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## **Liberia: Heightened Fears of Further Human Rights Violations On the Eve of First Post-civil War Elections**

Recent reports of violence against political opponents in Liberia and the former warring faction leaders' use of violence to secure political power, raises serious concerns that some groups may use tomorrow's elections as a pretext to provoke violence, Amnesty International said on the eve of the country's first multiparty elections in around 12 years.

The worldwide organization called on all actors in Liberia, including West African peace-keeping forces (ECOMOG), to take the necessary measures to ensure the protection of human rights in the country during and after the 19 July presidential and legislative elections.

"The Liberian National Transitional Government, leaders of political parties and the ECOMOG forces have a joint responsibility to ensure that the human rights of Liberia's people are not violated as they go to the polling stations for the first time since the end of a bloody civil war," Amnesty International said.

The organization called on all the political parties, including those of the former warring faction leaders, to adhere to the international human rights standards to which they pledged their commitment during their discussions with an Amnesty International delegation which visited the country in May 1997.

"During our recent visit, civil society organizations and a number of faction leaders supported moves to end the culture of impunity," Amnesty International said. "All reported cases of human rights abuses during the period of the elections must therefore be promptly investigated and those responsible brought to justice."

In carrying out its regular law enforcement functions, ECOMOG should also conform strictly to international human rights standards, and the UN Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL) should, in accordance with its mandate, investigate and issue a detailed public report on any report of human rights abuses occurring during and after the elections, the organization added.

### **Background information**

Seven years of protracted civil war have inflicted massive human rights abuses on Liberians. About 200,000 people were killed, about 700,000 became refugees and an estimated 1.4 million were internally displaced. Since 1989, when the war started, there have been 14 peace agreements in an attempt to bring about a cease-fire. Almost all have been breached by the armed factions.

On 26 August 1996 yet another accord was entered into which provided for disarmament, demobilization and general elections. Disarmament started on 22 November 1996 and ended on 9 February 1997. Elections were initially scheduled for 30 May 1997 but due to disagreement among the political parties they were postponed to 19 July 1997. There are 16 political parties contesting the legislative and presidential election including parties of three former warring faction leaders  
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