

## ***WOMEN RIGHTS IN LIBERIA***

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### BACKGROUND:

From the historical out look of Liberia in the setting of Women rights, is a global phenomenon that cuts across geographical, cultural and political boundaries and varies only in its manifestations and severity. Gender Violence has existed from time immemorial and continues up to the present day.

It takes covert and overt forms, including physical and mental abuse. Violence against women, including female genital mutilation, wife burning, dowry-related violence, rape, incest, wife battering, female feticide and female infanticide, trafficking, early marriage, teenage pregnancy, summary ex-execution and prostitution, is a women violations and not only a moral issue but human rights violation according to the Geneva Conventions, Elimination Against Women, CRS, CEDAW, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Security Council Resolution and many other international instruments on women. It has serious negative implications on economic and social development of women and society, and is an expression of the societal gender subordination of women.

Liberia Watch for Human Rights who serve as watch dog in its press conferences condemned the violence against women in the society, Liberia being no exception; most of the practices reviewed so far constitute acts of violence against women or girl child by the state, security apparatus, families and the communities.

The form of harmful traditional practice Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in Liberia has been on the increase and continues to be in scandalous proportion based on societal practice or cultural believe by some ethnic groups in Liberia. Girl children under the ages of 5-18 yrs. are forced by their parents to go through female circumcision culturally called sande and Poro societies (Sande for Female and Poro for Male). Non-Sterilized blunt objects are used in this tradition ional practice.

Mostly in Liberia, parents use their girls children as bread winners for the families to up-keep their homes, the early marriage is another traditional way of giving girl children out to friends or religious family ageing between 12-15,thus resulting to teenage pregnancy in Liberia. This commonly practices among ethnic groups of Vai,Mende,Gbande and Mandingoes who are mainly Muslim.

Another human rights violations against women in Liberia is found in Liberia education system where girl children trade-off their bodies to the teachers in replacement of scoring grade marks. It is both prevalent from elementary schools and university colleges. Among other violations against women are rape, prostitution, female genital mutilation (FGM), and early marriage as mentioned.

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Even though in Liberia statutory law women are permitted to go on maternity leave at a certain period of pregnancy, regrettably both private and public sectors disregards this right to

women that of which are in existence as far back as many decades. Hitherto, nothing has been done to improve the women status in that direction.

In the fulfillment of democracy, consistence with the United Nations Chapter in regard to Gender Equality and every aspect of life women in Liberia are gradually ascending to the position of authority or leadership in Liberia like Ruth Sando Perry, former Chairman of the six men council, Gloria Musu Scott, former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Liberia, and Francis Johnson-Morris, present National Election Commission (Commissioner).

#### DATA BASE: WOMEN VIOLATIONS:

It seems as though little or nothing is being done to the plight of women rights in Liberia, women will continuously suffer in the hand of the state security apparatus, individuals, family and community with impunity. Almost on a daily basis there are numerous reports of continued violations of women rights according to UNICEF survey evaluation on teenage pregnancy, Liberia take the highest rate in the world.

There was a case investigated and documented by LWHR of a ten (10) years old girl, Mary Doe who was fuss by her grand mother to join a sande society, because of the stress and fuss, she become unconscious for three days without taking to the hospital until she died in the bush as a result of Constance bleeding.

On the 20th of July 2003, LWHR was fortunate to investigate a case at Grand Cape Mount County, were an old lady by the name of Hawa Kromah was rape to death by seven fighters of the LURD rebels. According to them (fighters) revealed that it is better to have sex with older women because they may not been suffering from the Aids virus.

On Saturday March 22, 2003, at about 4:50pm. A girl identified as Mercy Toe, 7yrs., was shot to death by her big brother Junior Weagba. This incident occurred in Wleboken, Killepo Kanweaken District, River Gee County.

According to credible sources and confirmed by an eye-witness who went on the scene of the incident said that little Mercy Toe and her big brother Junior were both cooking their afternoon meal when a serious argument erupted between them, as to who will take huge portion of the food. All kinds of insult were used.

