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Liberia: Peace elusive as Liberians prepare to elect new government

As Liberians finally prepare to elect a new government following almost two decades of conflict characterized by gross violations of human rights by all sides, Amnesty International warned that the prospects for peace in Liberia are still under threat, in a new report published today entitled *Liberia: Violence, discrimination and impunity*.

"The people of Liberia have been waiting a long time for this opportunity to elect a new government and create a new society following devastating years of conflict, and this opportunity must not be wasted," said Kolawole Olaniyan, Director of Amnesty International's Africa Programme.

"Voters need to know where the candidates stand on critical human rights issues so that they can make the best choice for peace -- and eventually hold the new government accountable to its promises of peace. At the same time, the international community must give greater support to the work of the UN in Liberia to ensure a smooth transition to a new, elected government."

The mandate of the UN Mission in Liberia is scheduled to be reviewed by the UN Security Council today. The Liberian elections, scheduled to take place on 11 October, follow a two-year transitional period following the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement on 18 August 2003.

"Although some progress has been made during the transitional period, outbreaks of violence, inter-communal discrimination and rivalries, an incomplete demobilization programme and the widespread illegal circulation of weapons still threaten the people of Liberia and their prospects for peace," said Kolawole Olaniyan. "Candidates of all parties in the upcoming election must clearly state their commitment to protect human rights and make the rights of Liberians the core of their vision for a new Liberia."

Liberians have been strongly critical of the transition process. The painfully slow pace of reform, exacerbated by funding shortfalls, has impeded progress in addressing threats of violence and impunity. The armed forces, police, judiciary and prison services all suffer from insufficient resources and training and a lack of qualified personnel.

In its report, Amnesty International made several specific recommendations to election candidates, including that they:

- speak out against violence by former combatants;
- call for those who have committed human rights abuses to be brought to justice, including pledging to surrender former President Charles Taylor -- currently in exile in Nigeria -- to the Special Court for Sierra Leone, where he faces a 17-count indictment for war crimes and crimes against humanity;
- take every opportunity to speak out against ethnic discrimination and inter-communal violence;
- ensure that there is sufficient funding to complete the disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and resettlement process; - commit to appropriate and needed reform of the army, police, judiciary, and prison systems;
- back the five-year National Human Rights Action Plan, formulated by the UN in consultation with the Liberian transitional government, civil society groups and the international donor community; and
- support the strengthening of the independence, impartiality and funding of the Independent National Commission on Human Rights, so that it can vigorously pursue human rights concerns, including ethnic discrimination, and promote human rights education throughout the country.

For a copy of the full report, please see <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engaf340032005>

Public Document

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