

# **LIBERIA 2014 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Liberia is a constitutional republic with a bicameral National Assembly. In 2011 Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of the Unity Party won a second term in multi-party presidential elections, which domestic and international observers considered generally free and fair. Authorities generally maintained effective control over the security forces.

In early August, President Sirleaf declared a 90-day state of emergency to combat the deadliest epidemic of the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) in history. As of late November, more than seven thousand Liberians had been infected, with a high fatality rate, and infections continued to increase. Responding to the epidemic overwhelmed the government's extremely limited technical and human capacity. This health crisis brought a robust and coordinated international response of public health and logistics experts, international health-care workers, and other civilian and military responders to support the government's efforts. The legislature approved the state of emergency as required by law, and the measure allowed the government to deploy security personnel throughout the country to enforce quarantine checkpoints and a national curfew. It also allowed for the suspension of unspecified rights and privileges, in addition to discouraging large group gatherings as a way to minimize opportunities for spreading the virus. Soon after the state of emergency took effect, the chief justice of the Supreme Court noted the measure did not suspend habeas corpus. The Ebola crisis disrupted access to medical care and education, stigmatized affected communities and individuals, discouraged traditional burial rites, and stressed already limited government capacity and funding. The state of emergency expired on November 12. After legal injunctions spurred by Ebola fears delayed Senate elections several times, in mid-December the Supreme Court allowed the elections to proceed, and the elections were held on December 20 without major incidents.

The most serious human rights abuses were those linked to a lack of justice, judicial inefficiency, corruption, lengthy pretrial detention, denial of due process, and harsh prison conditions. Violence against women and children, including rape and domestic violence, and child labor were also serious problems.

Other important human rights abuses included reports of police abuse, harassment, and intimidation of detainees and others; arbitrary arrest and detention; official corruption; human trafficking; racial and ethnic discrimination; discrimination

against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) persons; mob killings; and ritualistic killings.

Impunity remained a serious problem despite intermittent and limited government attempts to investigate, prosecute, and punish officials who committed violations, whether in the security forces or elsewhere in the government.

## **Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom from:**

### **a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life**

There were no reports that the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings. In September, however, Liberia National Police (LNP) authorities announced the indefinite suspension of nine officers in connection with a confrontation that led to the death of an unidentified man at a police checkpoint at ELWA junction. The nine officers were charged with manslaughter and were awaiting trial at year's end.

### **b. Disappearance**

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

### **c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment**

The constitution prohibits practices such as torture and inhuman treatment; however, police officers and other security officials allegedly beat, abused, harassed, and intimidated persons in police custody or on the street in attempts to extort money.

### **Prison and Detention Center Conditions**

Prison conditions were harsh and at times life threatening.

Physical Conditions: The local press and the local nongovernmental organization (NGO) Prison Fellowship Liberia reported that prison officials threatened prisoners' lives and that prisoners were raped by other prisoners. Inadequate space, bedding, food, sanitation, ventilation, cooling, lighting, basic and emergency medical care, and potable water contributed to harsh and sometimes life-threatening conditions in the country's 15 prisons and detention centers. Many

prisoners supplemented their meals by purchasing food at the prison or receiving food from visitors. The Bureau of Corrections reported six prisoner deaths through November 13.

According to the Bureau of Corrections, approximately half of the country's 1,719 prisoners were at Monrovia Central Prison (MCP). This prison operated at more than twice its 375-person capacity because of the large number of pretrial detainees. The MCP population of 818 individuals included 14 juveniles as of November 4, but the female population, which numbered 17 the previous year, was relocated to a facility in Tubmanburg to create space in the prison for an intake isolation process to prevent Ebola from entering the prison population. Prisons remained understaffed, and prison personnel were poorly paid. The average monthly wage of a corrections officer, paid in U.S. currency, was \$200 plus incentives. Sixty-nine additional correctional officers were hired and trained at Camp Ware Academy during the year.

The MCP's one dedicated vehicle often was not operable, and as a result the MCP was frequently unable to transport prisoners and detainees to court or to a hospital. Prisoners were transported to or from court by the LNP or by commercial motor bikes and taxis. The need for prisoner transport was expected to grow due to revisions to the law, increasing the caseload in far-flung magistrate courts. The United Nations, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Carter Center, and Prison Fellowship Liberia continued to provide medical services and improve basic sanitary conditions at the MCP and other facilities where such services and conditions remained inadequate. NGOs provided medicines to treat seizures, skin infections, and mental health conditions, but other necessary medications, including those for malaria and tuberculosis, were replenished only when the stock of that medication was completely depleted. Since replenishment sometimes took weeks or months, inmates went without medication for lengthy periods. The government attempted, when funding was available, to improve prisoner diet by supplementing the prisoners' rice-based diet with beans. Funding to feed prisoners, maintain prison facilities, and pay employees lapsed in the last quarter of the year.

There were reports of inadequate treatment for ailing inmates and inmates with disabilities. While the law provides for compassionate release of prisoners who are ill, such release was rarely granted, since the law requires a written policy that does not exist.

Authorities held men and women in separate blocks throughout the country. In some counties and cities with just one detention center, officials held juveniles with adults and pretrial detainees with convicts. There were reports that separation of juveniles was inadequate, particularly at the MCP, where some children were held in adult cellblocks.

Conditions for women prisoners were somewhat better than were those for men, and women inmates were less likely to suffer from overcrowding. Women also had more freedom to move within the women's section of facilities.

The Corrections Advisory Unit of the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) worked with the Bureau of Corrections and Rehabilitation (BCR) to improve its accountability and adherence to international corrections standards. In addition to mentoring, advising, and capacity building, the UN Corrections Advisory Unit assisted refurbishment and rehabilitation of facilities.

Administration: The government continued to make efforts to improve recordkeeping on prisoners, but the process was manual and challenges remained. The BCR maintained a prison roll with help from the UNMIL Corrections Advisory Unit, but these were handwritten and referenced only one or two court documents. A biometric intake process, including photographs, at MCP was in an initial phase and had not been fully developed. Plans to develop a computerized database project for prisoners at the BCR were finalized. The international initiative, Making All Voices Count, in coordination with Prison Fellowship Liberia, began work on the framework for the biometric intake process.

Authorities sometimes used alternatives to prison sentencing for nonviolent offenders, but no ombudsman system operated on behalf of prisoners and detainees. Probationary sentences were used in some cases for nonviolent offenders. There was a nascent supervised pretrial release program being instituted in both magistrate and circuit courts, but the concept met with considerable resistance until the Ebola crisis. The Ministry of Justice's Division of Probation Services led efforts during the Ebola crisis to reduce greatly the number of inmates at the MCP. The law provides for bail, including release on the detainee's own recognizance. The bail system, however, was inefficient and corrupt. Courts failed to make adequate efforts to employ alternatives to incarceration at the pretrial stages of criminal proceedings.