Based on the insult from his sister, Junior went in their parent room and took his father's single barrel gun and began to shout with a loud voice asking his sister if she still challenged him, when his sister lifted up her head to respond to him, he instantly shot her in the foreface and pronounced dead.

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As a result of this incident, Junior Weagba was arrested and detained by the police and charged with murder. The police later sent him to Fish Town for court trial, while little Mercy was buried later after deposited for three (3) days.

In a wake of the recent attack on Toe Town, Grand Gedeh County, on March 29, 2003, an unknown armed men believed to be Government Militia men, murder a Norwegian Worker of the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) Madam Kaare Lund 39.

According to our monitor who spoke to some of the escapees from Toe Town said that the relief worker was killed by a group of armed men in Toe Town, Grand Gedeh County near the Liberia-Ivorian Border while on her way to pay relief workers in that region. Being accused

the government forces of carrying on these act, the Liberian government ordered an immediate investigation into the killing.

Meanwhile, the European Union, UN Office in Monrovia, Liberia Watch for Human Rights, the Female Lawyer Association of Liberia, the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission and the National Bar Association were invited to participate in collaboration with Defense Ministry, but up to present, no order or comment has come from the government to start the investigation.

As a result of the incident, the United States Government and the European Commission has threatened to withhold all development assistance unless the government ensure that the rights of individual were protected in consonances with the rule of law.

On Friday, August 8, 2003, at about 2:30pm. A lady identified as Lorpu Kollie, 52 yrs. Was murder by Sekou Kamara alias "K-1" of the LURD Rebels. This incident occurred in Clara Town, Bushrod Island. According to the victim's sister, Madam Esther Kollie, told our monitor that the incident occurred when her sister went to find her daily bread in H&A Warehouse. It was at this point Gen. K-1 suddenly killed her. O, Gen. K-1 has killed my sister, she lamented. As a result Madam Kollie corpse decomposed on the incident scene.

On Thursday May 8, 2003, at about 8:00pm. A lady identified as Linda Welleh 37 yrs. was mal-handled and intimidated by a man only identified as Kadafi, believed to be an Anti-Terrorist Unit Personnel (ATU). This incident occurred in Patty Town, Montserrado County.

According to Madam Welleh a relatives of Linda Wellah, told our monitor that Kadaji and Linda were in relationship but separated (divorce) some two years ago. Now because of the constant maltreatment she has been receiving from Kadafi, she moved to an unknown area to avoid being molested.

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On that fateful day, Kadafi, (ATU Personnel) walked into their house and grabbed Linda by her wrist and flogged her, and dragged her without any reason. Madam Annie Welleh further said that Kadafi has threaten to killed anyone who will make an attempt to rescuer the woman or want to stop him from carrying on this ugly act. Madam Annie also quoted the ATU Officer, said the Officer give some goods and an amount of USD to Linda, some years ago to deposit and demanded that either Linda produce the money out of her stomach or he will kill her.

As a result of the incident, the family member of Linda went to all the police detention cells and prison centers to consul, but could not find her anywhere around.

The abuse of innocent civilians today has become a cancerous wound in our society and consuming silently the future of our life. It seems as though little or no action is being taken to the plight of the civilian. In the area, (Paynesville) than innocent will died slowly. Almost on a daily basis there are numerous reports of continued harassment and raping of women and girls in the night hours. On Monday May 12, 2003 at about 2:14 pm, our monitor visited the area and able to speak to some victims. Madam Vivian Seboe one of the victim told our

monitor that these attacker were believed to be member of the government Militia men who were in the constant habit of entering people houses, put them at gun point, collect all their properties and raped women and girl children.

As a result of the constant harassment, the Civilian in the area (Paynesville), are living in fear from the state security behavior.

On Saturday May 24, 2003, at about 12:35am. a girl identified as Ophelia Molly 17 yrs. was forcefully rape by two of the government Militia men, identified as Pvt. Patrick Challey and his friend (name not mentioned) at the Borough of New Kru Town, Monrovia.

