

LIBERIA

Lack of justice for students, victims of torture including rape

Introduction

Over the last year, dozens of Liberian students have been arbitrarily detained, tortured -- including women being raped -- or forced to flee their country by Liberian security forces. University students have also been on the front line scrutinizing the government's action, holding the authorities responsible for bringing perpetrators of human rights abuses to justice, and promoting and defending human rights in Liberia.

On 21 March 2001 more than 40 Liberian students were arbitrarily detained and tortured and female students were raped after forces of the Anti-Terrorist Unit (ATU) and the Special Operation Division (SOD) stormed the University of Liberia campus to stop a peaceful rally. Dozens of students and professors were beaten indiscriminately. Throughout the year, the ATU and the SOD, the government's special security units, have been implicated in hundreds of cases of human rights violations including political killings.¹

Liberian security forces have denied allegations that they tortured the students. Yet no independent and impartial investigations into these allegations have been opened by the Liberian authorities and to date no one has been brought to justice. Since mid-May 2001 more than 15 university students -- mainly the leaders of the University of Liberia Student Union (ULSU) and the Student Unification Party (SUP), the student grouping from which the ULSU current leadership is drawn -- have fled Liberia. They went into exile after the Minister of Justice, Eddington Varmah, publicly stated that dissident collaborators were operating from the main campus of the university.

This report highlights numerous cases from 2001 showing that torture in custody is widespread and frequent, both in police cells and in unofficial detention centres such as ATU bases. The report stresses that members of the ATU, the SOD and other security forces have been acting with impunity for far too long.

Amnesty International urges the Liberian authorities to establish an independent commission of inquiry to carry out a thorough, independent and impartial investigation into allegations of torture, including rape, of students detained in March 2001, with the aim of bringing those responsible to justice and providing victims with redress. The members of the commission

¹ See in particular Amnesty International *Liberia: War in Lofa County does not justify killing, torture and abduction*, 1 May 2001 (AI Index: AFR 34/003/2001) and *Liberia: Killings, torture and rape continue in Lofa County*, 1 August 2001 (AI Index: AFR 34/009/2001).

of inquiry should be people of acknowledged probity and impartiality, and the commission should be empowered to summon and take evidence from law enforcement officials.

Amnesty International also urges the authorities to take prompt steps to prevent future cases of torture and other human rights violations. These steps should include ending impunity, ensuring that no one is detained in unofficial detention centres and ensuring that all detainees are given access to a lawyer, their relatives and prompt and adequate medical care.

Since July 2001, the international community have shown increased concern about human rights abuses in Liberia. In July 2001, in the light of the worsening human rights situation, primarily in the north of the country, the European Union (EU) decided to open consultations over human rights with the Liberian government. The consultations were opened under Articles 96 and 97 of the Cotonou Agreement signed in Benin in June 2000 by the EU and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) nations. On 14 August 2001, the United Nations (UN) Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, while regretting the Liberian government's failure to submit its reports and engage in dialogue with the Committee, expressed concern about "reports of extrajudicial killings, allegations of torture, including rape, and the lack of accountability of perpetrators, including government security forces, for these abuses".² On 16 August 2001, the UN Security Council publicly stressed "the need for human rights abuses to cease by whatever parties they are committed" in Lofa County, northern Liberia.³ Hundreds of unarmed civilians have been victims of killings, rape and other human rights violations by Liberian security forces and many others have suffered abuses by Liberian armed opposition groups since the renewed insecurity in the north of the country which began in July 2000.⁴

Amnesty International welcomes these public condemnations of human rights abuses in Liberia by the international community. Amnesty International now urges the EU, the UN and other members of the international community to take concrete and prompt steps to bring these abuses to an end. In addition to pressing for impartial investigations, the international community should deploy international human rights monitors to monitor and report on persistent patterns of gross human rights violations in Liberia. Sustained support and protection should be provided to members of the Liberian human rights community who have faced increasing attacks for their legitimate activities of monitoring and reporting on human rights violations. Resources should also

² See Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Liberia. 14/08/2001, CERD/c/59/Misc.23/Rev.2. Members of some ethnic groups, such as the Mandingos, have been targeted by Liberian security forces who associate them with the armed opposition groups fighting in northern Liberia.