Authorities generally permitted regular visitation hours and religious observances. Officials from the Human Rights Division of the Ministry of Justice and the BCR

visited prisons and detention centers to monitor conditions during the year. They also worked with prison staff to improve the treatment of inmates and detainees, as well as their conditions of detention. Internal reports and investigations into allegations of inhuman conditions were not made public; however, the bureau made statistics on prisons available to the public.

Independent Monitoring: The government permitted independent monitoring of prison conditions by local human rights groups, international NGOs, the United Nations, the ICRC, diplomatic personnel, and the media. Some human rights groups, including domestic and international organizations, regularly visited detainees at police headquarters and prisoners in the MCP. UNMIL's Human Rights and Protection Section held prison-monitoring training for more than 30 participants from the Independent National Commission on Human Rights (INCHR) and other civil society organizations.

Improvements: The ICRC provided hygiene items to four prisons and essential medicines to all 15 prisons. The ICRC, with the Ministry of Justice, improved water and sanitation infrastructure for 1,719 detainees and was working to establish a prison health-care system.

#### **d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention**

The constitution prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention; however, the government did not always observe these prohibitions. Citizens continued to be arbitrarily arrested, assaulted, and detained. For example, in September a lawmaker assaulted a public relations officer of a county superintendent at the Capitol Building during a personal quarrel. Members of the media also were targeted for political reasons. Mob violence continued to be widespread, partly because many citizens lack confidence in the justice system.

Citizens were frequently detained by police officers or magistrates for simply owing money to a complainant. Criminal charges were sometimes based upon allegations that were civil in nature.

Children under the age of 16 cannot be held criminally responsible for their conduct; however, magistrates, judges, prosecutors, police officers, and public defenders often lacked knowledge of the regulation. Juvenile offenders were frequently prosecuted as criminals and treated as adults by the judicial system. Children were often held in prisons, were poorly segregated or commingled with

adult offenders (even for nonviolent property offenses), and detained for extended periods.

### **Role of the Police and Security Apparatus**

The Ministry of Justice has responsibility for enforcing laws and maintaining order within the country, including overseeing the LNP and more than 20 other law enforcement agencies. The armed forces provides external security but also had some domestic security responsibilities, discharged primarily through the Liberia Coast Guard.

An estimated 4,430 UNMIL peacekeepers and 1,410 UN police officers (UNPOL) played a greatly reduced role in maintaining security, as the LNP assumed greater responsibility during the year. As part of a continuing drawdown, approximately 1,500 UNMIL personnel withdrew. Approximately 480 UNPOL advisors and 980 officers in the UN Formed Police Units monitored and advised the LNP.

The LNP operated independently and retained arrest authority. UNPOL ended joint patrols with LNP officers at the beginning of the Ebola crisis in March. In addition to its regular force, the LNP had a Police Support Unit (PSU), which received additional training in crowd and riot control, and an Emergency Response Unit (ERU), which received specialized training in antiterrorism, hostage rescue, internal security, tactical anticrime, and search-and-rescue activities. Half of ERU personnel received recertification training focused on strengthening police skills and knowledge of constitutional law, permissible use of force, and respect for human rights. Officers who failed the class were removed from the ERU and reassigned to other police jobs. The PSU and ERU were better trained and equipped than the regular LNP force.

Regular LNP officers remained poorly equipped, ineffective, and slow to respond to criminal activity, although the foot patrol met with some success in curbing crime in some areas. Police had limited transportation, logistics, communication, and forensic capabilities, and they did not have the capacity to investigate adequately many crimes, including homicides. The lack of a crime laboratory and other investigative tools hampered police investigations and evidence gathering that, in turn, hampered prosecutors' ability to prepare court cases. Training and assistance by international donors supported some improvements, including establishment of a new forensics lab with several trained staff members.

The Professional Standards Division of the LNP is responsible for investigating allegations of police misconduct and referring cases for prosecution. The INCHR reported violent police action during arrests was the most common complaint of misconduct.

An armed forces disciplinary board investigates alleged misconduct and abuses by military forces. The armed forces administer nonjudicial punishment and transfer any criminal cases involving military personnel to the LNP and Ministry of Justice for prosecution. President Sirleaf directed the INCHR to investigate a shooting incident involving soldiers during the quarantine of the West Point neighborhood in August. The INCHR released its findings to the public in a report on November 5, which recommended compensating victims' families, improving health-care facilities in West Point, and prosecuting offenders. Also on November 5, five soldiers, including a platoon commander, were sanctioned by a disciplinary board with demotions, forfeitures of salary, and correctional custody for offenses that ranged from making false statements and dereliction of duty to assault related to the August 20 West Point quarantine shootings.

### **Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees**

In general police must have warrants to make arrests. The law allows for arrests without a warrant, however, if appropriate paperwork is filed immediately afterwards for review by the appropriate authority. Arrests often were made without warrants, and warrants were sometimes issued without sufficient evidence. Detainees have the right to prompt determination of the legality of their arrest, but this did not always occur. The law provides that detainees be either charged or released within 48 hours, and detainees generally were informed of the charges against them upon arrest and typically brought before a judge for arraignment within 48 hours. Once sent to jail, however, those arraigned were often held in lengthy pretrial detention. Some detainees, particularly among the majority without the means to hire a lawyer, were held for more than 48 hours without charge. The law provides for bail for all criminal offenses, although it severely limits bail for individuals charged with capital offenses and serious sexual crimes. Detainees have the right to prompt access to counsel, visits from family members, and, if indigent, an attorney provided by the state in criminal and civil cases. The government frequently did not respect these rights, and indigent defendants appearing in magistrate courts (the venue in which most cases are initiated) were rarely provided state-sponsored counsel. Unavailability of counsel at the early stages of proceedings contributed to prolonged pretrial detention.

Arbitrary Arrest: Security forces continued to make arbitrary arrests, especially during major holidays, in an effort to reduce crime.

Pretrial Detention: Although the law provides for a defendant to receive an expeditious trial, lengthy pretrial and pre-arraignment detention remained serious problems. An estimated 70 percent of prisoners were pretrial detainees as of October 3, despite the large number of detainees released by the Magistrate Sitting Program (MSP) during the year to reduce EVD transmission in overcrowded prisons. A 2013 study of the MCP population revealed pretrial detainees were held on average more than 10 months.

The corrections system improved its capacity to implement probation. Additional police training helped reduce the number of pretrial detainees. Incarceration of new detainees, however, kept prisons overcrowded. In some cases the length of pretrial detention exceeded the maximum length of sentence that could be imposed for the alleged crime. Pretrial detention was exacerbated by the shortage of trained prosecutors and public defenders, inadequate police investigation and evidence collection, poor file management, and rampant allegations of extrajudicial settlements and judicial corruption. Under the state of emergency declared in response to the Ebola crisis, the judiciary and Ministry of Justice began substituting writs of arrest for writs of summons. This policy change, driven by a desire to minimize prison congestion and its potential to spread infection, greatly reduced the number of individuals arrested and held in pretrial detention.

