treatment, and Execution of Detainees:

Samuel Doe's forces have long been implicated in torture and inhumane treatment of detainees. Doe himself has been accused of having personally participated in the 1985 murder of Thomas Quiwonkpa. The troops closest to Doe in the Executive Mansion have a reputation for particular brutality.

Andrew Voros, (see above) was himself captured by 17 Liberian soldiers on August 10 and held at the presidential mansion for eight days. He was arrested at the residence of USAID personnel in Monrovia, where he was living, along with Col. Chris Doe (no relation to the president). According to Voros, Col. Chris Doe hid at his home because he had received word from inside the military that he was to be killed because of his attempts to limit abuses by the soldiers.²⁷

Voros and Col. Doe were taken to the Executive Mansion, which has a common cell and a number of others in a cellblock which had been designed originally as a latrine for the Executive Mansion. Voros was questioned by General David Nimley and accused of being a CIA agent. Also in the cellblock with Voros and Col. Doe were several dozen Mano and Gio prisoners, some of whom had been held for months. Some appeared to have been jailed solely because of their ethnicity. Others were common criminals, and there was one woman detainee who was apparently an insane person living on the streets. Her constant ravings and screams kept the other prisoners awake. Conditions within the cells were appalling; there were no toilets, simply an empty adjoining room, thick with excrement, which was used by soldiers and prisoners alike as a latrine. Filth from the latrine was tracked back into the cells where prisoners sat or slept on the floor.

The prisoners (except for Voros) were not given food and water, and many of them were literally starving to death. They begged for food scraps at a tiny opening to the outside at the top of the cell, and passed around crumbs of food between them. When Voros attempted to share the occasional tin of juice given to him by the soldiers, he was prevented from doing so and warned

²⁶AFP, "Government Soldiers Looting, Shooting in Monrovia." September 20, 1990.

²⁷Voros says that Col. Doe had been going about Monrovia attempting to disarm "1990 soldiers" -- that is, thieves and criminals who had been hastily recruited into the army to make up for the large numbers of casualties and desertions in the course of the counterinsurgency campaign. The army depicts Col. Doe as a deserter.

that his own rations would be cut if he shared them.

Periodically, Krahn soldiers would enter the cells and randomly select prisoners to take outside and beat bloody with their heavy cartridge belts. Badly wounded prisoners would be thrown back into the excrement-covered cell. The unlucky ones were taken out and killed by soldiers. On August 14, Col. Chris Doe was one of those killed; he was surrounded by a group of screaming soldiers and cut repeatedly with a machete until he was nearly dead, when they cut his throat.

Occasionally, prisoners would be taken from their cells for "burial duty." Voros saw two very emaciated prisoners, an old man and a younger one, taken away. According to the younger man, the two were taken to a burial ground behind the Executive Mansion and made to dig a mass grave. They buried twelve bodies, most of which were horribly mutilated. When the digging was completed, the older man's throat was cut and he was thrown into the common grave. The younger prisoner was returned to his cell.

On August 18, Voros was taken to Barclay Training Center where Gen. Nimley accused him of firing upon and killing government soldiers.²⁸ Eventually he was released and evacuated from Liberia by U.S. Embassy officials.

C. Looting, Pillaging, and Abuse:

The death of Samuel Doe hastened the disintegration of the Liberian army, which was already apparent in the large numbers of defections and desertions earlier this year. In recent months, the remnants of Doe's army are running amok in Monrovia and elsewhere. Africa Watch has received extensive reports of looting, stealing, and harassment of civilians by soldiers.

Refugees interviewed in the Ivorian town of Tabou described how Doe's soldiers had taken over towns on Maryland County, including Pleebo and Harper in mid-August. Comfort J., a young Liberian woman who arrived in the Côte d'Ivoire on August 19, reported the following:

I am from Pleebo, in Maryland County. I came here two weeks ago. The Krahn Army [government forces] was taking people's things, harassing and beating people. I know of people they killed. When they arrived, I left.²⁹

²⁸Nimley also insisted that a U.S. missionary who had been killed on approximately August 10 had died when he ran a roadblock and shot at a soldier. But the Lebanese neighbors of the victim, who were on the U.S. ship offshore where Voros was taken, actually witnessed the killing of the missionary. They stated that he died when army soldiers fired on his home and he was hit by a ricochet bullet.