³ See Press statement on Liberia by the President of the UN Security Council, 16 August 2001.

⁴ See footnote 1, AI Indexes: AFR 34/003/2001 and AFR 34/009/2001.

be provided for training of Liberian security forces and the judiciary in international human rights standards. The Liberian Human Rights Commission should be enabled to carry out investigations independently of the government.

21 March 2001: Security forces unleash violence at the university campus

On 21 March 2001, dozens of university students and professors, both male and female, were indiscriminately whipped and beaten -- and many were injured -- when the SOD and the ATU entered the campus in Monrovia and violently dispersed a peaceful rally that was being held in light of the continued arbitrary detention of four independent journalists.⁵ Journalists present on the campus to report on the rally were also beaten. Police had been called in by the president of the University of Liberia (UL), who had opposed the rally and claimed that the rally needed authorization.

Students and professors were reportedly chased and hit with batons, kicked and flogged as they fled their classrooms and the campus to escape violence by security forces. AA, who was at the campus to collect some documents, was running away when an ATU soldier threatened to kill him if he did not stop: "I stood still until he came and grabbed me. He dragged me and continued to beat me. Another ATU man came and kicked me in my stomach".⁶

At least three commanders from the security forces were seen by different sources at the campus during the raid. The following day, a non-governmental human rights organization publicly expressed concern about "the brutal and personal involvement" of a police commander, who was "blatantly seen flogging and assaulting unarmed and helpless university students".⁷

At least twenty students were arrested by the SOD and taken to the National Police Headquarters. They were subsequently released without charge. They carried visible marks of beatings. Several others were held incommunicado without charge and tortured, including women being raped, by the ATU. Some were released or managed to escape on the same day of their arrest. Others, including several young women, were detained incommunicado for weeks and were tortured, including being raped, before being released without charge. In the three weeks that followed the incident a total of 27 students were released without charge as a result of widespread local and international pressure. Given the ATU practice of holding people

⁵ See *Liberia: Journalists under threat again*, 14 March 2001 (AI Index AFR 34/001/2001).

⁶ The names of the victims who spoke under condition of anonymity, or whose identity Amnesty International wants to protect for fear of reprisals, have been replaced.

⁷ See Press statement by the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission on 22 March 2001.

incomunicado, it is difficult to know the exact number of students detained and tortured and to verify that all those arrested have been released.

In total there were four different areas in and around Monrovia where students were held incommunicado and tortured by the Liberian security forces: two different areas close to the Pan African Plaza ATU base opposite Monrovia city hall; an area just behind the Executive Mansion, which is the office of the president in Monrovia; and an area near the Vamoma House which lies on the border between Sinkor, a neighbouring suburb of Monrovia, and Monrovia.

Amnesty International has taken the testimonies of a number of victims who were held and tortured at both the Pan African Plaza and the ATU cells behind the Executive Mansion. The young women held at the Pan African Plaza reported being raped. One of them told Amnesty International that the beach in front of the ATU base “was turned into a rape field”. Female and male students were reportedly beaten with gun butts, whipped and threatened with death. They were accused by members of security forces of being “radicals” or “university rebels”. Others were reportedly accused of “collaborating with the rebels” and fighting in the north, trying to create “chaos” in the university, or “trying to undermine the *papay*”.⁸

BB, a female student, was arrested by the ATU at one of the university exits while fleeing violence by the security forces. She was forced into a “pickup” truck and taken with other female students to the Pan African Plaza base. She told Amnesty International that she was dragged to the beach, stripped naked and gang-raped by at least four members of the security forces: “Over 15 girls were raped on the beach with me. After they did what they wanted to do to us, they decided to set us free. [...] Because of the stigma associated with rape, most of us declined from raising any alarm because ours is a very small society.”