#### **e. Denial of Fair Public Trial**

The constitution and law provide for an independent judiciary; however, judges and magistrates were subject to influence and corruption. Uneven application of the law and unequal distribution of personnel and resources remained problems throughout the judicial system. The government continued efforts to harmonize the traditional and formal justice systems, in particular through campaigns focused on trying criminal cases in formal courts. These cases included murder, rape, and human trafficking, as well as some civil cases that could be resolved in either system

#### **Trial Procedures**

Trials are public. Juries are used in circuit court trials but not at the magistrate level. The pool of jurors remained limited by literacy requirements. Jurors also were subject to influence and corrupt practices that undermined their neutrality.



Defendants have the right to be present at their trials, consult with an attorney in a timely manner, and have access to government-held evidence relevant to their case. These rights, however, were not consistently observed. Defendants have the right to be informed of the charges promptly and in detail. If a defendant, complainant, or witness does not speak or understand English, the court provides interpreters for the trial. Defendants have the right to a trial without delay and to have adequate time and facilities to prepare their defense. These rights often were not observed. Defendants enjoy a presumption of innocence, and they have the right to confront and question adverse witnesses, present their own evidence and witnesses, and appeal adverse decisions. Many of these protections were unavailable to defendants unable or unwilling to pay bribes or afford an attorney.

Lengthy pretrial detention often resulted in a miscarriage of justice. Some local NGOs continued to provide legal services to indigent defendants and others who had no representation. The Liberian National Bar Association continued to offer limited pro bono legal services to the indigent. Financial constraints remained a major challenge in recruiting experienced lawyers for this service.

The Magistrate Sitting Program, begun in 2009 to expedite the trials of persons detained at the MCP, adjudicated 950 cases through October. Proceedings resulted in the release of 572 detainees, the conviction of 252, and the transfer of 14 cases to a different court, while 10 case files were not found. The program suffered from operational problems including poor coordination among judges, prosecutors, defense counsel, and corrections personnel; deficient docket management; and inappropriate involvement of extrajudicial actors. Under the state of emergency, a policy change from issuing writs of arrest to issuing writs of summons slowed the arrival of new detainees at the MCP and substantially reduced the program's workload.

### **Political Prisoners and Detainees**

There were no reports of political prisoners or detainees.

### **Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies**

No specialized court exists to address lawsuits seeking damages for human rights violations. There is a separate civil law court in Monrovia, but circuit courts in each county function as both criminal and civil courts. Special courts deal with sexual violence, tax, probate, labor, civil, traffic, juvenile, debt, and administrative matters. As with the general courts, specialized courts were inefficient and in

some cases corrupt. The releases often were related to a lack of evidence and suspected bribes. For example, two months after the June conviction and sentencing of Anthony Kassabli for gang rape, human trafficking, and smuggling, a judge granted him bail pending his appeal despite the government's request to the Supreme Court that it block his release. Observers noted that the judge's bail ruling did not appear to comport with the law.

Individuals may appeal their cases, including human rights cases, to the Community Court of Justice of the Economic Community of West African States.

#### **f. Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence**

The constitution prohibits such actions, and the government generally respected these prohibitions.

### **Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:**

#### **a. Freedom of Speech and Press**

The constitution provides for freedom of speech and press, and the government generally respected these rights, although with some limits.

Freedom of Speech: Individuals could generally criticize the government publicly or privately without reprisal, but libel and national security laws placed some limits on freedom of speech.

Press Freedoms: Newspapers commonly accepted fees to publish press releases or other favorable articles. Those wishing to suppress information also made payments to newspapers not to print stories on particular topics. Media outlets rarely checked the accuracy of articles.

Violence and Harassment: Newspaper and radio station owners were occasionally harassed by law enforcement entities for their political opinions and reporting, especially when criticizing government officials. For example, in August, two staff members of the *National Chronicle* newspaper were allegedly beaten and detained when government security agencies closed the newspaper's office on the pretext of investigating claims that some officials were planning illegally to form an interim government.

Censorship or Content Restrictions: In the first half of the year, a radio station twice suspended the broadcast of a radio talk show host's program after he accused the government of corruption and inefficiency. The talk show host subsequently opened his own radio station.

Although generally able to express a wide variety of views, some journalists practiced self-censorship to avoid possible libel charges.

Libel Laws/National Security: Libel laws and a corrupt judicial system combined to constrain the work of some journalists and media outlets reporting on high-profile government or other public figures. For example, in August 2013 a prominent journalist was detained for failing to pay a judgment of 1.2 billion Liberian dollars (\$14.4 million) against him in a civil libel case filed by a former government minister. The Supreme Court upheld the sentence. When the minister of justice released the journalist from jail for humanitarian reasons, the Supreme Court suspended the minister from practicing law for six months and imposed the same penalty on the journalist's legal counsel for three months. The suit was subsequently resolved out of court.

## **Internet Freedom**

The government did not restrict or disrupt access to the internet or censor online content, and there were no reports that the government monitored private online communications without appropriate legal authority. According to the International Telecommunication Union, 4.6 percent of the population used the internet during 2013, a slight increase from 2012.

## **Academic Freedom and Cultural Events**

There were no government restrictions on academic freedom or cultural events.

### **b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association**

There were generally no government restrictions on peaceful assembly or association, but the president imposed restrictions on the movement of persons for health reasons under the state of emergency. Entertainment centers, video clubs, and schools where contagious disease could easily be spread were ordered to close or restrict their hours of operation for substantial periods during the year.

### **c. Freedom of Religion**

See the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* at [www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/](http://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/).

#### **d. Freedom of Movement, Internally Displaced Persons, Protection of Refugees, and Stateless Persons**

The constitution provides for freedom of movement within the country, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights, subject to exigencies imposed due to the Ebola crisis and the resulting state of emergency.

The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), other humanitarian organizations, and donor countries in providing protection and assistance to internally displaced persons, refugees, returning refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons, and other persons of concern.

In-country Movement: The LNP and Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization (BIN) officers occasionally subjected travelers to arbitrary searches and petty extortion at unofficial checkpoints. During the Ebola crisis, the national task force put additional checkpoints into place at border crossings as well as between and within counties heavily affected by the Ebola virus. A national curfew and quarantine zones declared to contain the health crisis further restricted in-country movement, with violations subject to penalty.

During the state of emergency, the government temporarily closed a number of border crossing points. Liberians stranded in Sierra Leone were allowed to petition both governments to cross the border; however, the BIN reported no such petitions were granted. The BIN also acknowledged it was unable to monitor effectively the many unofficial border-crossing points.