According to our monitor who spoke to one of the neighbor in the area, Mr. Isiah Seegbah told our monitor that the incident took place when Ophelia was coming from the IB Club late in the night. When the two officers saw her going home, they creep behind her until they pass by Redemption Hospital (a dusty road that leading to D. Tweh High School). It was at this juncture, the two officers jump on Ophelia and tear her clothes and forcefully have sexual intercourse with her. He further said upon Ophelia crying for rescuer a score of neighbors came out and grab one of them while the others escape.

After forceful sexual intercourse, Ophelia bleed until she was rushed to the Redemption Hospital for medical treatment. Mr. Seegbah said that the family has not yet report the case to the authority but walking after their daughter's health.

As a result of the incident, Ophelia was later discharged at the Redemption hospital and her parent carry her to Pipeline for County treatment, one of the perpetrators is arrested and jailed at New Kru Town Police Station.

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On Thursday July 10, 2003, a lady identified as Nancy Sieh 58 yrs., was raped to death by LURD rebels fighters identified as Abel Sekou. This incident occurred at Brewerville, Montserrado County.

According to the victim (Nancy Sieh) daughter, Ms. Ida Sieh told our monitor that the incident occurred when her mother decided to stall at their Brewerville resident to attend to some problem. It was at this juncture the perpetrator ransacked her house and forced her into having sexual intercourse with her for good two days. As a result, the lady died after she was forcefully raped and the perpetrator escaped the scene and went on the war front, (Bomi).

On Wednesday July 24, 2003, at about 9:00am. a lady identified as Madam Mary Kollie, 51 yrs. Was raped by Captain Sannah Thomas of the LURD rebels. This incident occurred in Hope Community, Bushrod Island Monrovia. According to our monitor who spoke to Madam Mary Kollie, explained that she met her sexual abuse when she was alone in her resident preparing her breakfast. It was at this juncture the officer put her under gunpoint and forcibly raped her (Mrs. Kollie) instantly. Later when one of the LURD rebels Gen. Sekor Kenneh alias "K-1" got the information he arrested the officer and shoot him on the sport. He told the victim's family that he will see to it that the lady be treated on the expense of the LURD rebels.

As a result of the incident, the lady was treated at the LURD rebels combat Clinic while the perpetrator was killed by Gen. K-1 of the LURD rebel.

On the 25th of June 2003, at about 11:00pm. a lady identified as Mary S. Togbo 26 yrs. was raped by Capt. Jonah Taywon of the Navy Battalion, Government Militia men. This incident occurred in Iron Factory, Gardnersville. The girl was forcibly rape during the recent attack by LURD rebels in the city, when no law and order on ground. Presently, the girl is at the John F. Kennedy Medical Hospital seeking medical treatment.

On Thursday March 27, 2003, at about 12:15 noon, a resident of New Kru Town identified as Martha Dolo, 43, was unmercifully flogged by three (3) unidentified armed men believed to be Militia men, led by Lt. George Kamara, 35, of the Anti-Terrorist Unit (ATU). This incident occurred in Nyunun-Panton, New Kru Town.

According to our monitor, the lady was flogged when she refused to offer the armed men (3) three coconuts they asked her to give them, but the action of the lady did not please the armed men who began to insult her with all sorts of profane languages to provoke her to anger. The lady responded by giving them harsh words, which led to scuffle between she and the armed men.

As a result of the incident, Martha Dolo was beaten with gun butt and sustained injury on her left leg. The armed men were no were to be found but the Community resident told our monitor that the three armed men has gone to the battle front.

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On Friday February 21, 2003, at about 9:21 am. a little girl identified as Bendu Quie, 13, was abducted by group of armed men believed to be member of the LURD rebel. This incident occurred in Bakligbo Town, Bomi County.

According to the father of the little girl, Bendu Quie, Mr. Bomiah Gray, said that the rebel lunched an early morning attack and raided the town with heavy shooting, which caused them to flee into the bushes for safety. Mr. Gray speaking in a very distressed tone, reported to LWHR'S office that when the rebels entered the town, they arrested forty person including women, children and elderly people. They were abducted and forced out of their town and taken to Gbarma Town, the rebel headquarter. Mr. Gray managed to escape from the rebel and reported the incident to security authority in Monrovia.