Amnesty International has obtained the testimonies of other female students who were gang-raped at the Pan African Plaza; some of these testimonies are given below. The identities of the victims are known to Amnesty International but cannot be named, as the victims -- all detained for more than ten days and repeatedly raped before being released without charge -- were threatened with reprisals by security forces if they told their story or lodged complaints.

- *“When I left class on Wednesday 21 March 2001 to get home by way of the second gate, St. Patrick High School area. I was confronted by some ATU officers, approximately eleven men hiding behind the flowers and the university fence. Without warning or an opportunity to tell them that I was not part of the rally, the commander of the group, one major ordered that I should be forced into a waiting ATU pickup and taken to their base at the Pan African Plaza for*

⁸ *Papay* is a Liberian term for a fatherly figure to whom respect is due; in this case it refers to Liberian president Charles Taylor.

questioning; We were three girls. The first officer slapped me, kicked me and then I saw what looked like a gun butt coming. I could not tell what happened next. When I woke up, I found myself in a dark room. My jewelry, wristwatch, shoes and handbag were gone. My dress was in shreds and I was messed-up. I don't know whether I will ever recover from the trauma. For thirteen days I was raped by I don't know how many men. The first three days I spent in the dark room without food or water. On the fourth day I was brought outside, according to them (ATU) to get fresh air and shower. It was during this time I saw six other girls who were also arrested during the episode and eight boys as well. After shower and a meal of farina and sugar, we were placed in one cell. It appears we were being kept not because of the rally but because the soldier wanted to have a lustful feast. For me, every time I was taken out, it was because the soldier wanted to rape me. I was raped so many times, I don't know the number well, please spare me the times.”

- *“Upon my arrest I was taken to an underground room in the Pan African Plaza, which is the base of the ATU. I was stripped naked with the exception of my underclothes and placed in a room of palpable darkness. I was severely whipped several lashes on my buttocks and then my back. The lashes created painful bruises, which made it impossible for me to sit well and straight. I was starved for almost three days. I was kept in a dark room with all sort of cruel and inhumane treatment for days. During this period, I was made to sleep on the cold floor without bedding, and was faced with constant violent sexual harassments by some ATU officers.⁹ Some times I would resist them with a severe fight, but this would only make them to be more vindictive and injurious. After some days of my being there I became completely disoriented relative to place and time. Another problem was that I was feeling very sick from the massive flogging and injuries inflicted on me during most of the sexual harassment fights. I was released at the end of the thirteen days with injuries both psychological and physical. I had become completely traumatized since then till someone recommended that a psychiatric could help. I am grateful that my life was spared and now I could have a chance to continue my education. Though I am still undergoing some medical treatment as recommended by my family doctor.”*
- *“I was arrested by some security personnel of the ATU and taken to the Pan African Plaza, where I was detained for more than fourteen days without any justifiable reason. While serving my term of detention without being convicted, I was subjected to inhumane treatment as well as torture. On several occasions I*

⁹ The Amnesty International interviewer considered that by “sexual harassment” the victim meant “rape” but was ashamed to say so explicitly.

lamented as to why I was kept in detention, but the ATU commander said I was arrested on suspicion of being in support of some so-called university activists who were trying to cause chaos on the UL campus, relative to the four detained journalists. I was severely flogged on my back at the break of every day and was also threatened to be killed. I was detained in a room that was very dark with no ventilation. The condition of the cell was very deplorable to some extent that I felt humiliated. The sanitary condition of the cell was also bad and posed a health hazard. I was always found lying on the bare floor. The commander of the cell would maintain that I be fed once a day. For this cause I became malnourished. I was also abused sexually several times. On many occasions I opposed them, but as I refused they would become more violent in their action. The system of security is degenerating into uncontrollable mob, due to their unlawful attitude. In view of the above, the commander further stated that I was detained for supporting people who tried to undermine the government. However, I was released after fourteen days, owing to several appeals made by numerous human rights groups.”