Emigration and Repatriation: In August, because of the state of emergency, the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization implemented a new policy for managing cross-border movement.

Before the Ebola crisis began in April, the UNHCR had resumed voluntary repatriation, and more than 12,000 Ivoirian refugees returned home during the year. The program, however, was temporarily suspended due to Ebola concerns.

#### **Protection of Refugees**

Access to Asylum: The law provides for the granting of asylum or refugee status. The government has an established system for providing protection to refugees and granted refugee status and asylum.

Temporary Protection: The government provided temporary protection to individuals who may not qualify as refugees. The government, with the UNHCR and other implementing partners, continued to provide protection to Ivoirian refugees who entered the country after November 2010. As of the end of October, 38,217 Ivoirian refugees remained in Liberia. In the past ethnic tensions resulting from this influx contributed to land conflicts along the country's border with Cote d'Ivoire. As a precautionary measure, in the midst of the Ebola health crisis, the government and the UNHCR suspended the consolidation and relocation of the refugee population.

### **Section 3. Respect for Political Rights: The Right of Citizens to Change Their Government**

The constitution and law provides citizens the ability to change their government through free and fair elections, which they exercised through elections based on universal suffrage.

#### **Elections and Political Participation**

Recent Elections: In the 2011 presidential runoff election, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf won with 91 percent of the vote after her opponent, Winston Tubman of the Congress for Democratic Change (CDC), boycotted the second round of voting. Voters also selected 15 senators and 73 representatives in that election. International and national observers declared the presidential runoff election free, fair, and transparent, although marred by low turnout due to previous violent protest and the CDC boycott.

The runoff followed general elections held the previous month in which 16 candidates vied in a first round for the presidency and 865 candidates contested 15 Senate and 73 House of Representatives seats. International and national observers declared those elections also to have been free, fair, transparent, and credible despite some minor irregularities.

Special senatorial elections scheduled for October were postponed because of the Ebola health crisis. The elections were held on December 20, a date agreed upon

by both the legislative and executive branches and allowed after the Supreme Court heard several arguments seeking to postpone the elections further. All candidates campaigned during a period shortened by legal proceedings before the Supreme Court and characterized by restrictions on large group gatherings intended to contain the Ebola epidemic.

Participation of Women and Minorities: In addition to a woman president, there were five female ministers in the 20-member national cabinet. There were five women in the 30-seat Senate and eight in the 73-seat House of Representatives. Two female associate justices sat on the five-member Supreme Court. Women constituted 33 percent of local government officials and 31 percent of senior and junior ministers.

In a predominantly Christian country, one cabinet minister, two deputy cabinet ministers, one senator, eight representatives, one Supreme Court justice, and one county superintendent were Muslim.

#### **Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government**

The law does not provide explicit criminal penalties for official corruption, although criminal penalties exist for economic sabotage, mismanagement of funds, bribery, and other corruption-related acts. Corruption persisted, and the World Bank's most recent Worldwide Governance Indicators reflected that corruption was a serious problem.

Corruption: Officials engaged in corrupt practices with impunity. Low pay for civil servants, minimal job training, and little judicial accountability exacerbated official corruption and a culture of impunity. The government dismissed some officials for alleged corruption and recommended others for prosecution. The Liberian Anti-Corruption Commission (LACC) and the Ministry of Justice are responsible for exposing and combating official corruption. The LACC is empowered to prosecute any case it refers to the Ministry of Justice and which the ministry declines to prosecute within 90 days. Underfunding, understaffing, and judicial bottlenecks hampered the LACC's ability to act on its own initiative. During the year the LACC received 26 cases, investigated 11 cases, and recommended seven cases for prosecution. The cases LACC recommended to the Ministry of Justice for prosecution included 13 current and former government officials, including T. Nelson Williams II, managing director of the Liberian Petroleum Refining Corporation; Clemenceau Urey, former board chair of the National Oil Company of Liberia; Miatta Beyslow, former minister of commerce

and industry; Milton Teahjay, superintendent of Sinoe County; David Kortie, publisher of *Flash Point* newspaper; and Jusufu S. Keita, public relations officer at the Ministry of Public Works.

In 2013 the government passed antimoney laundering and counterterrorism-financing threat legislation and established a Financial Intelligence Unit in February to monitor financial disclosures, mainly by banks. Neither law was fully implemented at year's end.

A code of conduct applying to all public officials and employees was signed into law in May proscribing, among other things, "the giving of any form of bribe or casual gift in connection with the performance of...public duties."

The government dismissed or suspended a number of officials for corruption. For example, in June the president suspended three senior officials in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for financial impropriety. Those suspended included Deputy Minister for Administration Unan Kumba Thompson, Consul-General Williams G. Greaves, Jr., and Comptroller Jame Quiqui.

Some judges accepted bribes to award damages in civil cases. Judges sometimes requested bribes to try cases, release detainees from prison, or find defendants not guilty in criminal cases. Defense attorneys and prosecutors sometimes suggested defendants pay bribes to secure favorable rulings from or to appease judges, prosecutors, jurors, and police officers. The Ministry of Justice continued its calls to reform the jury system.

Police corruption was a problem. The LNP investigated reports of police misconduct or corruption, and authorities suspended or dismissed several LNP officers. The BIN dismissed one officer for forgery, suspended four others for financial malpractice, and was investigating three others for their involvement in allowing Guineans who were suspected of carrying the Ebola virus to cross into Liberia. An LNP officer was convicted in August of drug trafficking after his arrest in November 2013 at a border checkpoint.

The government continued to take steps to improve transparency. The General Auditing Commission (GAC) audited ministries and other government agencies and sent reports to the legislature. Since 2008 the GAC had submitted more than 70 reports to the legislature, none of which were reviewed or acted upon. The World Bank assisted the legislature in setting up the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) Secretariat, a technical committee staffed by accountants and other auditing

experts, which was charged with reviewing the backlog of GAC reports and recommending appropriate action to the legislature. The PAC conducted public hearings, reviewed seven audit reports in 2013, and submitted its findings and recommendations to both houses of the legislature. The legislature endorsed those recommendations and forwarded them to the Office of the President, but none was acted upon. The PAC conducted four additional audit reports in February but by year's end had not submitted its findings and recommendations to the legislature.

Financial Disclosure: President Sirleaf issued an executive order in 2012 requiring executive branch officials to make mandatory financial disclosures and declare their assets to the LACC. In 2013 the LACC initiated an asset verification process to review the declarations and summarized its findings of discrepancies and instances of unexplained wealth. The LACC was not required to release the contents of individual declarations, and it released only aggregate information about officials' cooperation and overall compliance. In September, under the new code of conduct, the president suspended for one month three officials who failed to declare their assets and required that they each forfeit a month's salary. This followed her suspension of 40 ministers and deputy ministers earlier in the year for the same reason.