²⁹Interview in Tabou City, September 14, 1990.

THE HUMANITARIAN NEEDS OF THE REFUGEES:

As a consequence of egregious abuses against Liberia's civilian population by all parties to the conflict, approximately half the population of the country has been displaced from their homes. A quarter of these are refugees in West Africa. The people of the Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, and Sierra Leone have responded generously to the plight of the Liberian refugees. The U.S. State Department's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) estimated on October 26, that there were 561,681 Liberian refugees in West Africa, including: 280,000 in Guinea; 206,681 in the Côte d'Ivoire; 70,000 in Sierra Leone; and 5,000 in Ghana.³⁰ In all cases, the host governments have not needed to set up refugee camps because local residents have permitted the refugees to share their dwellings. Host governments and relief organizations have helped the refugees build additional huts. In Guinea, roofing and plastic has been donated by the UNHCR, and hundreds of huts have been built. Relief personnel maintain that this arrangement is far better for the refugees than a camp situation, but it is clear that more must be done to assist the Liberians and their hosts.

The villagers have shared their food, too, which has been particularly important because relief assistance has not been sufficient to meet refugee needs.³¹ The United States is by far the largest donor to the Liberian refugees. Indeed, many of U.S. allies consider Liberia a "U.S. problem," and have not responded as generously as is needed. Africa Watch regards the Liberian disaster as an international problem, and recognizes the need for the international community to respond appropriately. Nonetheless, it is clear that because of the United States' historic relationship with Liberia, and particularly because of past U.S. support for the Doe Government, which helped lay the groundwork for the country's destruction today, the U.S. bears a particular responsibility to aid the victims.

To date, the United States had provided \$41 million for rice through the World Food Program. (This figure includes funds needed for transport.) An additional several million dollars in additional assistance has been donated by the U.S. for the refugees through humanitarian organizations, and \$2 million has been donated by the U.S. to the International Committee of the Red Cross, Catholic Relief Services, and the French medical groups for humanitarian assistance within Liberia.

At the time of our visit, refugees in the Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea were not starving, though they were clearly in need of more food and medical assistance than the humanitarian organizations were able to provide them. In particular, the need for protein, such as dried fish,

³⁰"West Africa -- Displaced Persons," Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), Situation Report No. 10, October 26, 1990.

³¹According to relief personnel, there is currently a shortfall of \$10.2 million in response to the pledging request of the League of Red Cross Societies, the UNHCR, and World Food Program.

was acute; refugees interviewed in Pekan Houebli and Pahoubli in the Toulepleu area who arrived in late June or July received a relief package that included rice, oil, salt, tomatoes, and onions. Some also received soap and blankets. No further commodities except rice was provided after the initial package was given, and later arrivals only received rice. Because most of the refugees (particularly the later arrivals) arrive from Liberia starving, their original ration is depleted quickly and their Ivorian hosts are forced to share their scarce food supplies with the refugees.³² Relief personnel in the Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea made a strong appeal that they be given additional food by international donors, and permission to distribute it among the host families.

Large numbers of refugees arrived from Maryland County in recent weeks, due to fighting in that area and an acute shortage of food within Liberia. There are currently about 10,000 refugees in Tabou, most of whom have come since August. Refugees interviewed in Tabou City and surrounding villages experienced the same shortage of food as those in Toulepleu. The Ivorian Prefecture of Tabou, Simeon Agoua, said that the League of Red Cross Societies had promised that there would be dried fish and it was announced on the radio that this commodity was available. No fish was supplied after an initial shipment, however, and the Prefecture expressed concern about the miserable condition of the refugees in his area.³³ According to the Red Cross, an international donor had made some fish available last spring, but when this had been distributed, no additional fish was provided. Representatives from the League of Red Cross Societies interviewed by Africa Watch appealed for international donations of fish and other food commodities needed by the refugees.

The newer arrivals in the Tabou villages were mostly urban dwellers from the town of Harper and surrounding towns in Liberia who had few skills for living in the jungle. An Ivorian living in Prollo, directly across the river from Liberia, noted that the Liberian refugees "don't have the habit of fishing," and stated that he was aware of only one refugee who had attempted to fish. Nor did they have guns to hunt with.³⁴ Relief personnel confirmed that the former city dwellers were unequipped to forage for food or fish or hunt in order to supplement the rice supplied to them by the Red Cross, making them wholly dependent upon their Ivorian hosts for meat and other food. Relief personnel feared that tensions would inevitably develop between the refugees and their hosts, as food supplies were becoming scarce for everybody, refugees and Ivorians alike.