CC, one of the student leaders held for a few hours at the Pan African Plaza, told Amnesty International that members of the SOD and the ATU grabbed him as he was trying to flee the campus:

“They [the ATU men] dragged me and brutalised me but fortunately they did not identify me. I was hit with a gun on my back. I still feel the pain in my neck. I was then dragged into their vehicle and taken to the Pan African Plaza base. We were at least 18 kept in the fence in the backyard. I was beaten with a gun butt. There were girls with us and they were beaten as well with a gun.¹⁰ I could hear people crying from the basement. I think that they were students. One of them was wailing and saying that he was not a university student. The ATU told us that instead of going to school we were trying to undermine the “papay” and that they had received information that some students were trained to cause havoc. This is not true.”

DD, one of the students who was held at the ATU cells at the Executive Mansion from 21 March until 4 April 2001 claimed to Amnesty International that an ATU officer accused him of “collaborating with the rebels”. The student was told by the same ATU officer, “Before removing the government you will feel the pain. We’ll fuck with you people”, which he interpreted as a death threat. He told Amnesty International that during his detention he was taken to a beach area, forced to look at the sun and repeatedly kicked when he tried to look

¹⁰ “girls” normally refers to females under 18.

down. He was repeatedly slapped and whipped in custody. He was held in a dark room that smelled like urine.

EE was held with eight other students at the Executive Mansion for 24 hours. He was slapped and beaten: “As soon as we reached the Mansion they stripped us. One of the officers told me to inflate my jowls [cheeks] and he slapped me with both hands. At midnight they took everybody outside and they carried us to a place where they beat us”.

The reaction of the Liberian authorities

In the days following the security forces’ raid on the campus, Liberian non-governmental human rights organizations, such as the Justice and Peace Commission, the National Center for Human Rights -- an umbrella of human rights organizations -- and the Center for the Protection of Human Rights, condemned the security forces’ brutality and called for those responsible to be brought to justice. Liberian journalists published several first-hand accounts of students who were beaten and whipped at the campus. Several victims gave accounts of floggings and beatings on a local radio program, “DC talk show”, and a female caller expressed concern about female students who had been taken to the Pan African Plaza ATU base and whose fate is still unknown. The student leadership publicly reported that female students had been sexually abused, continued to urge the release of students still held incommunicado in ATU bases in Monrovia, and called for an independent investigation and compensation of victims.

On 22 March, members of the opposition in the House of Representatives reportedly condemned the indiscriminate use of force by police and urged the government to promptly open an investigation and take “appropriate action” against those responsible. Amnesty International publicly called on the Liberian authorities to make sure that no student was held incommunicado or tortured and to immediately release any student who was still arbitrarily detained, unless there was credible evidence of a recognizably criminal offence.¹¹

Despite being confronted with such a high number of allegations of torture by security forces and reports of detention of students, including young women, in unofficial detention centres, nothing was done by the Liberian authorities to prevent further torture, including rape, in ATU custody. No action was taken to ensure that any of the detainees were transferred to official detention centres, given access to a lawyer, their relatives or prompt and adequate medical care.

¹¹ See *Liberia: As UN sanctions approach, repression of critics escalates*, 22 March 2001 (AI Index: AFR 34/002/2001)

To date, no steps have been taken by the Liberian authorities to open a thorough, independent and impartial inquiry or to bring those responsible to justice. In late March 2001, President Charles Taylor, commenting on the incident, reportedly said that students could not be allowed to “take the law into their own hands and go against the authority of the university and bring chaos to the campus”. President Taylor added that police intervened as there were fears of clashes among students.

Speaking after the security raid at the campus, Paul Mulbah, the director of the Liberian National Police, denied police brutality and said on a local radio that police had moved into the campus -- by request of the university authorities -- to stabilize the situation, as students wanted “to act disorderly”. He added that he did not have any regret and he would take full responsibility for police action. A few days later, the president of the University of Liberia, who had called the police in the campus, reportedly said at a faculty meeting that he regretted police brutality and floggings. However, the findings of a faculty committee appointed by the university authorities to investigate into the 21 March incident were never made public.

