

LIBERIA 2020 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Liberia is a constitutional republic with a bicameral national assembly and a democratically elected government. The country held presidential and legislative elections in 2017, which domestic and international observers deemed generally free and fair. In December the country held midterm senatorial elections which observers deemed largely peaceful, although there were some reported instances of vote tampering, intimidation, harassment of female candidates, and election violence. Opposition candidates won 11 of the 15 Senate seats contested, according to election results announced by the National Election Commission on December 21.

The Liberia National Police maintain internal security, with assistance from the Liberia Drug Enforcement Agency and other civilian security forces. The Armed Forces of Liberia are responsible for external security but also has some domestic security responsibilities if called upon. The Liberia National Police and Liberia Drug Enforcement Agency report to the Ministry of Justice, while the Armed Forces of Liberia report to the Ministry of National Defense. Civilian authorities generally maintained effective control over the security forces. Members of the security forces committed some abuses.

Significant human rights issues included: arbitrary killings by police; cases of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment by police; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; arbitrary detention by government officials; serious problems with the independence of the judiciary; serious restrictions on freedom of the press, including violence and threats of violence against journalists; official corruption; lack of investigation and accountability for violence against women; the existence or use of laws criminalizing consensual same-sex sexual conduct between adults; and the worst forms of child labor.

Impunity for individuals who committed human rights abuses, including atrocities, during the Liberian civil wars that ended in 2003, remained a serious problem, although the government cooperated with war crimes investigations in third

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employment, and authorities did not effectively protect employees in this situation. For certain categories of industries, the law requires employers to employ safety and health officers and establish a safety and health committee in the workplace.

The government did not effectively enforce the law in all sectors. The Ministry of Labor's Labor Inspection Department is responsible for enforcing government-established wage, hour, and health and safety standards in the formal sector, but there is no system for monitoring and enforcement in the informal sector. The government did not employ a sufficient number of labor inspectors to enforce compliance. Penalties for violations were not commensurate with those for similar crimes. In April and September 2019, the Ministry of Labor, Liberia Revenue Authority, Liberia Immigration Service, and National Social Security and Welfare Corporation conducted joint nationwide labor inspections to ensure employers complied with the Decent Work Act and all other labor laws. Observers reported labor inspectors solicited and took bribes to certify compliance with regulations, and the labor inspectorate did not track numbers of individual inspections or violations.

Most citizens were unable to find work in the formal sector and therefore did not benefit from any of the formal labor laws and protections. The vast majority of citizens (estimated at 80 percent) worked in the largely unregulated informal sector, where they faced widely varying and often harsh working conditions. Informal sector workers included rock crushers, artisanal miners, agricultural workers, street sellers, most market sellers, domestic workers, and others. In the diamond and gold mines, in addition to physical danger and poor working conditions, the industry is unregulated, leaving miners vulnerable to exploitive brokers, dealers, and intermediaries. Illegal mining of gold was rampant throughout the country and posed serious safety risks, resulting in the deaths of several persons every year. On December 11, the bodies of three illegal gold miners were retrieved from a collapsed mineshaft at David Dean Town in Kokoyah Statutory District, in Bong County. A local Lands and Mines inspector in Bong County told *Front Page Africa* that more than 10 illegal miners were feared to have been buried alive at the illicit David Dean Town mining center.