The food situation for refugees in Guinea is much worse than in the Côte d'Ivoire. Refugees are living with the local population in their homes, as in the Côte d'Ivoire, but food distribution is complicated by the fact that there are fewer villages and many more isolated huts

³²We heard reports from relief personnel that some of the refugees arrived so hungry from Liberia that they ate their rice raw.

³³Interview, September 14, 1990, Tabou City.

³⁴Interview, September 14, town of Prollo.

in the forest. Moreover, the roads from the Guinean capital of Conakry to the forest area where most of the refugees reside are very poor.³⁵ Only about half of the relief supplies that are needed have reached the refugees via the route from the capital. Until very recently, no aid was being brought across the Ivorian border at all, in part due to Guinean Government reluctance to deal with the Ivorian authorities. A week before our visit, the first food shipments arrived from the Côte d'Ivoire, though the delegation visited some villages where virtually no food at all had been delivered.³⁶

The delegation found cases of malnutrition in refugee children in Guinea, as well as cases of beri beri. Food in Guinea is in particularly short supply from now until harvest in approximately six weeks to two months. Virtually all the rice has been used for seed, and the local people have almost nothing left to share. Refugees and Guineans alike are eating "palm cabbage" -- the inner part of the palm tree. The relief delegation reported that refugee concentrations in the area of Yomou had received no relief assistance at all, and the refugees had been there for a full seven months. There are approximately 6,000 Guineans living in the area, and at least 6,000 Liberian refugees.³⁷ Additional groups of refugees are said to be arriving in Guinea at the rate of 500 per day, fleeing both the fighting and hunger. It is said that there is virtually nothing to eat in Liberia, and many refugees emerge emaciated and ill.

A. Harassment of the Refugees:

The Refugees International delegation which visited Guinea experienced some hostility from Guinean soldiers at a local level, and at one point a member of the delegation was arrested for having attempted to take video film of the refugees in the Guinean town of Thuo. When the Liberian refugees witnessed the soldiers' hostility to the delegation, they came forward to describe their own problems with local military authorities. According to the refugees, the refugees are harassed by the soldiers, who have taken Liberian refugee children "hostage," by confining them within military facilities until their parents pay a ransom of food or money. The refugees stated that this was a regular practice. Guinea's civilian authorities were extremely cooperative with the delegation, and are clearly concerned about the Liberian refugees. Africa Watch is calling upon the Government of Guinea to investigate the reports of harassment by the Guinean army.

³⁵The Refugees International delegation which visited Guinea reports that one trip of 60 miles took them five hours.

³⁶Officials at the U.S. Embassy in Abidjan estimated that the refugees in Guinea needed approximately 4,500 to 5,000 tons per month. They had received no more than 2,000 tons per month from Conakry. The first shipment of 500 tons from the Ivory Coast was to have been delivered in early September, and relief personnel are hoping to move as much as 1,000 tons per week into the area. Interview, September 12.

³⁷There are 4,000 refugees officially registered, though the Government of Guinea states that the actual number may be as high as 11,000.

B. Medical Care:

The Ivorian Government and the French medical groups have visited most refugee areas and vaccinated the refugee children, as well as Ivorian children, for yellow fever and measles. In Guinea, children had been vaccinated in some of the villages the delegation visited, but not all. The French medical group, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) is providing medical assistance to the refugees at small clinics set up in various villages in the Côte d'Ivoire. MSF-Belgium is providing similar services in Guinea. Despite the invaluable work of these medical groups, however, there are extensive medical needs among the refugees and gaps in the provision of medical care.

