
LIBERIA

Amnesty International's recommendations to member states of and observers to UNHCR's Executive Committee at its Fifty-third session, Geneva, Switzerland, 30 September-4 October 2002

Amnesty International's report *Liberia: Civilians face human rights abuses at home and across borders*, published on 1 October 2002, provides an overview of the protection concerns faced by Liberian internally displaced people (IDPs) and refugees in West Africa. It looks at causes of displacement inside Liberia and highlights human rights abuses carried out by Liberian security forces and the armed opposition Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD). It describes the situation of Liberian refugees as they flee over borders and cites cases of human rights violations carried out by members of the security forces from other West African countries, and the threat posed to refugees by the presence of Liberian security forces

in other countries in the region. It also highlights tensions between local residents and refugees in those countries.

The report provides a comprehensive set of recommendations to the Liberian government, the LURD, West African governments, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the international community.

Amnesty International welcomes the opportunity to highlight the situation of Liberian IDPs and refugees in West Africa at the Fifty-third session of the Executive Committee which brings together 61 governments, UNHCR, international agencies and non-governmental organizations to look at refugee assistance and protection issues worldwide.

Ensure that all possible efforts are made to put an end to human rights abuses against Liberian IDPs and refugees in West Africa

Since the beginning of 2002, approximately 200,000 Liberians have fled their homes, becoming either IDPs or refugees. Many have been subjected to human rights abuses such as deliberate and arbitrary killings, torture, including rape, abduction and harassment both in the context of the armed conflict in Liberia and also in other West African countries. Amnesty International calls on West African governments, including Liberia, the leadership of the LURD, UNHCR and the wider international community to take effective measures to protect Liberian civilians both in Liberia and across its borders.

Among specific recommendations to West African governments, including Liberia, and the leadership of the LURD are:

- ▶ giving clear instructions to all fighting forces that human rights abuses will not be tolerated;
- ▶ ensuring that refugees and IDPs are not deliberately targeted on suspicion of backing parties to the armed conflict;
- ▶ ensuring that all security forces receive comprehensive training in all relevant international human rights and legal standards;

- ▶ ensuring independent and impartial investigations of human rights abuses and that those found responsible are brought to justice;
- ▶ ensuring that security is provided in camps, settlements and other locations where IDPs and refugees have sought safety, including by working closely with UNHCR;
- ▶ working closely with UNHCR to register and provide identity documents to refugees;
- ▶ ensuring that civilians are allowed to move to safe areas within the country or to leave the country without harassment or intimidation by security forces;
- ▶ ensuring that all IDPs and refugees who are arbitrarily detained are either brought to justice or released.

Ensure a more coordinated approach by international agencies in IDP protection in Liberia

Since 1999 insecurity caused by the fighting between Liberian security forces and the LURD has resulted in tens of thousands of people becoming internally displaced. Fighting has intensified during 2002 and heavily populated towns and villages have frequently been attacked by both sides. Attacks on large towns and villages have often involved looting on a large scale, and civilians have become targets of human rights abuses and caught in cross-fire. As people flee, their personal possessions are taken and families are separated, leaving women and girls vulnerable to sexual exploitation and violence. Fighting and insecurity have made it difficult for humanitarian agencies to gain access to very large numbers of IDPs.

Ensure that relevant governments and UNHCR play a strong role with regard to refugee protection in West Africa

Since the beginning of 2002, approximately 70,000 Liberians have fled the country, including 30,000 to Sierra Leone, 25,000 to Guinea, 16,000 to Côte d'Ivoire, and 2,000 to Ghana. This adds to the 83,000 already in Guinea, 122,000 in Côte d'Ivoire, and 11,000 in Sierra Leone, and a total of some 15,000 in Ghana, Senegal and Nigeria. This is the highest level of displacement of Liberians since the previous armed conflict ended in 1997. Increasingly, however, Liberians have become reluctant to flee over borders as their compatriots have faced hardship and human rights abuses in these countries of asylum. Members of security forces, particularly in Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea, have are reported to have harassed Liberian refugees. There are numerous reports of refugees being turned away at the border of neighbouring countries, a measure which amounts to *refoulement* and which violates the most fundamental principle of international refugee law. In areas where there are large numbers of Liberian refugees, local residents, who fear that their presence will bring war and insecurity to their country or indiscriminately associate refugees with

There is no one agency assigned to focus on the overall protection of IDPs. UNHCR has three protection officers with responsibility for Sierra Leonean refugees and IDPs who live alongside the refugees in camps. There have been recent efforts to focus on protection for IDPs, in particular those living in camps. Amnesty International welcomes this initiative; it is, however, concerned about the tens of thousands of IDPs outside camps and without access by humanitarian aid agencies.

Amnesty International welcomes the appointment of Abou Moussa as the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General in the United Nations (UN) Peace-building Support Office in Liberia (UNOL). Amnesty International recommends that the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the UNOL office work closely together to ensure that IDP protection is a priority. The organization also urges involvement from the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to provide technical expertise and resources to UNOL to enable it to monitor, document and publicly report on the human rights situation and to take immediate corrective measures, as necessary.

armed opposition groups, have been hostile and violent towards refugees.

Some particular groups of refugees face additional risks, including human rights defenders, members of the political opposition, others deemed critical of the Liberian government, and members of the Krahn and Mandingo ethnic groups. In some cases, there have reportedly been tensions and violence among Liberians themselves in refugee camps, reflecting existing ethnic tensions.

UNHCR must take action, and be allowed to take action, with regard to the protection of refugees in West Africa by: ensuring that the civilian nature of refugee camps is maintained; being party to a real-time assessment of procedures for identifying and separating armed elements for refugee protection; identifying individual refugees who are at risk and taking action to ensure their protection; referring cases for resettlement in a timely manner; being present at reception points along borders; and monitoring and documenting abuses which are taking place and taking immediate corrective measures, where necessary.

For the full report and a more comprehensive set of recommendations, see *Liberian civilians face human rights abuses at home and across borders* (AI Index: AFR34/020/2002), 1 October 2002.

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