

Stop violence against women

Liberia: Rape is a war crime – there can be no impunity

[Photo caption]

Cover photo : Liberians forced to flee by the conflict, at a camp for the internally displaced, Nimba County, November 2003. © AI

Left : Women at a camp for the internally displaced in Kakata, Margibi County, talk to an Amnesty International representative, November 2003. Several women at the camp gave harrowing testimonies of rape and other forms of sexual violence. © AI

[end captions]

[Quote]

“They abducted five girls coming from church. They took us to the front line. We had to cook and carry ammunition in the bush. They treated us bad; if I didn’t go [have sex] with them, they would kill me... I want to go to school. I want to go back to Nimba to my people.”

A 14-year-old girl, abducted by a member of the former government’s forces in March 2003.

[end quote]

Angela tried, and failed, to escape with her four-year-old child when soldiers of the former government attacked her home in June 2003. The soldiers forced her to go with them to cook their food. Two of them raped her. She later found refuge at a camp for internally displaced people, but had to flee again when the camp was attacked. Two other soldiers discovered her sleeping in the open behind a school building, and raped her.

She has received some medical treatment and counselling but there is an acute shortage of appropriate care. She continues to suffer abdominal pains and emotional trauma, and fears being shunned by her family and community.

Thousands of women and girls were raped, forced into sexual slavery or subjected to other forms of sexual violence during 14 years of almost continuous conflict in Liberia. As fighting intensified in 2003, civilian communities were targeted by forces of the former government and armed opposition groups. All sides systematically abused the rights of women and girls. An initial study by the UN and Liberian non-governmental organizations in 2004 found that between 60 and 70 per cent of the civilian population had been raped or had suffered other sexual violence, such as being publicly stripped and humiliated. Most were women and girls, and many had been gang-raped. These were war crimes on a massive scale.

A culture of impunity has flourished in Liberia. In neighbouring Sierra Leone, the Special Court for Sierra Leone is making an important contribution to ending impunity for the brutal abuses inflicted on the civilian population during its 10-year conflict. Yet the international community and the Liberian transitional government have so far shown little determination to bring to justice those allegedly responsible for the crimes against humanity and war crimes committed in Liberia.

Liberia’s peace agreement of August 2003 contains a proposal for the transitional government to consider granting a general amnesty to all those engaged or involved in military activities during the conflict. International law prohibits amnesties for crimes against humanity, war crimes and other serious violations of international law. Although a formal amnesty has not been granted, it remains unclear how impunity will be effectively addressed. A truth and reconciliation commission is to be established, but it cannot be a substitute for a court of law to try alleged perpetrators of serious violations of international law.

To deny justice to Angela and to thousands of other Liberian women and girls would be to aggravate and perpetuate the human rights abuses they have suffered.

“I was captured in Cheesemanburg market where I was selling fish. The LURD fighters were shooting between themselves and one 21-year-old boy came to take me from the market to be his ‘wife’. I was forced to join him to save my life.”

An 18-year-old woman, captured in February 2003 by the armed opposition Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy.

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In the home and in the community, in times of war and peace, millions of women and girls are beaten, raped, mutilated and killed with impunity. Join Amnesty International’s campaign to demand action by governments, communities and individuals to stop violence against women throughout the world.

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Support our campaign: together we can make a difference

- Take an interest:

Find out and monitor how your community, government, police, security forces and courts respond to violence against women and girls.

- Take a stand:

Speak out about violence against women. Challenge prejudiced or dismissive attitudes.

- Take action:

Join our global campaign for women’s right to freedom from violence and discrimination.

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Together we can make our voices heard

Join us in demanding justice for women and girls in Liberia.

Call on the transitional government (which includes representatives of the former government and the armed opposition) to:

- rule out the possibility of any amnesty for crimes against humanity, war crimes and other serious violations of international law, including rape and other forms of sexual violence, and work with Liberian civil society and the international community to bring those allegedly responsible for these crimes to justice
- ensure that reform and rehabilitation of law enforcement and the national justice system include training programmes on human rights and dealing sensitively with survivors of sexual violence
- ensure the development of a comprehensive set of measures aimed at enabling survivors of sexual violence to obtain redress in the courts
- collaborate with Liberian and international organizations to establish a comprehensive programme to address the physical, psychological and social needs of survivors of sexual violence
- actively promote the involvement of women in all aspects of the peace process and post-conflict reconstruction

Send appeals to: Gyude Bryant, Chairman, National Transitional Government of Liberia,

Fax: +231 22 80 26 / 22 67 89 *

*Communication with Liberia can be erratic. If you are unable to get through, please try again later.

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What you can do

- Join Amnesty International and become part of a worldwide movement campaigning for an end to human rights violations. Help us to make a difference.

- Take action on Amnesty International’s website at web.amnesty.org/actforwomen/actnow-index-eng

- Make a donation to support Amnesty International’s work.

Want to know more?

Contact the Amnesty International office in your country at the address in the box (right), if there is one.

Or contact

Amnesty International's International Secretariat in London:

Peter Benenson House, 1 Easton Street, London WC1X 0DW, United Kingdom

Or visit Amnesty International's website at www.amnesty.org/actforwomen

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