Newly arrived refugees in the Tabou area of the Côte d'Ivoire did not report significant medical problems, but those who had been in the Côte d'Ivoire longer, such as those interviewed in the Toulepleu area, were in bad need of medical care. In Pekan Houebli, for example, where there are approximately 3,000 refugees and 300 Ivorian locals, refugees interviewed on September 16 reported that 5 adults had died in the previous two weeks of malaria. Also, 4 children had died the previous day of malaria, diarrhea or of a disease which the medical groups speculated might have been elephantiasis, according to the symptoms they described. The refugees interviewed by Africa Watch in Pekan Houebli and Pahoubli also complained of stomach problems from eating "bush cabbage" which they found in the jungle to supplement their rice diet, and coughs and respiratory problems due to sleeping on the ground with no blankets. MSF has a number of clinics in the Côte d'Ivoire, but the refugees in Pekan Houebli were not aware of those clinics, and did not have to access medical care.

The medical situation in Guinea was worse than that of the Côte d'Ivoire, according to the delegation from Refugees International and Project Mercy who visited a number of villages in the forest area. The group saw cases of beri beri, and children who were clearly malnourished.

In Guinea, as in the Côte d'Ivoire, skin diseases were common, as many of the refugees were sleeping on the ground without blankets or mats. According to the League of Red Cross Societies, a donor had provided a supply of soap and blankets for the refugees last Spring, but supplies have long since been exhausted and the size of the refugee population has increased considerably. Many refugees in Guinea suffered from malaria. Refugees appealed for mosquito netting and malaria pills.

The lack of clean water is another major problem in both Guinea and the Côte d'Ivoire. In Guinea, the delegation found considerable problems with dysentery which was the result of refugees and local people alike over-using creeks, open wells, and streams for all their sanitation needs. In the Ivorian town of Prolo, refugees and local people obtained their drinking water from the Cavalla River. One of the refugees, John T., said that they see dead bodies floating in the river every day, which obviously contaminate the water supply.³⁸

³⁸Interview, September 15, 1990.

The most urgent medical need at the moment, however, is the need for more food. The refugees (and sometimes their Ivorian and Guinean hosts) are much more vulnerable to disease due to inadequate food. Food assistance must be increased significantly if the outbreak of disease is to be avoided.

HUMANITARIAN NEEDS WITHIN LIBERIA:

As difficult as the situation of the refugees is, their situation is not nearly as desperate as that of Liberians who remain in the country, particularly in Monrovia. According to the U.S. Department of State, "50 to 60 deaths are reported daily in Monrovia due to severe malnutrition and diseases; most of the victims are children."

More than 80 percent of the population of Monrovia are malnourished.³⁹ To date, the U.S. and other donors have not delivered large amounts of food to Monrovia because, according to State Department officials, the security situation has not permitted ships to land. Andrew Natsios, director of the State Department's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, has stated that the first ship, holding 500 tons reportedly reached Monrovia on October 25, and a second ship holding 1,100 tons of food was to have arrived on October 26.⁴⁰ Natsios reported at a Congressional hearing on October 25 that Catholic Relief Service carried out a nutritional survey last week of 500 Liberians in Monrovia. Of those interviewed, 208 were said to be suffering from the final stages of malnutrition. Natsios stated that relief officials were shocked by such a statistic, which they said rivalled anything they had seen, including the Ethiopian famine of 1984-1985.⁴¹

The United States and other donors have granted assistance to various non-governmental organizations within Liberia, including Médecins Sans Frontières and Catholic Relief Services. However, a much larger international effort is clearly needed and will continue to be needed in coming years, given the destruction of Monrovia particularly and the rest of the country.

Africa Watch calls upon all parties to the conflict within Liberia to facilitate the provision of food and medical aid to all civilians in need. In particular, all parties must agree to permit the free transport of food into Monrovia, and protect all relief personnel there, and in the rest of the country.

³⁹ Agency for International Development, Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance, Situation Report No. 10, October 26, 1990.

⁴⁰ Interview in Washington, D.C., October 25, 1990.

⁴¹ Joint hearing by the House Select Committee on Hunger and the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa, October 25, 1990.

U.S. POLICY:

There is no country in Africa with whom the United States has had closer relations than Liberia. Settled in the 19th century by freed American slaves, Liberia has looked to the United States for support ever since. Today, Liberians are anguished by what they feel is the United States' virtual abandonment of their country at a time of its greatest crisis.