On Tuesday February 11, 2003, at about 7:00 am. a little girl identified as Patience Keith, 15, was raped by Vasco Willies of the Government Militia forces assigned in the area. This incident took place in Kakata City, Margibi County.

Madam Ruth, the victim's mother alleged that a man of the government Militia forces forcibly had sexual intercourse with her daughter in one of the dilapidated building near the County Administrative Building. Thereafter, she was told not to tell anybody that if she does, she would be killed. In subsequence to her rape, she started experiencing lower abdominal pains with vagina discharges. While she was discovered raped rape by her mother after three (3) days, she was rushed to a nearby Clinic, according to physical examination (PE) made by the Doctors the general appearance of patience looks fairly mail-nourished and pale. Afebril to touch; and the conjunctive is slightly pale, chest is symmetrical; lungs are dear; abdomen flat soft and slight tenderness in the lower abdominal region.

As a result of the incident, little girl Patience was discharged after treatment while the officer was arrested, detained and charged with rape by the Magisterial Court in Kakata City, Margibi County. Officer Vasco Willies was convicted and detained at the Monrovia Center Prison Compound.

On Sunday April 18, 2004, at about 6:30 am a lady identified as Mary Darwolo, 23 yrs was murdered by some "Heart-man" commonly called "Gbayoo" for ritualistic purpose. This incident occurred in Caldwell, the suburb of Monrovia.

According to one of the victim's relatives, Mr. Thomas Tolokpala who spoke to our monitor that the incident happened when Darwolo came out early in the morning to dispose a waste in a near by unfinished building. It was at this juncture that Gbayoo collected and slaughtered her to death. He stated further that when Mary corpse was found her throat had already been cut deep to the bones. When the neighbor heard Madam Mary Darwolo crying for rescue, few neighbors came to her rescue. Unfortunately, she has being killed by the perpetrators.

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When Mr. Thomas Tolokpala forwarded the complaint to the nearby police station, one Capt. Swen told him that they (Police) would do internal and external investigation to bring the perpetrators to justice, if guilty would be sent to life imprisonment, the officer assured. As a result of the incident the corpse was deposited at Samuel Striker Funeral awaiting burial.

On Friday April 2,2004 at about 11:00 am two girls of the kpelle tribe identified as Lorpu Naigai 17 yrs and Maima Johnson 19 yrs were abducted by a group of armed men believed to be members of the LURD-fighters. This incident took place in Gbarnga City, Bong County.

According to our monitor and other credible sources close to the relatives of the victims revealed that their sisters were going to the nearby village to purchase palm-wine which the always sell to Gbarnga City when they came in contact with these armed men who were going to the same direction. The sources also revealed that the unidentified armed amen spotted them walking and abruptly stopped them. These armed men arrested the two girls. As a result of the incident, these two girls were arrested and carried to an unknown destination by these armed men. No one held responsible for the acts.

On Thursday April 15, 2004, at about 3:00pm a lady identified as Mrs. Helena Nyanneh, 37 yrs. was raped by some members of Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) fighters under the command of General Chea Willie nick-named "Bloody". This incident occurred in Jacksonville, Sinoe County.

According to Mr. Helena Nyanneh who spoke to our Monitor revealed that she met her sexual abuse when Gen. Willie and his seven (7) bodyguards went to her resident requesting for goat violently. The lady pleaded that the particular goat was not hers, but promise to contract the owner, the General got angry and ordered his body-guard to deal with the lady. Based upon the ordered of the Gen., she was raped by the bodyguards unmercifully. All effort made by the family members to contract the MODEL authority was futile.

On Wednesday July 7, 2004, at about 12:00 mid-night a lady by the name of Ma-Lucy Kweh 49 yrs. was raped by four (4) armed men believed to be members of the Ex-LURD fighters. This incident occurred in Tubmanburg, Bomi County.

Ma-Lucy Kweh who our Monitor interviewed on her hospital bed, said that the incident happened when she came out at that time to urinate. When the four former armed men saw her they jump on her and about to forcibly have sexual intercourse with her respectfully. As a

result of the incident the lady bled for two days and later rush her to John F. Kennedy Hospital for medical treatment. No action was taken against the perpetrators.