During the year the Ministry of Finance published the national budget and quarterly financial results, and individual state-owned enterprises published their financial statements. Many of these enterprises had not been audited for several years. Short-term advisors continued to support the ministry and other government entities in efforts to improve financial management, purchasing procedures, and contracting practices. They helped institute financial controls that increased government revenues and helped to curb corrupt practices. Government ministries and agencies often did not adhere to public procurement regulations, particularly for natural resource concessions, or to government vetting procedures when hiring ministry officials. Concerns remained about the transparency of the finances of the state-owned enterprises and autonomous bodies.

Public Access to Information: The law provides that the government release upon request government information not involving national security or military issues. Some transparency advocates, including the head of the LACC, suggested that legislators amend the law to provide citizens better access in order to verify government funds were properly spent and accounted for. In 2013 a local NGO sued and won a case against the LACC for failing to provide access to an executive branch official's asset declaration data. The case was under appeal at year's end.



## **Section 5. Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights**

A number of domestic and international human rights groups operated without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. Government officials were generally cooperative and responsive to their views.

Government Human Rights Bodies: In 2011 the INCHR developed a work plan including creation of the Palava Hut mechanism, through which community members could come together in their towns and villages to discuss grievances and seek reconciliation at the community level. The Palava Hut mechanism was launched in 2012, and one report was submitted. No subsequent reports were submitted, although the INCHR continued to function.

## **Section 6. Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons**

The constitution prohibits discrimination based on ethnic background, sex, creed, place of origin, disability, or political opinion; however, the government did not enforce these provisions effectively. The constitution allows only persons who are “Negroes” or of “Negro descent” to become citizens and own land. Lebanese born in the country over several generations, for example, remained noncitizens in accordance with this provision.

Tribal tensions exploited during the country’s civil war which formally ended in 2003 continued on a diminished level to contribute to social and political friction among ethnic groups.

### **Women**

Rape and Domestic Violence: Rape is illegal, but the government did not enforce the law effectively, and rape remained a serious and pervasive problem. According to the World Health Organization, 77 percent of women and girls had been the victim of sexual violence. The law legally defines rape but does not specifically criminalize spousal rape. First-degree rape, rape involving a minor, or rape that results in serious injury or disability or is committed with the use of a deadly weapon, is punishable by up to life imprisonment. Second-degree rape, defined as rape committed without the aggravating circumstances enumerated above, is punishable by up to 10 years in prison. Judges have the discretion to impose less than the maximum sentence. Defendants accused of first-degree rape

may be denied bail if evidence presented at arraignment meets certain evidentiary standards. There was a large backlog of rape cases, and defendants were often detained for years without trial and sometimes without indictment. The government and NGOs attributed increased reporting of rape to an improved understanding of what constitutes the crime. Despite increased reporting, however, human rights groups claimed that the prevalence of rape was higher, since many cases were not reported. The Sexual Pathways Referral program, a combined initiative of the government and NGOs, improved access to medical, psychosocial, legal, and counseling assistance for victims. The Women's and Children's Protection Section (WACPS) of the LNP investigated 188 reported cases of rape, of which 43 were referred to a specialized sexual violence court (Court E), which by law has exclusive original jurisdiction over cases of sexual assault, including abuse of minors. Court E's effectiveness was limited by having only one of two authorized judges. A few of the 43 cases referred to Court E were forwarded to criminal court (Court C) for further judicial review. There were prosecutions in seven cases during the year, all of which resulted in conviction and sentences ranging from one to seven years' imprisonment.

The sexual and gender-based violence prosecution unit within the Ministry of Justice continued to coordinate with Court E and collaborate with NGOs and international donors to increase public awareness of sexual and gender-based violence issues.

There were 58 WACPS offices across the country, 31 of them outside the capital. More than one-third of the 210 WACPS officers were female.

The social stigma of rape, especially in rural areas, contributed to the pervasiveness of out-of-court settlements and discouraged formal prosecution of cases. An inefficient justice system also prevented timely prosecution, although local NGOs pushed for judicial action and sometimes provided lawyers to indigent victims. The government raised awareness of the issue of rape through billboards, radio broadcasts, and other outreach campaigns.

The law outlaws domestic violence; however, it remained a widespread problem. According to the World Health Organization, 33 percent of married women reported experiencing domestic violence. The maximum penalty for domestic violence is six months' imprisonment, but the government did not enforce the law effectively and generally treated cases, if reported, as either simple or aggravated assault. The government and media made some efforts to publicize the problem, and several NGOs continued programs to treat abused women and girls and to

increase awareness of their rights. LNP officers received training on sexual offenses as part of their initial training.

During the year the Ministry of Gender and Development organized workshops and seminars to combat domestic violence.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): No law specifically prohibits female genital mutilation/cutting. There were no known reports during the year of FGM/C performed on women age 18 and over. It is typically performed on girls rather than on women (see section 6, Children).

Sexual Harassment: The law does not prohibit sexual harassment, which remained a major problem, including in schools and places of work. Government billboards and notices in government offices warned against harassment in the workplace.

Reproductive Rights: There are no laws restricting couples and individuals from deciding the number, spacing, and timing of their children, and individuals have the right to seek and acquire information on reproductive health. Information and assistance on family planning was difficult to obtain, however, particularly in rural areas, where there were few health clinics. The government included family planning counseling and services as key components of its new 10-year national health and social welfare plan. A 2013 demographic and health report indicated modern contraceptive use stood at 20 percent nationwide, although some rural counties had rates closer to 10 percent. A 2011 government-led survey found that approximately two-thirds of women in similar rural counties said they wanted to use family planning methods. This discrepancy suggested that poverty, lack of government resources, and cultural barriers may impede family planning efforts. Teen pregnancy was also historically very high.

According to the UN Population Fund, the country had earlier in the year reduced its maternal mortality rate during the past 13 years from 1,100 to 640 per 100,000 live births, and a woman's lifetime risk of maternal death was one in 31. Reducing maternal mortality remained a priority of the government, and activities in past years included additional training of midwives and providing incentives to pregnant women to seek prenatal care and childbirth at a hospital or clinic. The majority of women deliver outside of a health facility, but with the outbreak of Ebola, many midwives left their stations to return home, leaving many pregnant women without proper care.

Discrimination: Women and men enjoy the same legal status. By law women can inherit land and property, are entitled to receive equal pay for equal work, and can own and manage businesses. Women experienced discrimination, however, in such areas as employment (see section 7.d.), credit, pay, education, and housing. In rural areas traditional practice or traditional leaders often did not recognize a woman's right to inherit land. While progress was made through programs to educate traditional leaders about women's rights, authorities often did not enforce those rights.

