

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN INFORMATION KEY DOCUMENTS

LIBERIA

3 DECEMBER 2007

Border and Immigration Agency
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN INFORMATION SERVICE

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1. Preface

i This Country of Origin Information (COI) Key Documents has been produced by COI Service, Border and Immigration Agency (BIA), for use by officials involved in the asylum/human rights determination process. It provides general background information about the issues most commonly raised in asylum/human rights claims made in the United Kingdom. The COI Key Documents includes information available up to 3 December 2007.

- The COI Key Documents is an indexed list of key reports, papers and articles produced by a wide range of recognised external information sources. It does not contain any Home Office opinion or policy.
- For Home Office users, the COI Key Documents provides direct electronic access to each source referred to in the document, via a link on the source numbers in the index and list of sources. For the benefit of external users, the relevant web link has also been included, together with the date that the link was accessed.
- iv As noted above, the documents identified concentrate mainly on human rights issues. By way of introduction, brief background information on Guinea is also provided. Please note, this background material is not intended to provide a summary of the material contained in the key documents listed.
- v This COI Key Documents and the documents listed are publicly disclosable.
- vi Any comments regarding this COI Key Documents or suggestions for additional documents are very welcome and should be submitted to the Home Office as below.

Country of Origin Information Service

Home Office Apollo House 36 Wellesley Road Croydon CR9 3RR United Kingdom

Email: cois@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk

Website: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/country_reports.html

ADVISORY PANEL ON COUNTRY INFORMATION

vii The independent Advisory Panel on Country Information was established under the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 to make recommendations to the Home Secretary about the content of the Home Office's country of origin information material. The Advisory Panel welcomes all feedback on the Home Office's country of origin information material. Information about the Panel's work can be found on its website at www.apci.org.uk.

viii It is not the function of the Advisory Panel to endorse any Home Office material or procedures. In the course of its work, the Advisory Panel directly reviews the content of selected Home Office COI documents, but neither the fact that such a review has been undertaken, nor any comments made, should be taken to imply endorsement of the material. Some of the material examined by the Panel relates to countries designated or proposed for designation for the Non-Suspensive Appeals (NSA) list. In such cases, the Panel's work should not be taken to imply any endorsement of the decision or proposal to designate a particular country for NSA, nor of the NSA process itself.

Email: apci@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk

Website: www.apci.org.uk

2. Background information about Liberia

Full Country Name: The Republic of Liberia

Area: 111,369 sq km (43,000 sq mi). **Population:** 3,195,931 (July 2007 est.)

Capital City: Monrovia

Peoples and languages: The main ethnic groups are Kpelle (20%), Bassa (16%), Gio (8%), and Kru (7%). There are 12 other ethnic groups: Krahn, Mano, Grebo, Gola, Gbandi, Loma, Kissi, Vai, Dei, Bella, Mende and Mandingo. English is the official

language but there are also 16 indigenous languages spoken in Liberia. **Religion(s):** Christian 40%, Muslim 20%, indigenous beliefs 40% **Currency:** Liberian dollar (LDR). The US Dollar is also widely used.

Major political parties: normal party political activity was disrupted under Charles Taylor's rule. Parties have re-emerged since the end of the civil war, and following the elections of October 2005, there are 11 parties represented in the legislature. The biggest of these are the Unity Party, the Liberty Party, The Congress for Democratic Change and the Coalition for the Transformation of Liberia

President: Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf (inaugurated 16 January 2006).

Vice President: Joseph Nyumah Boakai.

Membership of international groupings/organisations: United Nations (UN), African Union (AU), Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), African Development Bank (AFDB) and Mano River Union (MRU).

[1a](Europa World Online); [2b] (United States Department of State, Background Note: Liberia, May 2007); [3a] (FCO country profile, Liberia, 29 October 2007); [10a] (Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), The World Fact book: Liberia, 15 November 2007).

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GEOGRAPHY

"Liberia lies just north of the Equator on the Atlantic coast in West Africa. It borders Sierra Leone, Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire. It has a tropical climate and is one of the wettest countries in the world, with an average annual rainfall of 200 inches. Inland from the coastal plain, much of the country is rainforest". [3a](FCO country profile, Liberia, 29 October 2007)

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RECENT HISTORY

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Country Profile, updated 29 October 2007, notes that:

"Liberia was established as an independent state by freed slaves from America in 1847. They were joined by Africans released from slave ships off the West African coast. For more than 130 years from its founding, politics were dominated by the small minority of the population descended from these original settlers, known as the Americo-Liberians or Congo. During that era, Liberia was renowned for its stability, its functioning economy and the large amount of foreign investment it attracted in the rubber plantations and the iron ore mines. But the indigenous Africans were largely excluded from political power.