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On Sunday, August 15, 2004, at about 1:40 pm. Two marketers identified as Mary Sumo 29 yrs. and Theresa Teah, 34, were intimidated by the Guinean border security guards, while crossing over to the Guinea border for business transaction. The incident occurred in Yela Town, Lofa County.

According to our monitor who interviewed one of the victims, Mary Sumo said that they are going through constant harassment by the Guinea security, she further said that the life in the County, especially Yela Town is becoming unbearable because of the reduce farming activities due to the insecurity.

She also told our monitor that the citizens in the area are continuously under threat and intimidation by the Guinea security accusing them that Liberian mercenaries were infiltrating the border region to start a military insurgency inside Guinea. When our monitor contacted the UNMIL peacekeeper assigned in the area concerning the incident, they denied the allegation that Liberians are not planning any military insurgency and assured the Guinea authority that nothing will happen as long as they are in control of the border. As a result of the UNMIL peacekeeper intervention the harassment in the area is relatively under control.

On Thursday, August 5, 2004, at about 9:30 am. a girl identified as Mamie Zimbay, 18 yrs. was killed by Snake Society headed by Samuel Krenekon, in Nimba County.

According to our monitor who visited the area just recently, said the 18 yrs, old girl was killed as a result of the "Snake society" whom membership is said to principally include youngsters of ex-combatants, now transformed their rebellious attitude of using the negative aspect of the Snake Society to destroy others.

According to our monitor because of the new wave of sins against innocent people, citizens are fleeing the County to save their lives. The society was than headed by one Samuel Menekon from Nimba County, he is a powerful man in terms of generating and casting evil aimed at taking away human life. Some former government officials in the County were also part of the snake society.

As a result, members of the society have been arrested and detained at the Ganta Police Station awaiting court trial.

On Sunday, July 25, 2004, at about 5:45 pm. a girl identified as Lorpu Wolobah, 13 yrs. was abducted by some unknown criminals, believed to be Ex-GOL Militia men. This incident occurred in Red Light, Paynesville.

According to our Monitor who interviewed the victim's mother, Noah Wolobah, when she came to Paynesville to make sure of her daughter's arrival, said her daughter left her on that fateful day to spend time with her father. Unfortunately, when she arrival in the area, she was told that her daughter was not seen at her father's place.

The parent of little Lorpu, are in continual search of her, but to no avail. When they reported the incident to the Zone five (5) Police Station in Red Light the Duty Commander told them that the police would look into the matter. Since than, the little girl had not yet found.

On Thursday August 12, 2004 at about 10:30 am, a girl identified as Christiana Saytue, 17 yrs, an 8th grade student of the 1st A.G.M High school on Buchanan Street, Monrovia, was abducted by some unknown criminals believed to be former combatants. This incident occurred in Bardnersville, Monrovia.

According to the victim's mother, Josephine Saytue, who spoke to our monitor, said Christiana told her that she was going to attend her friend, Marie Johnson's graduation program in Barnersville, who graduated from the Jimmy Jolocon High School, opposite the Super Market in Gardnersville.

She further said since the graduation her daughter Christiana could not return home. When the family members of Christiana reported the complaint to Zone 5 (five) police station concerning the incident, the police Commander Major Paul Goweh told the family that the CID division would investigate into the incident. Based upon the CID investigation, two suspects (Myer Suo and Jerry Jlay) were arrested and detained at the police station for further investigation.

On Saturday August 21, 2004, at about 9:30 pm. a little girl identified as Beatrice Nyantee, 7 yrs. disappeared.

According to our Monitor, who interviewed her mother, Helena Nyantee, said her daughter Beatrice told her that, she was going to her friend's house to watch television as usual. Her mother further said, after few moments when she went to get her daughter so that they could go home, surprisingly upon arriving at Beatrice friend's house, when asked for her daughter, in reply her daughter's friend, Mamie Johnson told her that, Beatrice did not go to her house on the particular Saturday evening. As a result of the incident, Beatrice Nyantee's where about is still unknown.