Intimidation and verbal attacks against the student leadership continued until they fled the country in May 2001. On 18 April the university authorities suspended ULSU and SUP leaders for one academic semester and announced a three-month ban on student politics at the campus. In May the Minister of Justice, Eddington Varmah, publicly claimed that dissident collaborators were operating from the main campus of the university as a result of which student leaders fled Liberia for fear of further physical attacks by the security forces.

Amnesty International believes that verbal and physical attacks by the security forces and the authorities against ULSU and SUP leaders were aimed at silencing them or forcing them out of the country. ULSU and SUP leaders have frequently been outspoken critics of the government and have highlighted in one way or another the following incidents:

- in early March 2001, around two weeks before the security forces stormed the university campus, ULSU leaders had publicly called for the establishment of a Truth Commission on widespread and gross human rights abuses carried out during the brutal 1989-1996 Liberian civil war. Since 1997 elections, won by President Charles Taylor, a former faction leader himself, the Liberian government has opposed the establishment of such a mechanism;
- on 9 November 2000, ULSU leadership had called for expulsion from Liberia of commander Sam Bockarie and other combatants belonging to the Sierra Leonean armed opposition Revolutionary United Front (RUF). RUF forces have committed serious human rights abuses in Sierra Leone during the ten-year internal armed conflict. RUF fighters have been seen operating in Liberia alongside the ATU, especially in Lofa County, despite the sanctions imposed on Liberia by the UN in May 2001 due to the military support it has provided to the RUF;

- in July 2000, leaders of ULSU, including **Alphonso Nimene** and **J. Karku Sampson**, were arbitrarily detained and beaten by police in Monrovia after expressing concern about accusations by the UN that Liberia was involved in the Sierra Leone conflict and after speaking of fighting in Lofa County as an “alleged war”.

Widespread and systematic torture in Liberia

Rape, beatings and other forms of torture used against the Liberian students in late March 2001 are common. The use of torture by Liberian security forces against political prisoners and criminal suspects is frequent and widespread. Ill-treatment and torture in custody has been used against critics of the government to intimidate and silence them. Civilians suspected of backing the armed incursion in the north have been tortured by the ATU or the SOD to force them to confess to backing armed opposition groups whom the government often refers to as “the rebels”.

An Amnesty International delegation visited Liberia for three weeks in February 2001. It gathered testimonies, medical records and other evidence indicating an alarming level of torture, including rape, in custody by police, the ATU and the SOD. Torture is often used by police to extract information or confessions from criminal suspects. The police have flogged, kicked and burned the skin of prisoners with hot plastic to extract confessions. Suspects tortured at the National Police Headquarters in Monrovia have been stripped naked, made to kneel on an iron bar and whipped with belts and cables. Others reportedly have been made to lie face down on the floor while police officers walked on their wrists and forearms.

Women have been raped in police custody, including at the National Police Headquarters in Monrovia. A victim of rape in 2000 at the National Police Headquarters told Amnesty International delegates that she was taken out of her cell for three consecutive nights and raped by one of the policemen. She was released without charge after one week in custody and she was threatened with further rape if she lodged a complaint against the rapist.

Amnesty International has received dozens of reports of women and girls being tortured, including being raped, by Liberian security forces fleeing insecurity in northern Lofa county in August and September 2001. Women and girls repeatedly reported that they were accused of being rebels or supporting the rebels while they were detained and tortured. They also reported that their lives were threatened if they reported the abuses they had undergone.

Impunity and lack of action by the government

“No person charged, arrested, restricted, detained or otherwise held in confinement shall be subject to torture or inhumane treatment; nor shall any person except military personnel, be kept or confined in any military facility...”

Article 21 (e), 1986 Constitution of Liberia

“Every person arrested or detained shall be formally charged and presented before a court of competent jurisdiction within forty-eight hours.”

