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Liberia: Full participation and support is necessary for the success of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

20 December 2006 - Today at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) headquarters in Monrovia members of civil society, the diplomatic community, the UN and government officials are invited to attend the launch of *Liberia: A Brief Guide to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission*.

The guide describes the mandate and functions of the TRC and outlines Amnesty International's main recommendations to the TRC and to the Liberian government. It aims to promote awareness of the TRC work and of Amnesty International's recommendations among Liberian non-governmental organizations, the media and the general public. Amnesty International hopes the user-friendly guide will encourage all Liberians to monitor and participate in the TRC process.

"For the TRC to be successful in its work, it must be fully understood and enjoy full participation from all Liberians", said Thompson Adebayo of Liberia Watch for Human Rights.

Since the inauguration of its operational activities on 22 June 2006, the TRC has achieved important results. The hiring of statement-takers and other staff has been completed and the statement-taking process has begun on 10 October 2006. However, the TRC has also experienced work delays, due to internal problems within the commission, and financial constraints.

In October, 2006 just as statement-taking activities had begun, the naming of alleged perpetrators during the first highly publicized statement-taking session became a key issue in public debates. One alleged perpetrator who had been named publicly, responded to the allegations by holding a press conference claiming that the TRC was trying to settle old political disputes. At the same time, Charles Taylor's lawyers filed a complaint with the Supreme Court to prohibit any testimony about the former president being heard by the TRC, stating that it could prejudice his trial before the Special Court for Sierra Leone. The Supreme Court rejected the petition.

Alleged internal problems within the TRC caused some unclarity among some donors about how funds will be used once dispensed and delays in funding. Projected that it will need \$14 million to carry out its work, the TRC has so far only received \$2.2 million. Amnesty International recommends greater transparency in and accountability for work done and future work, as well as better communication with the donors, to ensure the smooth functioning of the TRC.

"The success of the Liberian TRC depends on both the integrity within the commission to carry out the work as planned as well as the commitment of the international community to provide the funds as planned", said Kolawole Olaniyan, Director of the Africa Programme of Amnesty International.

Background information

The TRC was established by the August 2003 Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Accra. It began its official operations on 22 June 2006. It comprises nine Liberian members supported by three international experts. The TRC will investigate violations of human rights committed between January 1979 and October 2003. Most of its work is fact-finding. Those alleged responsible for war crimes, crimes against humanity and other serious human rights violations may be recommended for prosecutions. A reparation program may also be established. The TRC has two years to complete its investigative work (with possibilities of extensions for up to one year), and then three months to write the report and recommendations.

Amnesty International has been fully supportive of the TRC process and monitors its work on a regular basis through working with a steering group of local organizations on the ground.

Liberia: A Brief Guide to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (AI Index: AFR 34/007/2006) is a shorter version of *Liberia: Truth, Justice and Reparation- Memorandum on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Act, (AI Index: AFR 34/005/2006)*, published in June 2006