



For Immediate Release

Liberia: President Backs War Crimes Court

Lawmakers Should Act Now for Justice

(Monrovia) – Liberian President George Weah took a major step to bring justice for atrocities committed during Liberia’s civil wars by endorsing a war crimes court, 10 Liberian and international groups said today. The legislature should promptly establish a court in line with international human rights standards, drawing on relevant international support and expertise.

President Weah, in a letter to the legislature dated September 12, 2019, wrote: “I ... do hereby call on the National Legislature to advise and provide guidance on all legislative and other necessary measures towards the implementation of the TRC [Truth and Reconciliation Commission] report, including the establishment of the Economic and War Crimes Court.”

“President Weah’s support for a war crimes court is an important step for victims and for helping to ensure the violence that brought so much pain and loss to Liberia will not happen again,” said Adama Dempster at CSO Human Rights Advocacy Platform of Liberia and the Secretariat for the Establishment of a War Crimes Court in Liberia. “This decision benefits the victims, the country, and the rule of law in Liberia.”

During Liberia’s armed conflicts from 1989-96 and 1999-2003, Liberians suffered [widespread violations](#) of international human rights and humanitarian law such as mass killings, rape and other forms of sexual violence, summary executions, mutilation and torture, and use of child combatants.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which operated between 2006 and 2009, recommended creating a war crimes court – the [Extraordinary Criminal Court for Liberia](#) – to try those responsible for grave crimes committed. Many of the TRC’s recommendations, including for the war crimes court, have never been carried out.

The few cases involving civil wars-era crimes have all occurred outside Liberia before United States and European courts. Authorities have been pursuing cases under the principle of universal jurisdiction, which allows national courts to try international crimes committed abroad, as well as for crimes related to immigration, such as lying on immigration forms.

“In the past few years we have made significant progress in cases abroad to try alleged perpetrators of Liberia’s wartime crimes,” said Hassan Bility at Global Justice and Research Project and the Secretariat for the Establishment of a War Crimes Court in Liberia. “But our people should have the chance to see justice at home. Liberia should work with the United Nations and other international partners to set up a court that can hold fair, credible trials.”



Liberians have [held marches](#) to campaign for a war crimes court, and petitioned the legislature to carry out the commission's recommendations. Liberian, African, and international nongovernmental organizations have come together to [campaign for justice](#) in Liberia. In May several of the groups released a [video](#) appeal for the court, with statements from people of varied backgrounds who took part in a [national conference](#) on accountability in Monrovia in November.

The Liberian Bar Association [added its support](#) for a war crimes court in April. The Traditional Chiefs Council [backed](#) a war crimes court in early September. On September 6, the National Economic Dialogue, attended by 350 Liberians, including members of the government, political parties, youth, and civil society, recommended establishing the court.

In July, lawmakers attended a [legislative conference](#) on accountability organized by local and international groups. The joint committee of Liberia's House of Representatives then put forward a resolution backing the court, which was immediately [endorsed](#) by nine lawmakers.

The groups urged the legislature to move ahead with a law to establish the court and request assistance from Liberia's international partners in the effort, particularly the United Nations, as well as the European Union, African Union, United States, United Kingdom, Germany, and Sweden. There should also be greater involvement from nongovernmental organizations with expertise in war crimes courts.

Governments and international organizations have supported war crimes courts and developed expertise in recent decades in addressing challenges that often arise with them. Such expertise includes protection and support for witnesses and victims, security for judges and staff, assuring fair legal process, and educating the local population about the court.

"All eyes now turn to our national legislature," said Aaron Weah at Search for Common Ground-Liberia and the Secretariat for the Establishment of a War Crimes Court in Liberia. "Some victims have been waiting more than two decades. The legislature should move ahead to establish the court without delay."

The groups issuing this news release are: Advocates for Human Rights, Center for Justice and Accountability, Centre for Civil and Political Rights, CSO Human Rights Advocacy Platform of Liberia, Global Justice and Research Project, Human Rights Watch, Liberia Massacre Survivor Association, Search for Common Ground-Liberia, Transitional Justice Working Group, and the Secretariat for the Establishment of a War Crimes Court in Liberia.

For more information:

See a [question-and-answer document](#) on accountability for past crimes in Liberia. Watch a [video](#) appeal for the war crimes court.



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