Article 21(f), 1986 Constitution of Liberia

Torture is a crime in Liberia. Amnesty International has repeatedly raised its concerns with the Liberian government about widespread torture and other human rights violations carried out with impunity by security forces. In February 2001, the organization met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Monie Captan, who requested more details on the concerns brought to his attention and said that the government was committed to the prosecution of perpetrators of human rights violations. To date, Amnesty International has not received any response or comments to letters it addressed to the Minister on 9 and 22 March 2001. On 14 August 2001, the organization wrote to President Charles Taylor to reiterate its concerns and urge him to take steps to end impunity and human rights violations, but there had been no response at the time of writing.

Following the publication of two Amnesty International reports in May and August 2001 detailing cases of killings and torture, including rape, of unarmed civilians in Lofa County, the Liberian authorities denied the allegations and questioned the independence and impartiality of the reports.¹² However, the government has not produced any evidence to support its denials. On 2 August, Minister of Information, Reginald Goodridge, publically claimed that the ATU are “the best trained group in Liberia” and “are well disciplined”. He also called on international human rights groups to visit Liberia. It should be noted that members of the Liberian human rights community have systematically been targeted by Liberian security forces solely for carrying out human rights monitoring and publicly raising human rights concerns.

Since the 1997 elections, the Liberian government has done little or nothing to prevent human rights violations, including bringing perpetrators to justice. Victims of human rights violations rarely lodge complaints as they fear reprisals by the security forces. As demonstrated in this report, many rape victims are threatened with reprisals if they report on violations perpetrated against them. Mechanisms such as the Liberian Human Rights Commission (LHRC), intended to monitor and report on human rights abuses, have not been operational. The appointment of members of the LHRC, established in 1997, still has not been completed by the government and the LHRC is currently composed of only two members. In addition, it has not been provided with sufficient resources or *subpoena* powers to be able to function independently and effectively.

¹² See footnote 1, AI Indexes: AFR 34/003/2001 and AFR 34/009/2001

The Liberian judicial system still suffers from the effects of the civil war. It is in dire need of logistics and resources. Judicial officials need training in human rights standards. Amnesty International's experience of monitoring political trials appears to indicate that judicial officials, in the past, may have been susceptible to government attempts to influence the outcome of these trials. Amnesty International's monitoring also revealed that occasionally the government has used public statements through the print media to influence outcomes of trials with political implications. Members of the security forces are primarily former fighters of the rebel group, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia, and have not had formal training in international human rights and humanitarian law.

The impunity which the security forces have enjoyed for torture and other human rights violations has been a key factor in allowing human rights violations to reach the current alarming levels. The Inter-Agency Mission to West Africa, in its report transmitted by the UN Secretary-General to the UN Security Council in April 2001, specifically underlined the human rights problems in Liberia and observed that the absence of institutional measures to address the issue of truth and justice was considered to be a major handicap in the country's transition to democracy and the rule of law.¹³

No progress has been made by the authorities in bringing to justice the perpetrators of massive human rights abuses carried out during the seven-year civil war. Since the 1997 elections, on a few occasions, and often after public protests by the victims' relatives or outspoken human rights organizations, steps have been taken by the Liberian authorities to investigate some cases of human rights violations. However, those investigations have not been thorough, independent or truly effective and have not resulted in bringing the perpetrators to justice.

Those responsible for the killing of **Samuel Dokie**, a former government minister who was arrested and later found dead with three others in 1997, have still not been brought to justice. In 1998 after an investigation was done, a warrant was issued for the arrest of five people, including a high-ranking official of the Special Security Service. They were all believed to be in neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire. In March 2001, Amnesty International asked the Liberian authorities for an update on the case and whether an extradition request had been made to the Côte d'Ivoire authorities, but it has received no response to date.

Following national and international outcry at the killing of several members of the Mandingo ethnic group in Nikabuzu, Lofa County, in August 1999, allegedly by individuals belonging to the Lorma ethnic group -- known to be logistically supported by the local security forces -- an investigation was jointly opened by the Bureau of National Investigation (BNI) and

¹³ UN document S/2001/434, Letter dated 30 April 2001 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

the Criminal Investigation Division (CID). There is little evidence that the investigation was thorough, independent or impartial, as it lacked the necessary resources. The investigation apparently failed to bring those responsible, including local authorities and security forces, to justice. In March 2001 Amnesty International requested an update on the investigation and on any related judicial process, but to date no response or information has been received.

