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Liberia: The UN Security Council should accord highest priority to protection of human rights

As the United Nations (UN) Security Council considers the latest report by the Panel of Experts and reviews sanctions on Liberia, Amnesty International supports the recommendation of the Panel of Experts that the ban on arms and ammunition and other military assistance to Liberia remain in force.

"Given the widespread nature of human rights abuses by both sides in the continuing armed conflict in Liberia, the provision of arms and ammunition and other forms of military assistance - whether direct or indirect - can be reasonably assumed to contribute to human rights abuses against civilians," Amnesty International said.

Liberian government forces and militia fighting on behalf of the government continue to commit, with almost total impunity, extrajudicial executions, torture and ill-treatment, including rape and other forms of sexual violence, as well as arbitrary arrests and detentions.

The armed opposition Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) have also been responsible for serious human rights abuses against civilians, including deliberate and arbitrary killings, torture, including rape, abductions and the recruitment of children as combatants.

The Panel of Experts found evidence that - in violation of UN Security Council resolutions - arms were still being transferred to government forces and were also reaching the LURD through neighbouring countries, including Guinea.

Effective action needs to be taken to prevent military transfers to both sides in the conflict, which also threatens the stability of its neighbours, Guinea and Sierra Leone.

"If not effectively addressed, the situation in Liberia will have potentially disastrous consequences for the protection of human rights of civilians in all three Mano River Union countries," Amnesty International said.

While efforts to tackle the link between the illicit trade in diamonds and arms have had a significant impact, reports of the Panel of Experts have also made an explicit link between the Liberian timber industry and the arms trade.

"We are seriously concerned about reports that revenue from the timber industry, and the activities of individual timber companies, facilitate the acquisition of arms and ammunition or other military

assistance to government forces and government-allied militia," the organization said.

Amnesty International therefore supports the recommendation of the Panel of Experts that there should be a sustained financial audit of the Liberian timber industry by an international auditing team, to follow that being undertaken by Deloitte and Touche over a limited period. This longer-term audit should be fully independent and verifiable and its findings made public.

Following the UN Secretary-General's recent appointment of Abou Moussa as his Special Representative in Liberia, and the extension of the mandate of the UN Peace-building Support Office in Liberia (UNOL) until the end of 2003, Amnesty International is also calling for a strengthening of UNOL.

"Abou Moussa's appointment offers an important opportunity to build an effective human rights component within UNOL," Amnesty International said. "This should include a sufficient number of human rights monitors to document human rights abuses throughout the country and provide regular, detailed reports to the Security Council," the organization added.

Public Document

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