

# **Liberia 2024 Human Rights Report**

## **Executive Summary**

There were no significant changes in the human rights situation in Liberia during the year.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: arbitrary or unlawful killings; torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment; arbitrary arrest or detention; serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom, including violence or threats of violence against journalists and censorship; trafficking in persons; and systematic restrictions on workers' freedom of association.

The government took steps to identify and punish officials who committed human rights abuses, including abuses committed during the country's civil war.

## **Section 1. Life**

### **a. Extrajudicial Killings**

There were numerous reports the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings during the year.

In May, the Bureau of Rehabilitation and Corrections formally charged six

officers linked to the death in April of an inmate at the Fish Town Central Prison. The inmate death led to community unrest as angry residents vandalized the prison, leading to the escape of some inmates. According to the prison bureau, several corrections officers aided the jailbreak and were under investigation by the Liberia National Police (LNP). Four of the six officers involved were cleared of any wrongdoing, one was dismissed for failure to cooperate with the investigation, and one remained under investigation.

## **b. Coercion in Population Control**

There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities. A February 2023 report by the Ministry of Health in partnership with local and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) revealed induced abortions had taken place in previous years.

## **c. War Crimes, Crimes against Humanity, and Evidence of Acts that May Constitute Genocide, or Conflict-Related Abuses**

On June 25, the French Court of Cassation (France's supreme court for civil and criminal cases) affirmed a March court ruling that found Kunti Kamara of the former warring faction United Liberation Movement of Liberia for

Democracy guilty of complicity in crimes against humanity and in the commission of simple and aggravated acts of torture and barbarism. The court sentenced Kamara to 30 years' imprisonment, marking the first conviction of a former fighter for crimes against humanity linked to the country's 1989-1997 civil war.

## **Section 2. Liberty**

### **a. Freedom of the Press**

The constitution provided for freedom of expression, including for members of the press and other media, and the government generally respected these rights, although with some unofficial limits.

Individuals were generally free to criticize the government publicly or privately, but government officials sometimes used dismissal or threat of dismissal from employment to place limits on freedom of expression for public servants. In August, the Monrovia City Corporation dismissed nine city employees following allegations they used social media to criticize government officials and the president.

### **Physical Attacks, Imprisonment, and Pressure**

Press associations reported government officials occasionally harassed newspaper and radio station owners, as well as individual journalists, because of their political opinions and reporting. On June 26, the

Association of Liberia Community Radios demanded the reinstatement of Radio Kakata Station Manager Jerry Quoi, who was suspended by Margibi County Superintendent Victoria Duncan for alleged financial malfeasance. The association warned against political interference in the operations of community radios across the country, asserting such actions amounted to media censorship.

### **Censorship by Governments, Military, Intelligence, or Police Forces, Criminal Groups, or Armed Extremist or Rebel Groups**

Although generally able to express a wide variety of views, some journalists practiced self-censorship to avoid harassment. Some media outlets avoided criticizing government officials due to fear of legal sanctions and potential loss of government advertising, a large source of media revenue.

A June 20 meeting between Presidential Press Secretary Kula Fofana and media executives turned contentious, leading several editors to walk out. The incident arose concerning new accreditation requirements for journalists covering the executive mansion, including police clearances and institutional tax clearance certificates. These policies, along with demands by the government for free website advertising, which impacted newspaper revenues, sparked concerns regarding media freedom and independence.

## **b. Worker Rights**

### **Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining**

The law provided workers, except public servants and employees of state-owned enterprises, the right to freely form or join independent unions, bargain collectively, and conduct legal strikes or engage in “go-slow,” a protest by workers in which they deliberately worked slowly. The law prohibited antiunion discrimination and allowed unions to conduct their activities without interference by employers, parties, or government. The law provided employers and workers the right to establish and join organizations of their own choosing, without prior authorization, and subject only to the rules of the organization concerned. The law provided labor organizations and associations the right to draw up their constitutions and rules on electing their representatives, organize their activities, and formulate their programs. There was no minimum number of workers required, and foreign and migrant members were not prohibited, although a long approval process or denial on arbitrary grounds could be hurdles to registration.

A long-standing dispute that officially prevented members of the Civil Service Association of Liberia from joining the Liberia Labor Congress, technically banning them from unionizing, remained in force. This was reaffirmed by a 2023 court ruling resulting from a Ministry of Labor petition.

Civil servants and the government remained far apart on this issue despite the court ruling, with some civil society organizations arguing the government should take steps to amend the law for wider public-sector participation within the Liberia Labor Congress.

The government's Labor Practices Review Board had the right to supervise trade union elections, which the International Confederation of Trade Unions termed an interference in a union's right to organize its administration. Trade and labor unions were registered with, and licensed by, the Ministry of Labor, which represented the government in the labor and employment sector. The Ministry's Bureau of Trade Union Affairs and Social Dialogue coordinated activities of trade unions and employer organizations in the labor sector. As a result, labor union members frequently accused the government of meddling in trade union affairs and creating tension and distrust among workers.