"In 1980 Master Sergeant Samuel Doe, a member of the indigenous Krahn ethnic group, seized power in a violent military coup. Key members of the Americo-Liberian

elite, including the President and his Cabinet were summarily executed in public on the beach. The USA, a traditional strong ally of Liberia, withdrew its support. Doe mismanaged the economy and transformed the armed forces into an ethnic Krahn militia which committed extensive human rights abuse against Liberia's other ethnic groups".

The FCO Country profile adds:

"In 1989 the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), led by Charles Taylor, began a revolt against the Doe regime. It quickly became a vicious civil war. The Doe dictatorship collapsed and he was murdered by a rebel faction in September. At this point Taylor (and to a lesser extent other rival warlords) already controlled large parts of Liberian territory. Despite occasional truces and no fewer than a dozen abortive peace agreements, the conflict continued for a further 6 years. During this period, the rival warlords, and West African peace keeping forces, looted the country's natural resources and state revenues.

"Democratic elections were finally held in July 1997. Taylor won but the elections bought only temporary respite. Taylor's government set about plundering the state of its assets and stifling opposition activity. In 1999 fighting began and by July 2003 Taylor had lost control of most of the country, including much of Monrovia. Peace talks in Accra in August led to the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in September. A new Economic Community Of West African States (ECOWAS) peacekeeping force was deployed, which has since been replaced by the 15,000 strong UN force (UNMIL). Taylor was forced into exile in Nigeria. Indicted by the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL), Taylor was arrested in Nigeria on 29 March 2006 and subsequently transferred to the Special Court in Freetown where he was charged on 3 March with offences relating to the Sierra Leone civil war. He has subsequently been transferred to The Hague to await trial under SCSL Mandate". [3a] (FCO country profile, Liberia 29 October 2007)

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RECENT EVENTS AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Country Profile, updated 29 October 2007, notes that: "Following the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, a vast DDR programme (Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration) disarmed over 100,000 combatants in 2005, although reintegration programmes have had only patchy success. UNMIL are deployed over the entire territory to provide security. The CPA created the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL), made up of representatives from former rebel groups, political parties, the former Taylor government and civil society. It has been accused of extensive corruption".

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Country Profile, also notes that: "In 2005 Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf won the Presidential elections, with 59% of the vote in the second round run off against the former footballer George Weah. She was inaugurated President of the Republic of Liberia on 16 January 2006, in the presence of high profile international guests including the US Secretary of State, the First Lady of the United States and FCO Envoy Chris Mullin. President Johnson-Sirleaf has faced a daunting set of challenges and does not command a majority in the legislature. She faced a serious challenge from Speaker of the House of Representatives Edwin Snowe in the first half of 2007, but he has since been removed from his position".

[3a] (FCO country profile, Liberia, 29 October 2007)

Europa World Online, accessed 13 November 2007, notes: "In February 2007 Willis D. F. Knuckles, the Minister of State for Presidential Affairs, resigned after allegations were published in the press of inappropriate behaviour and the sexual exploitation of young women. Johnson-Sirleaf announced in March that Dr Edward McClain would assume Knuckles' vacated portfolio on a temporary basis, pending the appointment of a new minister".

[1a](Europa World Online)

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Country Profile, updated 29 October 2007, notes that: "The judicial system and the security sector in particular need to be rebuilt almost from scratch. Good progress has been made with the reconstruction of the Liberian police force, although a serious incident occurred when a fight broke out between the Liberian Police and the Liberian Seaport authority in July [2007]. The reconstruction of the army has taken longer than hoped. In July this year an alleged coup plot was uncovered, and two individuals are now awaiting trial." [3a] (FCO country profile, Liberia, 29 October 2007)

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ECONOMY

GDP: US\$ 839 million (2006 est) **Annual Growth:** 7.8% (2006 est)

Inflation: 7% (2006 est)

Major Industries: "The [Liberian] economy is now growing due to growth in exports (especially rubber) and donor funding. UN sanctions on timber were lifted in June 2006 and sanctions on the export of diamonds were lifted in April 2007. The iron ore works at Yekepa in northern Liberia, closed down at the beginning of the civil war, have now been restarted and are to be run by Acelor Mittal. Negotiations for agreements to open up diamond mining and further iron ore mining concessions are underway".

Major trading partners: Recent figures are unreliable but main trading partners are

the European Union, Japan, Sierra Leone, the United States and China

Exchange rate: £1 is approximately 100 LRD [3a] (FCO country profile, Liberia, 29 October 2007)

The CIA World Factbook, updated 15 November 2007, states:

"Civil war and government mismanagement have destroyed much of Liberia's economy, especially the infrastructure in and around the capital, Monrovia. Many businessmen have fled the country, taking capital and expertise with them. Some have returned, but many will not. Richly endowed with water, mineral resources, forests, and a climate favorable to agriculture, Liberia had been a producer and exporter of basic products - primarily raw timber and rubber. Local manufacturing, mainly foreign owned, had been small in scope. President Johnson-Sirleaf, a Harvard-trained economist, has taken steps to reduce corruption, build support from international donors, and encourage private investment. An embargo on timber exports has been lifted, opening a source of revenue for the government, but diamonds remain under UN sanctions. The reconstruction of infrastructure and the raising of incomes in this ravaged economy will largely depend on generous financial support and technical assistance from donor countries".