While rebel and army leaders and their forces are responsible for the destruction of Liberia, the United States has a particular obligation to assist the victims. During the first five years of Samuel K. Doe's reign, the U.S. Government provided half a billion dollars to the regime, making it the largest aid recipient in sub-Saharan Africa. In 1985, the Reagan Administration put its stamp of approval on elections which were recognized by a wide range of international observers, as well as Liberians, as fraudulent. U.S. support for Doe at that critical moment consolidated his hold on power, and demoralized and weakened Liberia's political opposition. In 1986, the U.S. Congress ended most U.S. assistance to Liberia.⁴² However the United States maintained military "advisors" in Monrovia who actually went into Nimba County ostensibly to advise Doe's troops during the bloody attempt to depopulate the area in early 1990.⁴³

Because past U.S. support for Doe played a major role in the destruction of the country today, the Bush Administration has an important responsibility to do more to assist the victims of the conflict.

A. Relief Assistance:

The United States is the largest donor for the Liberian refugees, but much more assistance is needed, and the U.S. and other donors should provide it expeditiously. As of October 11, the Bush Administration had provided \$48,724,703 in assistance to the Liberian refugees, out of a total of approximately \$62 million provided by the international community. European governments have tended to view Liberia as a "U.S. problem," and have not given as much assistance to the refugees as they have in other circumstances. Africa Watch believes that because of the historic special relationship between Liberia and the U.S., the United States' government has a particular responsibility in the current situation. Nonetheless, the humanitarian needs of over half a million Liberian refugees are great, and their situation is worsening. Other

⁴²Military aid to Liberia "in the pipeline" continued into 1987.

⁴³The Bush Administration has justified the presence of the military advisors on the grounds that they were attempting to curb human rights abuses. This was an unrealistic objective, given the breadth of the slaughter. It is inconceivable that two U.S. advisers could have restrained marauding troops who had actually been ordered by Doe to commit abuses against civilians. Some have suggested that the United States advisors went into Nimba in an attempt to investigate reports of Libyan support for Charles Taylor's forces.

donors should join the United States in mounting an enormous effort on behalf of the refugees and Liberians still living in the country.

In addition to dramatically increasing humanitarian assistance to the refugees themselves, the United States and other donors should provide sufficient food commodities to the World Food Program and the League of Red Cross Societies (which are distributing food in Sierra Leone, Guinea, and the Côte d'Ivoire) to enable those organizations to provide supplemental food to local villagers, as well as to the refugees.⁴⁴ In mid-October, a special appeal for \$5.4 million was launched by United Nations Disaster Relief Organization (UNDRO) to provide aid to Guinean villagers in need because of the assistance they had provided to the refugees. At the time of this writing, no donor had responded.

B. Liberian Refugees in the U.S.:

There are thought to be approximately 14,000 Liberians visiting the United States who are stranded here as a result of the conflict in Liberia. On July 27, 1990 the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) issued instructions which granted Liberians living in the United States voluntary departure status on a case-by-case basis. In order to apply for the new status, Liberians with valid visas must turn in their documents and place themselves in deportation proceedings prior to receiving the safe haven designation. The new status, however, only allows them to stay in the United States for six months.⁴⁵ Moreover, the safe haven program is only available for those Liberians who arrived in the United States before July 27. Finally, the INS has apparently not publicized even this limited program to its regional offices; lawyers working with Liberian refugees have reported that virtually none of their clients have been granted the change of status, apparently due to the fact that local INS officials were for the most part ignorant of the program.

While we welcome the fact that there has been acknowledgement of the need for safe haven for Liberians in the U.S., the INS's program does not begin to meet the needs of those in the United States. First, Liberians entering the United States after July 27 should be included in any safe haven program. Second, Liberians should be permitted to stay in the United States until conditions within Liberia allow them to return home safely.

Liberian refugees are clearly deserving of "extended voluntary departure," (EVD) a program which the executive branch can simply designate for victims of conflicts or natural disasters. In the past, EVD has been granted to Poles, Ethiopians, Ugandans, and others on the

⁴⁴ According to officials from the international humanitarian agencies, they cannot distribute commodities to citizens of the Ivory Coast, Guinea, and Sierra Leone unless a major donor such as the United States specifically instructs them to do so.