In another case in November 2000, seven policemen were suspected of torturing two inmates being held in the police station in Buchanan, Grand Bassa County. After local human rights organizations raised the cases publicly, the policemen were investigated and charged with an “unprofessional attitude” which carries a sentence of temporary suspension and transfer.

One of the victims was shot in the leg while trying to escape from the room in which he was being tortured, including being burnt with hot plastic. The other suspect had a barrel gun thrust into his rectum. The seven policemen involved were suspended for periods ranging from two to five months. The local commander was reportedly transferred to Sinoe County. Though disciplinary measures were taken to suspend security officers responsible for torture, no steps have been taken to bring them to justice and provide the victims with redress.

Conclusions

The Liberian authorities must immediately send an unequivocal message to its security forces and Liberian civil society that torture, including rape, and other human rights violations will not be tolerated and that those responsible will be brought to justice. The establishment of an independent and impartial inquiry into torture, including rape, of students detained in March 2001, the prosecution of the perpetrators and redress for the victims would signal to the international community and the Liberian population that the Liberian government has the political will to tackle impunity.

Much still remains to be done to investigate human rights violations, prevent future cases and promote human rights in Liberia. Bringing to justice those responsible for the torture, including rape, of students in March 2001 would be a positive and reassuring step in the right direction.

The international community should press for this inquiry and ensure it would be effective and independent. It should also provide resources and expertise to open other independent and impartial investigations into human rights violations, to provide protection for victims and witnesses, and to bring those responsible to justice. The Liberian authorities should be asked to take other steps to end human rights violations, such as training the security forces and the judiciary in human rights standards, and should be provided with assistance to do so by the international community.

Recommendations to the Liberian government:

- < a commission of inquiry should be promptly established to open a thorough, independent and impartial investigation into torture, including rape, of students detained in March 2001, with the aims of bringing to justice those responsible in trials which meet international standards of fairness without recourse to the death penalty, and providing the victims with redress;
- < the commission of inquiry should comprise people of acknowledged probity and impartiality; its scope, methods and findings should be made public; the commission should be given jurisdiction to take evidence from alleged victims of torture, including rape; victims should be protected against harassment and reprisals by security forces; the commission should be empowered to summon and take evidence from law enforcement officials;
- < the commission of inquiry should file interim reports to facilitate the prompt initiation of any appropriate criminal and disciplinary proceedings;
- < independent and impartial investigations should also be opened into other cases of human rights violations and any member of the security forces suspected of committing torture, including rape, and other human rights violations, should be immediately suspended from active service pending investigation and trial, providing that suspension would not prejudice any proceedings;
- < a clear, public and unequivocal message should be given to the security forces that anyone responsible for torture, including rape, and other human rights violations, will be brought to justice;
- < security forces should be instructed that anyone who is arrested must be held in an official detention centre and be given immediate access to lawyers of their choice, their relatives, and prompt and adequate medical care;
- < the practice of incommunicado detention should be ended and the authorities should allow independent inspections of all official and unofficial detention centres, including ATU bases. Detainees in ATU bases should be immediately transferred to official detention centres;
- < all reports of detainees being held incommunicado should be fully and independently investigated and anyone responsible for breach of procedure of detainees' legal and human rights should be held accountable;

