

UA 367/00

Fear for**LIBERIA Conmany Wesseh****Amos Sawyer****Other members of the Centre for Democratic Empowerment (CEDE)**

One pro-democracy activist, who has been working with a small arms-control group of which Amnesty International is a member, was stabbed and several others were physically assaulted during an attack on their offices. It is believed the attack was carried out by war veterans, possibly with the backing of the Liberian authorities, in an attempt to stop activists from campaigning on democracy and arms transfer issues.

On 28 November about 70 men armed with knives, hammers and sticks, stormed the offices of the Centre for Democratic Empowerment (CEDE), a leading pro-democracy organization in Liberia. They destroyed computers and office furniture, stabbed Conmany Wesseh, CEDE's Executive Director, and physically assaulted other CEDE staff and Amos Sawyer, the CEDE Chairman and former Liberian interim President. Conmany Wesseh, Amos Sawyer and eight other CEDE staff required hospital treatment.

The police have reportedly arrested a number of those responsible for the attack, and the authorities have said they regret the incident. However, it has been reported that at least one of the detained attackers is a high-ranking member of the Liberian army. It is feared that the attack might have been backed by the authorities and that those responsible will not be brought to justice. It is not yet known whether charges have been brought against those arrested.

Conmany Wesseh's family home was attacked and ransacked in 1999, and his wife and children were threatened that they would be killed. At that time, those suspected of carrying out the attack were arrested, but were later released without charge, despite there being evidence against them.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Conmany Wesseh is a committee member of the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA), a non-governmental organization (NGO), of which Amnesty International is a founding member. He is an outspoken democracy activist and has been actively campaigning against the proliferation of small arms in Liberia and other West African countries.

The assault on 28 November followed a meeting of Liberian NGOs hosted by CEDE, which resulted in a public call on the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to take action to implement the 1998 moratorium on small arms and light weapons in the region. The ECOWAS moratorium, banning the import, export and manufacture of small arms and light weapons in the sub-region, is due to expire in October 2001. During the meeting Conmany Wesseh briefed the participants on his regional and international activities, and talked about his plans for the creation of a West African Action Network to prevent the proliferation of small arms.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in English or your own language:

- expressing concern that Conmany Wesseh, Amos Sawyer and other CEDE staff have been assaulted by suspected war veterans, urging the authorities to guarantee their safety and take immediate steps to prevent further attacks;
- welcoming reports that police have arrested some of the alleged attackers and calling for a prompt, independent and impartial investigation into the attack in order to bring those responsible to justice.

APPEALS TO:

Please note that it is difficult to get through to fax numbers in Liberia

President of the Republic of Liberia

His Excellency Mr Charles Taylor

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Salutation:Dear President Taylor

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Salutation:Dear Mr Varmah

Director of Police

Paul Mulbah

National Police Force

National Police Headquarters

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Salutation:Dear Mr Mulbah

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and to diplomatic representatives of Liberia accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 11 January 2001.