Women experienced some economic discrimination based on cultural traditions. The government, however, promoted women in the economic sector through Ministry of Gender and related programs and NGO partnerships--including workshops on networking, entrepreneurial skills, and microcredit lending. Women owned or operated many businesses.

While the law prohibits polygamy, traditional and religious customs permit men to have more than one wife. No specific office exists to enforce the legal rights of women, but the Ministry of Gender and Development and the Women, Peace, and Security Secretariat generally are responsible for promoting women's rights.

## **Children**

Birth Registration: Citizenship can be derived through parentage if at least one parent is a Liberian citizen or by birth in the country if the child is of "Negro" descent. If a child born in the country is not of "Negro" descent, the child cannot acquire citizenship. Non-"Negro" residents, such as the large Lebanese community, cannot acquire or transmit citizenship. The law requires parents to register their infants within 14 days of birth; however, fewer than 5 percent of births were registered.

Education: The law provides for tuition-free and compulsory education in public schools from the primary (grades one-six) through junior secondary (grades seven-nine) levels, but many schools charged informal fees to pay for teachers' salaries and operating costs that the government did not cover. These fees prevented many students from attending school. By law fees are required at the senior secondary level (grades 10-12) and, as a practical matter, are essential, since the government was unable to fund these schools fully. In both public and private schools, families of students often were required to provide their children's uniforms, books, pencils, paper, and even desks.

Although the official primary school-age population is six to 15 years of age, the civil war disrupted the education of many students; as a result primary school students in the country ranged from six to more than 20 years of age. An estimated 60 percent of children in primary school (grades one-six) were over age 12. While education reforms continued, overage students with a high rate of absenteeism continued to pose a significant challenge to an education system with limited resources and few qualified teachers. Girls accounted for fewer than half of all students in primary and secondary schools, with their proportion decreasing progressively at higher levels. Students with special needs and those in the rural counties were among the most vulnerable and underserved groups in terms of access to education. Although the government increased its budget allocation for education, it was unable to adequately compensate teachers, provide schools with needed resources, or compensate families for income foregone by sending their children to school. The Ebola crisis also shuttered all private and public schools for the fall semester.

The Civil Service Agency led a civil service reform effort to introduce biometric identification of personnel and thus eliminate “ghost” employees from the schools and other government offices.

Women are historically less educated than men, but the government sponsored campaigns countrywide to increase girls’ attendance at school. Government efforts resulted in more girls attending.

Child Abuse: Widespread child abuse persisted, and reports of sexual violence against children continued. Civil society organizations reported many rapes of children under 12, and there were a few cases of child endangerment reported during the year. The true incidence of child abuse was believed to be much higher.

Early and Forced Marriage: The 2011 National Children’s Act sets the marriage age for all persons at 18 years, while the Domestic Relations Act sets the minimum marriage age at 21 for men and 18 for women. The Equal Rights of the Traditional Marriage Act of 1998 permits a girl to marry at age 16. The government, in partnership with international donors, operated an alternative basic education program for adults who had never received formal education. The program also addressed life skills, such as health, hygiene, birth control, and ways to delay marriage. During the year the government released a parent-teacher association manual promoting delayed marriage and the importance of enrolling children in their proper grades. Nevertheless, underage marriage remained a problem in rural areas. According to a 2012 demographic health survey, 38 percent of women ages

20-24 were married or in a union before the age of 18. Mass media campaigns were conducted in target communities to educate citizens about the negative consequences of child marriage.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): FGM/C was common and traditionally performed on young girls of northern, western, and central ethnic groups, particularly in rural areas. According to a 2007 demographic health survey, 66 percent of girls and women ages 15-49 had undergone the procedure. Mass campaigns against FGM/C during the six years to 2013 reduced this number, but exact data was unavailable. The most extreme form of FGM/C, infibulation, was not practiced. The law does not prohibit FGM/C, and traditional institutions, such as the secret Sande Society, often performed FGM/C as an initiation rite, making it difficult to ascertain the number of cases.

To combat FGM/C, the government trained community leaders and women's groups and provided training in alternative income-generating skills to FGM/C practitioners. Supporters of the practice fiercely resisted government, NGO, and media attempts to report on and end the practice. Law enforcement agents reportedly resisted investigating intimidation and threats against anti-FGM/C activists. Officials did not actively seek a ban on FGM/C, but the government renewed its suspension of activity by the Sande Society across the country in June in light of the Ebola crisis.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The law prohibits the commercial sexual exploitation of children and child pornography, and authorities generally enforced the law, although girls were occasionally engaged in prostitution in exchange for money, food, and school fees. The minimum age for consensual sex is 18, and during the year the government tried and convicted five of 38 received cases of statutory rape, although that was reportedly only a small fraction of the true extent of the problem. Statutory rape is a first-degree offense, and the maximum sentence for perpetrators is life imprisonment. The penalty for child pornography is up to five years' imprisonment for violators. Orphaned children remained especially susceptible to exploitation, including prostitution.

Displaced Children: Despite international and government attempts to reunite children separated from their families during the civil war, some children – a mix of street children, former combatants, and internally displaced persons – continued to live on the streets of Monrovia.

Institutionalized Children: Regulation of orphanages continued to be very weak. Many unofficial orphanages also served as transit points or informal group homes for children, some of whom had living parents who had given them up for possible adoption. Orphanages had difficulty providing basic sanitation, adequate medical care, and sufficient nutrition. The orphanages relied primarily on private donations and support from international organizations such as the UN Children’s Fund and the World Food Program, which provided food and care throughout the year. Many orphans lived without assistance from these institutions. Some groups under guise of an orphanage brought children from rural areas with a promise to provide the children education and then generated income by selling the children to households in the Monrovia area.

The country did not have a facility for the care of juvenile delinquents. The Bureau of Corrections and Rehabilitation reported that land had been acquired for construction of a facility, but there were no firm plans to establish or construct such a facility. Instead, juvenile delinquents were routinely housed with adult offenders. The Ministry of Justice worked with the judiciary to issue new guidelines to divert juveniles from the formal criminal justice system and place them in a variety of safe homes and “kinship” care situations.

International Child Abductions: The country is not a party to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction.

### **Anti-Semitism**

There was no discernible Jewish community, and there were no reports of anti-Semitic acts.

### **Trafficking in Persons**

See the Department of State’s *Trafficking in Persons Report* at [www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/](http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/).

### **Persons with Disabilities**

Although it is illegal to discriminate against persons with physical and mental disabilities, such persons did not enjoy equal access to government services and found very limited employment prospects (see section 7.d.). The constitution prohibits discrimination against persons with physical, sensory, intellectual, or other mental disabilities in employment and provides for access to health care, but

these provisions were not always enforced. There is a legal prohibition against discrimination on such bases as access to air travel or other transportation. Streets, schools, public buildings, and other facilities were generally in poor condition and inaccessible to persons with disabilities, although new curbs in Monrovia were built to be wheelchair accessible. The National Union of Organizations of the Disabled (NUOD) argued against the passage of legislation under consideration that would allow schools to exclude children with disabilities from free and compulsory education.