- < all security forces and law enforcement officials should receive comprehensive training in international human rights and humanitarian law;
- < victims of human rights violations should receive immediate reparation from the Liberian government, including restitution, fair and appropriate compensation and any necessary medical attention and rehabilitation;
- < all those still arbitrarily detained, including women and girls, should be released from detention immediately and unconditionally, unless they are to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence and given a prompt and fair trial;
- < the appointment of members of the Liberian Human Rights Commission should be completed and steps should be taken to ensure that it can work effectively and independently, including by giving it *subpoena* powers;
- < the Liberian government should review interrogation rules, instructions, methods and practices and arrangements for the custody and treatment of persons subjected to any form of arrest, detention or imprisonment, with a view to preventing any further cases of torture;
- < the Liberian government should ensure that the UN Standard Minimum Rules for Treatment of Prisoners and the UN Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment are observed;
- < the Liberian government should ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Liberia is a signatory, and sign and ratify (without reservations) the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, with declarations providing for individual and inter-state complaints;
- < the Liberian authorities should respect and promote the provisions of international and regional human rights instruments they have already ratified. Such instruments include the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women;
- < the Liberian government should establish clear, transparent mechanisms for the reporting and investigating of all human rights violations. These should include gender-sensitive procedures for reporting rape and other violations against women, and procedures for protecting victims from reprisals. The government should take steps to publicise such mechanisms and ensure they are available to all victims.

Recommendations to the international community:

- < the European Union, following the consultations with the Liberian government opened in September 2001 under the Cotonou Agreement, should ask the Liberian authorities to implement the measures listed above. In particular, it should urge the Liberian authorities to end impunity and establish a commission of inquiry into torture, including rape, of students in March 2001 and ensure that it can work effectively and independently. Resources and expertise, including for protection of victims and witnesses, should be provided to the commission;
- < the Liberian authorities should be asked to introduce targeted reforms such as training of the Liberian security forces in international human rights and humanitarian law and should be provided with assistance to do so by the international community;
- < the international community should press for all members of the Liberian Human Rights Commission to be appointed and should ensure that the commission can work effectively and independently;
- < resources and expertise should be provided to open independent and impartial investigations into human rights violations and train the judiciary in human rights standards;
- < the international community should use its influence to have the most urgent steps taken immediately to end human rights violations. These include:
 - < allowing all detainees to have access to lawyers of their choice, their relatives, and prompt and adequate medical care;
 - < transferring detainees from unofficial detention centres such as the ATU bases to official detention centres;
 - < allowing independent inspections of all detention centres;
 - < giving public instructions to security forces that rape and other forms of torture and other human rights violations will not be tolerated and those responsible will be brought to justice;
 - < ensuring that human rights defenders and journalists can continue to carry out their work without fear of arrest or intimidation;
- < the UN, which already has a Peace-building Support Office on the ground, should employ and deploy human rights observers throughout the country to closely monitor and publicly report on human rights violations. (At least one of the human rights observers employed should have a background which takes into account a gender sensitive approach).

APPENDIX

What is Amnesty International?

Amnesty International is a worldwide movement of people whose vision is of a world in which every person enjoys all of the human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards. It is independent of any government, political persuasion, ideology, or religious creed. The organization does not support or oppose any government or political system, nor does it support or oppose the views of the victims whose rights it seeks to protect. Amnesty International's work is based on research that conforms to the highest standards of accuracy and impartiality - every piece of information is checked.

Amnesty International mobilizes volunteer activists in more than 140 countries and territories in every part of the world. There are more than 1,000,000 AI members and subscribers from many different backgrounds, with widely different political and religious beliefs.

Amnesty International's mission is to undertake research and action focussed on preventing and ending grave abuses of the rights to physical and mental integrity, freedom of conscience and expression, and freedom from discrimination. In this context Amnesty International works to:

- < free all prisoners of conscience, people detained for their political, religious or other conscientiously held beliefs or because of their ethnic origin, sex, colour, language, national or social origin, economic status, birth or other status - who have not used or advocated violence;
- < ensure fair and prompt trials for all political prisoners;
- < abolish the death penalty, torture and other ill-treatment of prisoners;
- < end political killings and "disappearances";
- < ensure that governments refrain from unlawful killings in armed conflict;
- < end abuses by armed political groups such as the detention of prisoners of conscience, hostage-taking, torture and unlawful killings;
- < prevent the return of refugees to countries where they may be at risk of human rights violations;
- < cooperate with other non-governmental organizations, the UN and regional inter-governmental organizations to further human rights;
- < ensure control of international military, security and police transfers and relations where such transfers or relations may contribute to human rights violations;
- < organize human rights education and awareness raising programs.