In May, the president mandated the Ministry of Labor to work with the divided parties of the Liberia Labor Congress to resolve a dispute concerning leadership. Historically, conflict within the congress often arose regarding abuses such as government interference in trade union activities, disputes concerning leadership and representation, concerns regarding unequal distribution of benefits among different worker groups, and divisions among factions favoring closer government ties versus independent unionism. Public-sector employees and employees of state-owned enterprises were

prohibited under law from unionizing and bargaining collectively, but they could join associations and process grievances through the Civil Service Agency grievance board.

The law outlined the rules and regulations governing the conduct of the civil service as well as addressing matters affecting civil servants.

Representatives from the Ministry of Labor, Liberia Labor Congress, and Civil Servants Association argued the law conflicted with the constitution, which afforded the right to associate in trade unions. Some public-sector associations, including the National Teachers' Association for public school teachers and the National Health Workers' Union composed of public health workers, declared themselves to be unions in defiance of the law, and the Liberia Labor Congress and Ministry of Labor backed their efforts to unionize. In July, the Ministry of Labor held a public engagement forum with stakeholders, including trade union representatives, to harmonize and conform the labor law with the international labor conventions on equity of trade union status of both public and private-sector workers.

The government did not effectively enforce the law in every sector. The law did not provide adequate protection for strikers, and some protections depended on whether property damage occurred and was measurable.

Penalties were not commensurate with those of other laws involving denials of civil rights. Penalties were rarely applied against violators. Administrative and judicial procedures were subject to lengthy delays or appeals and to

outside interference, such as bribes, coercion, and intimidation by politicians. According to the International Labor Organization, authorities required unions to represent most workers in an enterprise to engage in collective bargaining. In May, the United Workers Union of Liberia signed a three-year collective bargaining agreement with the public utility Liberia Electricity Corporation following months of negotiations.

## **Forced or Compulsory Labor**

See the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

## **Acceptable Work Conditions**

### **Wage and Hour Laws**

The law established minimum wages for unskilled laborers and for formal-sector workers. The law also allowed workers in the informal sector to bargain for a wage higher than the legal minimum.

The law provided for working hours not to exceed eight hours per day or 48 hours a week. The law provided for a maximum of five hours of overtime in any week at a rate of 150 percent of the normal rate. Alleged wage, hour, and overtime violations were common in the informal sector.



## **Occupational Safety and Health**

Occupational safety and health (OSH) standards were up to date for the intended industries. For certain categories of industries, the law required employers to employ safety and health officers and establish a safety and health committee in the workplace. Workers could not remove themselves from situations that endangered health or safety without jeopardizing their employment, and authorities did not effectively protect employees in this situation.

The government did not proactively identify unsafe work conditions. The government did respond to workers' OSH standards complaints.

The government did not keep records of industrial accidents, but evidence pointed to mining, construction, forestry, fishing, and agriculture as the most dangerous sectors. Hazardous occupations were especially dangerous in the informal sector, such as illegal fishing, logging, and mining, where the lack of regulation and remediation contributed to fatalities and obscured accountability.

For example, on March 27, local media reported the death of 10 persons during a mudslide at an artisanal mine site on the outskirts of Chio Town in Rivercess County. The incident occurred after reports of a gold find attracted illegal miners despite efforts by local security officers to regulate their movements. Illegal mining activities continued to attract local persons

in many other parts of the country despite the risks associated with the process.

### **Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement**

The Ministry of Labor enforced wage, hour, and OSH laws. The number of labor inspectors was not sufficient to enforce compliance. Labor inspectors had authority to make unannounced inspections but not to levy fines or initiate sanctions. There were no meaningful government efforts to prevent violations, particularly for vulnerable populations.

The Liberia Labor Congress noted that, overall, occupational health and safety compliance was lacking. The government did not effectively enforce minimum wage, overtime, and OSH laws in all sectors, especially in the small- and medium-enterprise sector. Penalties were less than those for similar crimes, such as fraud or negligence. Penalties were rarely applied against violators because of political interference or bribery. Observers reported labor inspectors solicited and took bribes to certify compliance with regulations, and the labor inspectorate did not track numbers of individual inspections or violations.

The World Bank reported 90 percent of the population worked in the informal sector. Informal-sector workers were not covered by wage, hour, OSH, and other labor laws and inspections.

## **c. Disappearance and Abduction**

### **Disappearance**

There were no reports of enforced disappearances by or on behalf of government authorities.

### **Prolonged Detention without Charges**

The constitution and law prohibited arbitrary arrest and detention and provided for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of their arrest or detention in court. The government did not always observe these prohibitions and rights.

In general, the law required police to have warrants issued by a magistrate to make arrests. The law allowed for arrests without a warrant if the necessary paperwork was filed immediately afterwards for review by the appropriate authority, but arrests often were made without judicial authorization, and warrants were sometimes issued without sufficient evidence.