The University of Liberia and other public schools discriminated against students with disabilities, arguing resources and equipment were insufficient to accommodate them. In 2012 a blind student passed the university's entrance exam but was denied entry on the basis that the university did not have proper equipment to support persons with disabilities. The NUOD sought redress, noting the privately run African Methodist University and United Methodist University admitted blind students, but no action was taken during the year on the request.

Many citizens had permanent disabilities as a result of the civil war. Persons with disabilities faced societal discrimination, particularly in rural areas. Few children with disabilities had access to education; a 2008-09 survey found only 0.8 percent of students enrolled in school were identified as having disabilities. The government included persons with disabilities in its 2012 Vision 2030 national development strategy meeting and related panel discussions that continued during the year.

Students with serious disabilities are exempt from compulsory education.

The right of persons with disabilities to vote and otherwise participate in civic affairs was protected by law and was generally respected. The Ministry of Health and Social Welfare is the government agency responsible for protecting the rights of persons with disabilities and implementing measures designed to improve respect for their rights.

### **National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities**

Although the law prohibits ethnic discrimination, racial discrimination is enshrined in the constitution, which restricts citizenship and land ownership to those of "Negro descent." Many persons of Lebanese and Asian descent who were born or lived most of their lives in the country were denied citizenship and property rights because of this discrimination.



## **Indigenous People**

The country has 16 indigenous ethnic groups; each speaks a distinct primary language and is concentrated regionally. Differences involving ethnic groups continued to contribute to social and political tensions.

## **Acts of Violence, Discrimination, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity**

The law prohibits consensual same-sex sexual activity, and the culture is strongly opposed to homosexuality. “Voluntary sodomy” is a misdemeanor with a penalty of up to one year’s imprisonment. As of November 4, five detainees were in custody for sodomy in the MCP, two of whom were detained for more than two years. The law prohibits same-sex couples, regardless of citizenship, from adopting children. LGBT persons were cautious about revealing their sexual orientation or gender identities. A few civil society groups promoted the rights of LGBT individuals, but most maintained a very low profile due to fear of mistreatment.

There were press and civil society reports of harassment of persons perceived to be LGBT. Societal stigma and fear of official reprisal may have prevented victims from reporting violence or discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

According to a local news report, on September 8, unknown assailants recognized and attacked a local LGBT-rights activist. The attackers smashed the front windshield of the car the activist was driving. The activist managed to escape from the mob and filed a police report. The case was under investigation at year’s end.

In November 2013 Human Rights Watch, in conjunction with Stop AIDS in Liberia (SAIL), an HIV/AIDS advocacy group, released a report, *‘It’s Nature, Not a Crime’: Discriminatory Laws and LGBT people in Liberia*. The report described the legal and cultural contexts of LGBT discrimination and made broad recommendations to government and civil society regarding policy, legislation, law enforcement techniques, investigation of reports of violence, and education. Human Rights Watch and SAIL continued their joint awareness campaign during the year highlighting the discrimination the LGBT community faced.

## **HIV and AIDS Social Stigma**

In the most recent demographic and health survey (2007), 63.4 percent of women and 45.5 percent of men reported discriminatory attitudes toward those with HIV.

The People Living with HIV Stigma Index 2013 report on Liberia stated that, with respect to external stigma, 48 percent of 483 respondents in a study believed they were subject to gossip, 30 percent had been insulted, 21 percent had been physically assaulted, and 20 percent had been subjected to psychological pressure or manipulation. With regard to internal stigma, 67 percent felt ashamed, 55 percent experienced guilt, 41 percent had low self-esteem, 18 percent were isolated, 12 percent had suicidal thoughts, and 10 percent believed they deserved to be punished. HIV-related social stigma and discrimination discouraged persons from confirming their HIV status, thus limiting HIV prevention and treatment services. Children orphaned because of AIDS faced similar social stigma. For example, in June neighbors reportedly isolated and ostracized a woman after a nurse inappropriately disclosed the woman's HIV-positive status to community members.

Government ministries developed, adopted, and implemented several strategic plans to combat social stigma and discrimination on the basis of HIV status. The Ministry of Labor was implementing a 2009 National HIV and AIDS Workplace Policy to promote in work environments supportive attitudes and environment for persons with HIV. Similarly the Ministry of Education's strategic plan for 2010-14 aimed to destigmatize and safeguard against discrimination on the basis of HIV status in its recruitment, employment, admission, and termination processes. A 2010 amendment to the Public Health Law prohibits "discrimination and vilification on the basis of actual and perceived HIV status" in the workplace, school, and health facilities, with offenses punishable by a fine of no less than 1,000 Liberian dollars (\$12).

### **Other Societal Violence or Discrimination**

Mob violence and vigilantism, which resulted in part from the public's lack of confidence in the police and judicial system, resulted in deaths and injuries. For example, in July a violent demonstration broke out at an Arcelor Mittal Company mining site northeast of the capital when locals alleged denial of proper compensation. The rioters vandalized, looted, or burned several of the company's properties. Many of the rioters were arrested and sent to court pending trial.

There were reports of increased stigmatization of EVD survivors and their families as well as EVD health-care workers. According to a September Danish Refugee Council Report, local residents of a town in Nimba county physically and verbally abused EVD health-care workers, since some residents believed the health workers had intentionally transmitted EVD in the community.

There were reports of killings in which body parts were removed from the victim, a practice that could be related to ritual killings. For example, during a one-week period in June, residents near the city of Harper in Maryland County found two mutilated bodies; both corpses had missing body parts. The cases were under investigation at year's end. The number of such killings was difficult to ascertain, since police sometimes described such deaths as homicides, accidents, or suicides, even when body parts were removed.

## **Section 7. Worker Rights**

### **a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining**

The law provides workers, except public servants and employees of state-owned enterprises, the right to form or join freely independent unions of their choice without prior authorization or excessive requirements. It allows unions to conduct their activities without interference by employers. The law provides that labor organizations and associations have the right to draw up their constitutions and rules with regard to electing their representatives, organizing their activities, and formulating their programs. The law also prohibits employers from discriminating against an employee because of membership in a labor organization. The law does not, however, provide adequate protection, because it has inadequate sanctions. The law prohibits unions from engaging in partisan political activity. It prohibits agricultural workers from joining industrial workers' organizations. Workers, except civil servants, have the right to strike, provided that the Ministry of Law is notified of the intent to strike. Collective bargaining is protected by law.