On Sunday August 29, 2004, at about 9:45 am. a girl identified as Julie Sando, 27 yrs. right eye was plucked by Nathan Snehwein, her ex-fiancee as result of quarrel for child support. This incident occurred at capitol bye pass, Monrovia.

According to our monitor who spoke to the victim's uncle, Mr. James Goffa, said besides plucking the eye, the perpetrator stabbed Julie twice in the abdomen before leaving the scene



to avoid him being arrested. He further said, he and some other family members saw Nathan going in the room to Julie while they were sitting outside, it was at that time they saw Julie running out of the house crying for help while she was completely naked.

The victim, Julie Sando was later taken to the JFK Memorial hospital where she is presently undergoing medical treatment. The police have launched a search for Nathan Snehwein in connection with the stabbing of Julie Sando.

On Friday, July 23, 2004, at about 11:15 am. a girl identified as Josephine Forkpa, 13 yrs. was raped by her father Joseph Forkpa. This incident occurred in Barnersville, Monrovia.

According to our monitor who interviewed the landlord, Morris Jones, said Joseph Frokpa forced the victim into sex and threatened to kill her if she reveals to anyone what has happened. He further said, he caught the perpetrator upon hearing the victim crying bitterly. As a result Mr. Forkpa was arrested and detained by Col. Abraham Massaley at the Liberia National Police Headquarters awaiting court trial. The victim is at the George Weah Clinic at Bardnersville, undergoing medical treatment.

On Thursday, July 29, 2004 at about 6:45 pm. some Orphanage children under the ages 5-17 about (6) six in number were trafficked by Mother Hannah B. Williams. The incident occurred on 24th Street Sinkor, Monrovia.

According to our Monitor who contacted one of the neighbors in the area, revealed that mother Hannah Williams is the sole proprietress of the Orphanage Home where she accommodates the children.

The neighbor further said Mother William is in the constant habit of leading these innocent victims into seeking a brighter future for them in the western world. She is under the disguise of adopting them for parents in the western world. When our monitor contacted Mother William concerning about the incident she told our monitor that she would not comment to any body but would take legal action against whosoever that will tarnish her character.

As a result of the incident, the Orphanage children are leaving the perpetrator residence to unknown places to avoid trafficking.

On Saturday, August 14, 2004 at about 12:00 pm. a girl identified as Cecelia Jackson, 17 yrs. was neglected by her biological father, Andrew Jackson, along a riverbank in Bassa Town, New Georgia, Gardnersville, Monrovia.

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According to our Monitor, who interviewed Mrs. Etmonia Sompon, a resident of New Georgia, said at Saturday night, while in door, she heard a wheelbarrow sound near her house driven towards the banks of the river. Mrs. Sompon further said in the early morning hours of Sunday, she heard a loud cry at the riverside, when she rushed there as to what happened, to her surprise she saw a girl who was later identified as Cecelia Jackson in the grass crying in severe pains and agony. She immediately informed authorities of the Zone four (4) police depot in that area. When the police was contacted by the lady Mr. Andrew Jackson was arrested and detained at the police cell for further investigation, while little girl, Cecelia Jackson was at the local clinic undergoing medical treatment.

On Wednesday, August 19, 2004 at about 11:00 pm. a little girl identified as Fatu Davis, 13 yrs. was raped by a 28 years old man identified as Prince Toe, in Paynesville City, Monrovia.

According to our monitor, who contacted her mother, Patricia Davies, said this happened during her elder daughter's graduation party, while little Fatu was asleep alone in her room. She further said she caught Prince Toe having sexual relationship with her daughter at the time she went in her room to get some drinks/food for the invitees. As she began to call or attract people attention, the perpetrator, Prince Toe forced his way out leaving the little girl bleeding.

As a result of the incident, the victim Fatu Davis was rushed to the John F. Kennedy Medical Hospital for treatment, while the perpetrator Prince Toe is on the run. Later, doctor report said that little Fatu would no longer give birth due to the rape that weakened her vagina/womb.