

### **Liberia: Killings, torture and rape continue in Lofa County**

*"The soldiers who arrested me took me some good yards away into the bush from the checkpoint and took out a knife saying that they would stab me and butcher me like an animal if I refused. I obeyed unwillingly as one of them satisfied his demand. In the end, he took a string off his boot and he tied me up to a tree. I remained tied as he returned and raped me again for the second time before loosening me. He told me: "If I ever catch you escaping, I will fire at you"*

*(Testimony of a woman arrested and raped by government forces in Lofa County, northern Liberia, in late April 2001).*

Amnesty International today called on Liberian government forces and Liberian armed opposition groups to immediately end widespread and gross abuses against unarmed civilians in Lofa County.

In a report published today -- *Liberia: Killings, torture and rape continue in Lofa County* -- the organization details cases of unlawful killings, torture and rape carried out from April to July 2001 by government and opposition forces. In particular, it highlights abuses by the Anti-Terrorist Unit (ATU), a special government military unit frequently accused of human rights violations, and combatants reported to belong to the opposition Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD).

In the past year, hundreds of civilians including women and girls have been victims of killings, arbitrary detention, torture and rape in the context of fighting in Lofa County which began in July 2000. Testimonies and reports gathered by Amnesty International suggest that, since late April 2001, more than 200 civilians suspected of backing the LURD, including women, have been killed, arbitrarily detained or tortured -- including by being raped -- by the Liberian security forces.

*Detainees have been beaten severely, made to walk on broken glass with bare feet and had their arms tied so tightly behind them that their elbows touch, causing severe pain. The scale of rape by security forces against women and girls -- some as young as 12-years-old -- raises concerns that it's used as a weapon of terror in the civilian population. Women and girls have been raped -- often by gangs of soldiers -- after fleeing the fighting and being arrested at checkpoints. Other victims of rape have been arrested in war zones in upper Lofa County on suspicion of backing the dissidents, being related to dissidents or being spies.*

*LURD combatants have reportedly also carried out rapes and summary and deliberate executions of civilians suspected of supporting the Liberian security forces. In one case in late June 2001, a 29-year-old man captured by LURD fighters reportedly witnessed the deliberate killing of two men detained with him on the orders of a high-ranking officer, apparently for failing to give information about the movement of government forces and numbers in the area. A young woman detained with them was reportedly tortured, including by being repeatedly raped and having a piece of wood forced into her vagina.*

*"The human rights crisis unfolding in Liberia is not inevitable. Liberian authorities and LURD leaders should publicly instruct combatants not to rape, torture and kill civilians. Those responsible for abuses should be removed from service and brought to justice," Amnesty International said.*

*In view of the deteriorating human rights situation in Liberia, Amnesty International is calling on the United Nations to consider deploying human rights observers in the country to closely monitor and publicly report on the abuses committed by government and opposition forces.*

*Amnesty International welcomes the European Union's decision on 23 July 2001, to open consultations over human rights with the Liberian government, in the light of the worsening human rights situation. "The European Union should press the Liberian authorities to take steps to end widespread rape, torture and extrajudicial executions and to prevent future violations," the organization urged.*

*Amnesty International also urges influential governments in the sub-region and other members of the international community to engage the Liberian authorities and the LURD in dialogue on human rights and exert their influence with both so that abuses are halted.*

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