

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **Liberia: Contact Group must condemn violations by Government and LURD forces**

As the International Contact Group on Liberia meets today in New York, it should give priority to tackling the human rights crisis in Liberia, Amnesty International said.

The international community's commitment to resolve the internal armed conflict and bring peace and security to Liberia must include initiatives to end the serious human rights abuses against civilians being perpetrated by both Liberian government forces, and militia allied to them, as well as the armed opposition Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD).

"Those meeting today should condemn in the strongest possible terms the serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law being committed by both government and LURD forces," Amnesty International stated.

This meeting occurs at a critical time. A resurgence of fighting in Liberia since January has resulted in widespread human rights abuses, including summary executions, torture and ill-treatment, arbitrary arrest and detention, and forcible recruitment of children under 18 years. It has also caused further population displacement and exacerbated an already desperate humanitarian situation.

"Serious human rights abuses against civilians are being committed with almost total impunity. This has been a major contributing factor to continuing abuses."

"The search for a durable solution to the conflict must include bringing those responsible for human rights abuses to justice," Amnesty International said.

In a 10-page report addressed to the International Contact Group, Amnesty International makes specific recommendations to help end human rights abuses. Specifically, attention is drawn to ending impunity, the particular vulnerability of refugees and internally displaced people, continuing military assistance to fighting forces, and the importance of an international human rights presence.

Particular attention is drawn to the desperate plight of hundreds of thousands of refugees and internally displaced people in Liberia and other West African countries. An already overwhelming situation has worsened with events since September 2002 in neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire, where Liberian refugees are at risk of being killed by Ivorian government forces and civilians, some of them armed by the government.

"Urgent additional funding should be provided to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to enable it to respond to the particular protection needs of Liberian refugees and internally displaced people as well as the wider refugee crisis in West Africa," Amnesty International added.

"In addition, urgent measures must be taken by governments in the region to protect refugees and internally displaced people from human rights abuses."

Despite United Nations (UN) sanctions, arms continue to reach Liberia. Given the widespread nature of human rights abuses by both parties to the conflict, the provision of arms, ammunition and others forms of military assistance -- whether direct or indirect -- to Liberia will most likely contribute to human rights abuses against civilians.

"All governments should take all possible measures to prevent the provision of arms, ammunition and military assistance both to Liberian government forces and the LURD," Amnesty International said.

"Attention should also continue to be paid by the UN Security Council and the UN Panel of Experts on Liberia, set up to monitor compliance with UN sanctions, to the established link between revenue from the Liberian timber industry and the arms trade to Liberia."

Accurate and impartial monitoring and reporting of human rights abuses are essential as Liberia continues to face a human rights emergency. A strengthened mandate proposed by the UN Security Council for the UN Peace-building Support Office in Liberia (UNOL) includes "enhancing and monitoring respect for human rights in Liberia".

"Priority should be given to establishing UNOL as soon as possible, with a strengthened mandate, including an effective human rights component which is able to monitor actively and report publicly on human rights abuses," Amnesty International concluded.

## **Background information**

The International Contact Group on Liberia was formed in September 2002 to respond to the political, security and humanitarian crisis in Liberia -- which has far-reaching consequences for the wider region of West Africa. It held its first working session on 19 December 2002 in Dakar, Senegal. It comprises representatives of the UN, the European Union, the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), France, Morocco, Nigeria, Senegal, United Kingdom, and United States of America. It is coordinated by ECOWAS.

For further information on Amnesty International's recommendations to the International Contact Group on Liberia, please see: [Liberia: Recommendations to the International Contact Group on Liberia \(AI Index: AFR 34/004/2003\)](#), published by Amnesty International on 28 February 2003, and also [Côte d'Ivoire: Liberian refugees at imminent risk \(AI Index: 34/003/2003\)](#), published by Amnesty International on 20 February 2003.

## **Public Document**

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