The law required authorities to arraign or release detainees within 48 hours. Detainees generally were informed of the charges against them upon arrest but were not always brought before a judge for arraignment within 48 hours. The law also provided that, once arraigned, a criminal defendant had to be indicted no later than the next succeeding term of court after arrest. If

the indicted defendant was not tried within the next succeeding court term and no cause was given, the law prescribed the case against the defendant be dismissed; nevertheless, cases were rarely dismissed on either ground, making this one of the most frequent abuses of the law. Approximately 60 percent of pretrial detainees, especially those held for felony offenses, were detained for more than two terms of court, or approximately 180 days, without a hearing.

According to the National Commission on Human Rights of Liberia (INCHRL), a detainee's access to a hearing before a judge sometimes depended on whether there was a functioning court or available transportation in the area. The INCHRL further stated some courts occasionally lacked both a prosecutor and a public defender, and the magistrate judge proceeded without them. Additionally, some magistrates solicited money from complainants to transport the accused or convicted to and from detention.

Detainees had the right to prompt access to counsel, and, if indigent, an attorney was provided by the state in criminal cases. The national public defender office was short-staffed and faced logistical constraints that hindered access to rural courts. Two domestic NGOs also provided legal assistance to some indigent defendants.

The bail system was inefficient and susceptible to corruption. The INCHRL and other civil rights observers reported judges misused the bail system, viewing it as punitive rather than a way to regulate appearance in court.

Some judges reportedly used the possibility of bail to solicit bribes.

Although official policy allowed detained suspects to communicate with others, including a lawyer or family member, inadequate telephone services resulted in many inmates being unable to communicate with anyone outside of the detention facility.

In November, a Monrovia criminal court judge chastised Ministry of Justice prosecutors for the handling of a case involving an alleged Guinean mercenary who was apprehended in Liberia for allegedly planning a coup plot against the Guinean president and military leader inside Liberian territory. The suspect, Ibrahim Kalil Cherif, was taken into custody by National Security Agency officials and, according to his defense lawyers and the INCHRL, was held without charges for several days before transfer to Monrovia Central Prison. According to the INCHRL, Cherif was later removed from prison by authorities without a court order; the government's information minister subsequently acknowledged Cherif had been turned over to Guinean authorities at their request and on the grounds that Cherif presented a national security threat to both Liberia and Guinea. The judge criticized the government's handling of the case and threatened contempt charges against the Justice Ministry. The case was closed as prosecutors dropped the charges and the defendant was no longer in the country.

Lengthy pretrial detention was a problem. The use of detention as a punitive measure, failure to issue indictments in a timely manner, lack of a

functioning bail system, poor court record keeping, failure of judges to assign court dates, ineffective assistance of defense counsel, and a lack of resources for prosecutors and public defenders all contributed to prolonged pretrial detention.

#### **d. Violations in Religious Freedom**

See the Department of State's annual *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

#### **e. Trafficking in Persons**

See the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

### **Section 3. Security of the Person**

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

The constitution and law prohibited such practices, but there were credible reports government officials employed them.

The law provided criminal penalties for excessive use of force by law enforcement officers and addressed permissible uses of force during arrest or to prevent the escape of a prisoner from custody. Nevertheless, abusive

acts by security forces including the LNP, the Liberia Drug Enforcement Agency, and the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) were a significant problem, although the AFL generally acted more professionally and had fewer instances of abusive conduct than the other security agencies.

In May, the LNP dismissed Patrolman Jerome Tokpah from the force for alleged police brutality. Tokpah was charged with attempted murder and aggravated assault after he allegedly assaulted Courage Tarr with a machete. At year's end, the case remained pending.

The law did not prohibit the practice of female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C), and NGOs reported there was little political will within the legislature to address the issue. According to UN Women, 50 percent of rural girls and women ages 15 to 49 had undergone FGM/C. In 2023, authorities announced a national ban on FGM/C for three years.

## **b. Protection of Children**

### **Child Labor**

See the Department of Labor's *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor* at <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/findings/>.

### **Child Marriage**

Laws regarding the minimum age for marriage were inconsistent, setting the

minimum marriage age for all persons at 18 but also permitting girls to marry at 16. The lowest median ages of marriage were in rural areas, and the median age of first marriage generally increased with growing wealth among women ages 25 to 40.

### **c. Protection to Refugees**

The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to refugees, returning refugees, or asylum seekers, as well as other persons of concern. In October, Patrick Worzie, the director of the Liberia Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission, and two other high-ranking officials were suspended and later fired after a whistleblower accused them of falsifying documents and theft of funds intended to assist refugees. The Liberian Anti-Corruption Commission investigated the case.

### **Provision of First Asylum**

The law provided for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government had established a system for providing protection to refugees. The law forbade the forced return of refugees, their families, or other persons who could be subjected to persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group, and the government generally respected those rights for refugees. The government granted permanent residency status to approximately 1,000



former refugees from Cote d'Ivoire who opted for local integration in the country.

#### **d. Acts of Antisemitism and Antisemitic Incitement**

There were very few Jewish individuals in the country (100 at most) and no known reports of antisemitic incidents.