⁴⁵ Arthur Helton of the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights reported that the INS office in New York where Liberian refugees are to go to change their status has the words "Detentions and Deportations" above the door. Naturally, few Liberians care to enter.

basis of turbulence in their countries. On October 2, the House of Representatives passed legislation granting EVD to Liberians, Kuwaitis, Salvadorans, and Lebanese. The Senate is expected to address the issue in the coming weeks. In the meantime, we urge the Administration to treat Liberians as they have dealt with Chinese students in the United States following the Tiananmen Square massacre, at which time a stay of deportation was announced for all Chinese, and work authorizations were processed expeditiously.

C. Travel Documents For Liberian Refugees in West Africa:

Liberia's West African neighbors have accepted half a million Liberians. Some of the refugees have close ties with the United States, including family members who are residents here. U.S. Embassies in West Africa should be instructed to view generously requests for non-immigrant visas for persons who wish to visit the United States, but not stay here permanently. Many Liberian refugees are eager to return home, as they have left family members there, and do not want asylum in the United States. Yet it is difficult for them to stay in the Côte d'Ivoire or Guinea, where they do not speak the language and have no family, friends, or money. The executive branch should designate Liberia as a country of special humanitarian concern, and allow Liberians to apply for visas at any Embassy. Liberians should not have to depend upon the INS representative, who is based in Nairobi.

D. Increased Refugee Slots for Liberians:

The regional ceiling for refugee admissions from Africa in fiscal year 1991 is 4,900.⁴⁶ In view of the enormous number of Liberian refugees accepted by the country's West African neighbors, the United States should increase the number of refugee admissions and designate them for Liberians. Two years ago, the number of Soviet Jews admitted to the United States was raised to 25,000. A similar agreement should be reached for Liberians.

E. Screening of Human Rights Abusers:

Liberians in the U.S. and U.S. missionaries who have recently returned from Liberia have reported that a number of Liberian soldiers whom they know to have been abusive have entered the United States. Several of Doe's top military leaders, who commanded troops which engaged in egregious abuses are now in the U.S., including General Alfred Smith, who commanded the troops which carried out the counterinsurgency campaign in Nimba County, Charles Julu, commander of the Executive Mansion Guard, and army chief of staff Henry Dubar. Also, several prominent civilian officials from Doe's government who are responsible for human rights abuses have recently entered the U.S. Among them are Doe's Presidential Affairs Minister, G. Alvin

⁴⁶For 1991, the ceiling for refugee admissions from Latin America is 3,100; for Eastern Europe it is 5,000; for the USSR it is 50,000; for East Asia (Indochina) it is 52,000; for the Near East/South Asia it is 6,000.

Jones,⁴⁷ and Justice Minister Jenkins Scott.⁴⁸ Africa Watch is urging the administration, that ways should be found to exclude known human rights abusers. We believe that neither the United States nor any other country should accept for permanent residence, or permit short-term visits, by notorious human rights abusers.

F. U.S. Pressure on Human Rights:

The conflict in Liberia has reached such proportions that it is difficult to know what the United States could do to aid civilians within Liberia. The vast majority of the population is at risk of disease and famine due to the conflict.⁴⁹ Krahn and Mandingos, particularly, are at grave risk at the hands of victorious rebels, and Doe's forces continue to kill other ethnic groups and political suspects indiscriminately.

The Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Herman Cohen, appeared to adopt a largely "wait-and-watch" attitude throughout most of the conflict. At no time did the Administration publicly call upon Doe to step down, despite the deep unpopularity of his regime within Liberia, its international isolation, and in light of the increasing bloodshed within the country. In September, Secretary Cohen visited the region and encouraged negotiations between the parties to end the conflict. Unfortunately the fighting and destruction have continued. It is clearly time for the United States to become more actively engaged in an international effort to save what is left of Liberia.

To date, U.S. policy appears to have been to defer to the Economic Community of West Africa in dealing with the Liberian crisis. It is unrealistic to expect ECOWAS to struggle alone with a disaster of this size. The ECOWAS "peacekeeping" force (ECOMOG) has now assumed a combat role, in alliance with the INPFL and the remnants of the Liberian army. Moreover, ECOMOG has not been able to protect and feed Liberian civilians, or stem the hemorrhage of refugees. A different approach is clearly needed. The United States and its allies should call upon the United Nations Secretary General to appoint a high-level special representative on Liberia. In the past, the United Nations has appointed special representatives to mediate conflicts in Afghanistan, Namibia, Central America and the Iran-Iraq war. As a recognition of the severity of the situation in Liberia, the U.N. should now adopt the same policy there.

