

Liberia Faces Persistent Human Rights Concerns, U.S. Report Finds

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Monrovia, Liberia, continues to grapple with widespread human rights violations despite ongoing government reforms, according to the 2024 U.S. Department of State Country Report on Human Rights Practices released this week.

The report noted no significant improvement in Liberia's human rights situation over the past year. While authorities have taken steps to identify and punish officials implicated in

abuses, including some tied to the nation's civil war, serious problems remain. These include reports of unlawful killings, torture, arbitrary detention, restrictions on press freedom, human trafficking, and limits on workers' rights.

Rights groups in Liberia say that underfunded and corrupt institutions continue to leave citizens vulnerable. "Rape is a human rights issue. Economic rights are human rights. Environmental issues are human rights," said Anderson Miamen of the Center for Transparency and Accountability in Liberia (CENTAL). He added that agencies such as the police, the Justice Ministry, and drug enforcement units suffer from inadequate resources and corruption, hampering enforcement.

One persistent concern is prison overcrowding and prolonged detention without trial. In April, unrest broke out at Fish Town Central Prison following the death of an inmate. Observers say the facility, plagued by poor medical care, reflects broader justice system failings where investigations into deaths and abuse often stall.

Tensions over environmental harm have also fueled conflict. In Grand Cape Mount County, protests against the Bea Mountain Mining Company in February turned deadly when police reportedly used live ammunition and tear gas on demonstrators, including women and children. At least three protesters, including students, were killed and nine others critically injured. Communities had accused the company of contaminating water sources and damaging farmland.

Concerns over the unequal application of the law have also drawn attention. In Margibi County, the son of a local politician was rearrested on drug charges after public backlash over his earlier release, while other minors remain in lengthy pretrial detention.

The report highlighted that human trafficking remains a serious issue. Victims often are women and children from rural areas or neighboring countries who are lured to cities like Monrovia with false promises of work or education, only to end up in forced labor or sexual exploitation. Although Liberia strengthened its anti-trafficking laws, prosecutions have declined, and victim support services remain minimal.

Government measures have included the introduction of electronic procurement systems by the Public Procurement and Concessions Commission to boost transparency, and steps toward creating a War and Economic Crimes Court. In May, an office was established to plan the court's structure, led by Executive Director Jallah Barbu, with technical assistance

from the United Nations. The Ministry of Justice has also launched initiatives to curb mob violence, and presidential amnesties have been used to reduce prison overcrowding.

However, activists say reforms are inconsistent. Miamen noted that rural residents often struggle to access birth registration, social services, and police protection. Environmental degradation from illegal mining continues to affect farming and fishing communities.

Eddie Jarwolo, Executive Director of NAYMOTE Partners for Democratic Development, urged Liberia's National Human Rights Commission to take a more proactive role. "The Commission should release regular, independent reports, analyze issues, and recommend solutions. We shouldn't have to wait for foreign governments' reports."

With Liberia holding a seat on the UN Security Council, rights advocates stress the urgent need for consistent law enforcement, properly resourced institutions, and an empowered civil society to safeguard the rights of all citizens.