[10a] (Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), The World Fact book: Liberia, 15 November 2007).

HUMAN RIGHTS

The US State Department report for 2006, published 6 March 2007, summarises the human rights record of Liberia's Government as follows:

"The government generally respected the human rights of its citizens; however, problems persisted in some areas. Deaths from mob violence increased. Police abused, harassed, and intimidated detainees and citizens. Prison conditions remained harsh and incidents of arbitrary arrest and detention occurred. Lengthy pretrial detention and denial of due process and fair public trial were problems. Liberia National Police (LNP) officers on several occasions assaulted journalists and a human rights worker. Some incidences of trial-by-ordeal were reported. Corruption and impunity continued in many levels of the government. There was violence against women, especially reports of rape. The practice of female genital mutilation (FGM) remained widespread. Child abuse, trafficking in persons, and racial and ethnic discrimination were problems. Instances of child labor were reported, especially in the informal sector. Child neglect and child abuse continued to be problems. There were some instances of ethnic tensions during the year, but none that resulted in violence.

"The government took significant steps during the year to correct past human rights deficiencies. The government worked with numerous international partners to rehabilitate the country's justice sector and established a public defender's office in the capital. The president dismissed or suspended a number of government officials for corruption, and the government tightened contracting practices and financial controls through the Governance and Economic Management Assistance Plan (GEMAP). During the year the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which was established in 2005 to investigate human rights violations and war crimes committed during the 14-year civil war, began taking statements from witnesses". [2a] (United States Department of State, Report on Human Rights Practices 2006: Liberia, 6 March 2007)

In addition the FCO country profile for Liberia, updated 29 October 2007, notes:

"Since the end of the civil war, there have been no significant prosecutions for human rights abuses, but the human rights environment has significantly improved. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was officially inaugurated on 20 February 2006, with the mandate to gather evidence and testimony concerning the decades of violence the country has suffered. The TRC is mandated to recommend prosecutions or amnesties for individual cases. It has made a slow start. Labour rights remain a contentious subject, particularly with regard to conditions in the rubber and diamond sectors. [3a] FCO country profile, Liberia, 29 October 2007)

3. Index to key source documents

(KB users - click source number to access document directly)

KEY FACTS AND	[1a]	Europa World Online,
GEOGRAPHY	[Location, climate, language, religion, flag, capital
		(accessed on 13 November 2007)
		http://www.europaworld.com/pub/
	[1b]	Europa World Online,
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	[2a]	United States Department of State, Report on Human Rights
		Practices – 2006: Liberia, 6 March 2007 http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78742.htm
	[2b]	United States Department of State, Background Note: Liberia,
		last updated May 2007 http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/6618.htm
	[3a]	Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Country Profile: Liberia,
		last updated 29 October 2007 http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/
		Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1007029394365&a=KCou
		ntryProfile&aid=1019744966050
	[7a]	British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Country Profile:
		Liberia, Last updated 3 October 2007
		http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/country_profiles/1043500.stm
	[10a]	Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), The World Factbook:
		Liberia, Last updated 15 November 2007
		https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world- factbook/geos/li.html
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		http://www.un.org/Depts/Cartographic/map/profile/liberia.pdf
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		Recent History (accessed on 13 November 2007)
		http://www.europaworld.com/pub/
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	[7b]	British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) Timeline: Liberia, last updated 3 October 2007 http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/country_profiles/1043567.stm
	[7c]	British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Liberia: A year of slow progress, 16 January 2007 http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/6266155.stm
	[21a]	Freedom House Freedom in the World 2007: Liberia http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2 007&country=7215
POLITICS AND RECENT DEVELOPMENTS	[1c]	Europa World Online, Recent History http://www.europaworld.com/pub/
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	[5a]	Human Rights Watch (HRW), World Report 2007: Liberia http://hrw.org/englishwr2k7/docs/2007/01/11/liberi14716.htm
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	[25a]	United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), Quarterly Report on the Human Rights Situation in Liberia February - April 2007 (accessed via UNHCR Refworld) http://www.unhcr.org/cgi- bin/texis/vtx/refworld/rwmain?page=country&docid=4745 4d132&skip=&coi=LBR&rid=456d621e2	
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	[14a]	Reporters sans Frontieres (Reporters without Borders): Liberia: Two journalists beaten by police and UN peacekeepers, one seriously injured, 20 June 2007. http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=22628
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	[13a]	Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), Liberia: Focus for IDP Returnees Moves from Conflict to Development, 27 July 2007 http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/refworld/rwmain?page=country&docid=46a9e0f72&skip=&coi=LBR&rid=456d621e2
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