While the law prohibits antiunion discrimination and provides for reinstatement for workers dismissed for union activity, it allows for dismissal without cause if the company provided the mandated severance package. It also does not prohibit retaliation against strikers.

In general the government effectively enforced applicable laws, and workers exercised their rights. Employees enjoy freedom of association, and they have the right to establish and become members of organizations of their own choosing

without previous authorization or coercion. In June the Malaysian palm oil company Sime Darby and the United Workers' Union signed the company's first collective bargaining agreement. The agreement focused on improving housing, health, and educational facilities; safe drinking water; latrines; and death benefits. On July 1, the Liberia Agriculture Company and United Workers' Union negotiated a new collective bargaining agreement targeting an increase in wages.

Union power increased during the year through increased membership at plantations; however, only a small fraction of the workforce was employed in the formal sector, and more than 80 percent of workers did not enjoy any formal labor protections. Labor unions called on the legislature to pass laws that would improve work conditions across the country. Although issues of wages remained critical in agriculture sector bargaining, labor unions also shifted attention to other socioeconomic issues, such as better housing, health, and education facilities. Unions were independent of the government and political parties.

There were no reports of discrimination or employer retaliation against strikers during the year.

#### **b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor**

The law prohibits all forms of forced or compulsory labor; however, the government did not effectively enforce such laws. Resources, inspections, and remediation were inadequate. The law does not prescribe explicit penalties for violations, and as such, was insufficient to deter violations.

Families living in the interior sometimes sent young women and children to stay with relatives in Monrovia or other cities with the promise that the relatives would assist the women and children in pursuing educational or other opportunities. In some instances these women and children were forced to work as street vendors, domestic servants, or beggars. Additionally, young women and children were subject to forced labor on rubber plantations and in gold mines, rock-crushing quarries, and alluvial diamond mines. Forced labor continued despite efforts by NGOs and other organizations to eliminate the practice.

When victims were identified, the Women and Children Protection Section of the LNP, along with NGOs, worked to reunite victims with their families in the interior or referred them to safe homes. Child labor was addressed as a child endangerment issue; consequently, no reliable figures were available on the number of children removed from forced labor. The government took a few steps

to prevent or eliminate forced labor, including periodic labor inspections to enforce the 2013 National Children's Act.

See the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at [www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/](http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/).

### **c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment**

The law prohibits the employment and apprenticeship of children under age 16 during school hours. The law does not provide for additional restrictions on working hours. One of the provisions of the New Education Reform Act of 2011 addresses prior inconsistencies between the minimum employment age and compulsory educational requirements. The new compulsory education requirement extends through grade nine or until age 15. The National Children's Act has provisions intended to protect children from the worst forms of child labor--any work hazardous to a child's health, educational, emotional, or physical development--and was intended to supplement other laws and efforts.

The Child Labor Commission is responsible for enforcing child labor laws and policies. The commission coordinated efforts to provide scholarships for children to enroll in school. The government charged the Ministry of Labor's Child Labor Secretariat, the Ministry of Justice's Human Rights Division, the Ministry of Gender and Development's Human Rights Division, the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare's Department of Social Welfare, and the LNP's WACPS with investigating and referring for prosecution allegations of child labor.

The government did not effectively enforce child labor laws. The Child Labor Commission had inadequate staff and funding. Resources, inspections, and remediation were inadequate. The law does not prescribe explicit penalties for violations and, as such, was insufficient to deter violations. Except for regularly scheduled sensitization and training activities, the government undertook no significant actions to address child labor.

Child labor was widespread in almost every economic sector. In urban areas children assisted their parents as vendors in markets or hawked goods on the streets. There were reports that children tapped rubber on smaller plantations and private farms. There were also reports that children worked in conditions that were likely to harm their health and safety, such as rock crushing or work that required carrying heavy loads. Some children were engaged in hazardous labor in alluvial diamond and gold mining as well as in the agriculture sector.

International NGOs worked to eliminate the worst forms of child labor by withdrawing children from hazardous work and putting at-risk children in school. Other local and international NGOs worked to raise awareness of the worst forms of child labor.

See the Department of Labor's *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor* at [www.dol.gov/ilab/reports/child-labor/findings/](http://www.dol.gov/ilab/reports/child-labor/findings/).

#### **d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment or Occupation**

A constitutional provision prohibits discrimination with respect to equal opportunity for work and employment regardless of sex, creed, religion, ethnic background, place of origin, or political affiliation, and calls for equal pay for equal work. The government, in general, did not effectively enforce the law. The law does not prohibit discrimination in the workplace regarding language, communicable diseases, sexual orientation, or gender identity.

Discrimination in employment and occupation occurred with respect to gender, disability, and HIV-positive status (see section 6). Apart from facing some economic discrimination based on cultural traditions, women also experienced discrimination in employment.

Migrant workers enjoy the same legal protections, wages, and working conditions as citizens.

#### **e. Acceptable Conditions of Work**

The national law requires a minimum wage of 15 Liberian dollars (\$0.18) per hour, not exceeding eight hours per day, excluding benefits, for unskilled laborers. The minimum wage laws apply only to the formal economic sector. The law does not fix a minimum wage for agricultural workers but requires that they be paid at the rate agreed to in the collective bargaining agreement between workers' unions and management, excluding benefits. Skilled labor has no minimum fixed wage, and the average salary for civil servants was 5,600 Liberian dollars (\$67) per month. The law requires equal pay for equal work.

Many families paid minimum-wage incomes were also engaged in subsistence farming, small-scale marketing, and begging.

The law provides for a 48-hour, six-day regular workweek with a 30-minute rest period for every five hours of work. The six-day workweek may be extended to 56 hours for service occupations and 72 hours for miners. The law provides for pay for overtime and prohibits excessive compulsory overtime.

The law provides for paid leave, severance benefits, and occupational health and safety standards. Penalties were not sufficient to deter violations.

The Ministry of Labor's Labor Inspection Department enforced government-established health and safety standards. The ministry had approximately 25 inspectors throughout the country to investigate allegations of labor violations. The department assigned these inspectors to supplement county labor commissioners in all counties, and they mainly monitored the formal sector. The department was grossly understaffed at the county level, and inspectors frequently lacked working vehicles. Although a few counties had assigned vehicles, most had only a motorbike. In instances of breach of standards, fines were imposed on violators, but often these were an insufficient deterrent. Delinquent violators were not regularly sent to the labor court. Enforcement of standards and inspection findings was not always consistent.

Most citizens were unable to find work in the formal sector and therefore did not benefit from any of the formal labor laws and protections. Informal sector workers, estimated at 85 percent of the workforce, faced widely varying, and often harsh, working conditions.

Workers cannot remove themselves from situations that endanger health or safety without jeopardy to their employment, and authorities did not effectively protect employees in this situation.