In addition to promoting a peaceful resolution to the conflict, the UN special

⁴⁷G. Alvin Jones is considered to have been Doe's closest advisor. He is personally responsible for having three men publicly flogged outside the Finance Ministry. The men were accused of theft, though there was no trial or conviction. One of the victims later died.

⁴⁸As Doe's Minister of Justice, Jenkins Scott is responsible for the unjust arrests of numerous prisoners over the years.

⁴⁹The Administration has sent a team to Liberia to attempt to assess humanitarian needs. Unfortunately, until there is some stability in the country, most observers feel that it will be almost impossible to deliver the assistance.

representative should coordinate a massive feeding effort within Liberia. Only the arrival of huge amounts of food can prevent mass starvation. But despite the gravity of the situation, the U.S. and other governments have been dithering over this problem for months. The excuse for not bringing ships into the port of Monrovia is that insurance is prohibitively expensive. Monrovia is facing a human crisis of enormous proportions; surely the international community can come up with a way to cut through the red tape, and deliver large quantities of food to the starving city.

Finally, Africa Watch recommends that the U.S. and other governments denounce abuses of human rights by all parties to the conflict. Following meetings between the Assistant Secretary and rebel leaders Charles Taylor and Prince Johnson, Ambassador Cohen, stated that both men "would like to see Liberia with a truly democratic system, and they would cooperate in organizing that."⁵⁰ There is no evidence to support this premature conclusion. On the contrary, there is overwhelming evidence that the forces commanded by both men have, and continue, to commit gross abuses of internationally recognized human rights and humanitarian law.

Presumably the Assistant Secretary made such an ill-considered remark in the context of encouraging negotiations to end the conflict. However there is no justification for prematurely praising Taylor and Johnson, given the overwhelming evidence of rebel leaders' personal responsibility for gross violations of internationally recognized human rights. The United States should take particular pains to avoid the mistake it committed ten years ago, when it rushed to embrace Samuel K. Doe who came to power after murdering top officials, including the president of the civilian government he overthrew.

The United States should make it clear that there will be no U.S. assistance for a regime which attempts to seize power by slaughtering civilians, and should call upon all parties to cease such abuses immediately.

THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY:

The disintegration of Liberia in such a short period of time, and the widespread abuses of Liberians by all sides to the conflict, is a tragedy of unparalleled magnitude for Liberia. Africa Watch is calling on all parties to the conflict to end abuses against innocent civilians, create conditions that would allow refugees and displaced people to return home, and to allow all Liberian citizens to live without the fear of violence, and to negotiate a peaceful end to the conflict.

Liberia is considered by many European governments to be an "American problem," and the U.K. and the rest of the E.C. have deferred to the United States and largely "watched and waited" while Liberia has been destroyed. It is long past time for the international community as

⁵⁰New York Times, September 21, 1990.

a whole to become engaged in efforts to help resolve the conflict in Liberia, and to provide greater assistance to victims both within and without Liberia. Africa Watch calls upon the United Kingdom and the European Community to press the United Nations to appoint a special representative on Liberia. Africa Watch also appeals to the U.K. and the European community to increase assistance to Liberians in West Africa, and to aid efforts to provide food and medical assistance within Liberia.

Previous Africa Watch publications on Liberia:

Liberia: Flight From Terror. Testimony of Abuses in Nimba County, An Africa Watch Report, May 1990.

"News From Africa Watch: Nine Years of Doe's Rule: Africa Watch Assesses the Record," April 11, 1989.

Africa Watch is a non-governmental organization created in May 1988 to monitor human rights practices in Africa

and to promote respect for internationally recognized standards. Its Executive Director is Rakiya Omaar; Richard Carver is Research Director; Alex de Waal is Research Consultant; Janet Fleischman and Karen Sorensen are Research Associates and Ben Penglase and Jo Graham are Associates.

Africa Watch is part of Human Rights Watch, an organization that also comprises Americas Watch, Asia Watch, Helsinki Watch and Middle East Watch. The Chairman of Human rights Watch is Robert L Bernstein and the Vice-Chairman is Adrian DeWind. Aryeh Neier is Executive Director of Human rights Watch; the Deputy Director is Kenneth Roth; Holly Burkhalter is Washington Director and Susan Osnos is the Press Director.