**United Nations Human Rights Committee calls on Liberia**

**to Prosecute Perpetrators of Civil War Atrocities**

8 August 2018

The United Nations Human Rights Committee (the Committee), a body of [independent experts](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CCPR/Pages/Membership.aspx) that monitors the implementation of the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CCPR.aspx) (ICCPR) by its State parties, has [issued strong concluding observations](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CCPR/Shared%20Documents/LBR/CCPR_C_LBR_CO_1_31862_E.pdf) on Liberia’s continued impunity for past crimes and human rights violations and calls upon the Liberian government to establish, as a matter of priority, a process of accountability for war crimes.

On 26 July 2018, following the first ever review of the human rights situation by the Committee, which included a dialogue with the Liberian government, the Committee [concluded](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CCPR/Shared%20Documents/LBR/CCPR_C_LBR_CO_1_31862_E.pdf) that it “regrets the very few steps taken to implement the bulk of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) recommendations of 2009.” It also expressed “concern that none of the alleged perpetrators of gross human rights violations and war crimes mentioned in the TRC report, has been brought to justice, and that some of those individuals are or have been holding official executive positions, including in the government.”

In advance of this historic meeting, [a coalition of 76 organizations](https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/07/05/liberia-76-groups-seek-justice-war-crimes)—including 56 Liberian NGOs and 20 international organizations—issued [a submission to the Committee](https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/supporting_resources/hrcommittee_group_submission_on_liberia.pdf) highlighting the “failure of the Government of Liberia to undertake fair and credible prosecutions of international crimes committed in Liberia during armed conflicts between 1989 and 2003, and to end impunity for civil war-era crimes.”

Liberia’s back to back civil wars resulted in numerous crimes under international law, including the killing of tens of thousands of civilians, the displacement of half the population, summary executions and numerous large-scale massacres; widespread and systematic rape; mutilation and torture; and large-scale forced conscription and use of child combatants. Despite a [Truth and Reconciliation Commission report](https://web.archive.org/web/20170515044651/http:/trcofliberia.org:80/reports/final-report) identifying crimes committed by all sides of the conflict, and recommending reparations for victims as well as justice in the form of a special international-national hybrid court, Liberia has yet to take steps to implement such recommendations. According to the [Committee’s assessment](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CCPR/Shared%20Documents/LBR/CCPR_C_LBR_CO_1_31862_E.pdf) “such a situation fosters a climate of impunity and fails to achieve transitional justice.”

During the review, Liberian government representatives pledged to issue a public statement on plans to implement the TRC report. Since assuming office, President George Weah has yet to publically share his opinion on accountability for grave crimes committed during the country’s two civil wars, despite his earlier support while serving as a Goodwill Ambassador to UNICEF. This comes in a context where calls for justice by Liberian civil society and ordinary citizens, in addition to international organizations, continue to [grow](https://allafrica.com/stories/201805110582.html). Moreover, [prosecutions](https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/trend-lines/22453/the-arrest-of-prominent-liberians-abroad-is-stirring-talk-of-justice-at-home) of former rebel commanders and military leaders are taking place in the U.S. and Europe while not a single person has been prosecuted in Liberia for civil war-era crimes.

[At a well-attended press conference](https://frontpageafricaonline.com/liberia-war-crimes-trial/liberia-cso-platform-committee-recommends-removal-of-war-crimes-perpetrators-from-public-office/) in Monrovia on August 1, Adama Dempster, Secretary General of the Civil Society Human Rights Advocacy Platform of Liberia noted that the government representatives assured the UN Committee that their position on accountability would be made clear upon their return to Liberia and called on the government to issue a statement without further delay.

Impunity for past crimes in Liberia is now one of three priority issues before the Committee, making accountability for civil war era abuses one of the most pressing matters that Liberia faces under its ICCPR review. Liberia is now tasked with responding to the UN’s calls to implement measures to provide justice, truth, and reparations for civil war victims, including: “ensure that all alleged perpetrators of gross human rights violations and war crimes are impartially prosecuted and, if found guilty, convicted and punished in accordance with the gravity of the acts committed”; “remove any persons who have been proven to be involved in gross human rights violations and war crimes from official positions”; take “all measures necessary to implement the TRC recommendations”; and develop and implement reparations for war time victims. Liberia will now need to provide a follow-up report on these matters by 2020 (two years prior to the regularly scheduled periodic report).

Weah’s attendance before the UN General Assembly in September may be another opportunity for the government to make clear its intentions to bring to justice, in fair trials, all those suspected of criminal responsibility for war crimes. As the 76 group [submission notes,](https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/supporting_resources/hrcommittee_group_submission_on_liberia.pdf) impunity in the name of reconciliation cannot continue in Libera.“Justice [for war crimes] must be one of the cardinal points of the President’s new agenda,” says Hassan Bility, Executive Director of the Global Justice and Research Project, “otherwise there will be no lasting peace in Liberia.”