

**Refugee Review Tribunal  
AUSTRALIA**

**RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE**

**Research Response Number:** LBR31837  
**Country:** Liberia  
**Date:** 12 June 2007

Keywords: Liberia – Secret societies – Neegee Society – Leopard Society – State protection – Monrovia – Rural areas – Returnees

This response was prepared by the Country Research Section of the Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT) after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RRT within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

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**Questions**

- 1. What evidence is there of the existence of the Neegee Society?**
- 2. Does the Society operate in particular provinces of Liberia and if so which ones?**
- 3. Is there any information about the purposes or practices of the Society?**
- 4. How are members of the Society recruited?**
- 5. Is there any information on leadership of the Society? Is there a group of elders (Zoes) and if so how are elders selected?**
- 6. Is there any documented evidence or research on recruitment and succession practices of any other secret societies in Liberia?**
- 7. What is the attitude of state authorities towards secret societies such as the Neegee Society? Are people found to be members of such a society punished in any way?**
- 8. How strong is the rule of law throughout Liberia currently?**
- 9. Are state agencies able to protect people in rural areas?**
- 10. Are refugees and others who fled Liberia or were internally displaced during the war able to return to their homes and reclaim property?**
- 11. Would a person with no family be able to survive independently in Monrovia today?**

**RESPONSE**

**1. What evidence is there of the existence of the Neegee Society?**

The Neegee Society appears to be one of a number of Liberian ‘secret societies’. Many different secret societies have been extant in a number of West African countries for centuries and of these the Poro and Sande Secret Societies have been the subject of the most substantial ethnographic and anthropological investigation.

After independence, however, many nations declared [secret societies] illegal. In other countries, secret societies continue to flourish and often function as a major and legitimate force in local-level politics. Many of these groups cut across ethnic, language, and national boundaries. The Poro is geographically the largest such association in West Africa. It is practiced in Sierra Leone, Liberia, the Ivory Coast,

and (today, illegally) Guinea. (Bellman, B. L. 1984, *The Language of Secrecy. Symbols and Metaphors in Poro Ritual*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, p. 13 – Attachment 1)

These secret societies perform a number of social, religious and educational functions, many of which are associated with *rites de passage* as children are prepared for adulthood.

The most prevalent system in Liberia is that of Poro (for men) and Sande (for women). Many of the classic ethnographies written on Liberia associate these two societies with specific ethnic groups only. Certainly, they are traditionally present in western and northern Liberia and in adjoining areas of Sierra Leone and Guinea, but not in the south-east of Liberia... Initiation societies are typically sodalities or groups that require elaborate initiation rites whose details may not be divulged to outsiders, which is why they are sometimes called 'secret societies'... In pre-colonial times...every person, male or female, was in principle initiated into the appropriate school at puberty. A non-initiate was simply not considered as a mature person, whatever their age. Initiation took place during a long period of seclusion, sometimes as long as seven years, when an adolescent was removed from his or her home and secluded in ritual village in the bush to learn the business of being an adult...For men, the education they received during their initiation including learning hunting and house-building skills, history and ritual knowledge. For women it included knowledge of child-rearing. (Ellis, S. 2003, 'Young Soldiers and the Significance of Initiation: Some Notes from Liberia', unpublished paper, African Studies Centre, University of Leiden, pp. 2-3 [www.asc.leidenuniv.nl/pdf/conference24042003-ellis.pdf](http://www.asc.leidenuniv.nl/pdf/conference24042003-ellis.pdf) - Attachment 2)

Traditional indigenous beliefs held by many of the population, despite the influence of Christianity and Islam, underpin the existence of these societies and, at least in part, the extent of their influence today.

Beliefs in spirits has always been fundamental to Liberian life, worldview and religious beliefs. Traditional religionists ... believe in the existence of a variety of spirits: ancestral spirits, various water and bush spirits, genies, spirits of the associations, and specific Poro spirits. Ancestral spirits are believed to protect and play mediatory roles in the affairs of their offspring and in their offspring's dealings with the spirit world, and generally maintain an interest in their well-being. Bush and water spirits and genies are believed to possess humans and to be capable of transferring specialized knowledge or power to them...These spirits are also believed to govern the mysterious world that exists outside of human control. Spirits (or totems) of the associations govern the affairs of the snake and leopard societies, which often act as the agents of the Poro...The spirit world of benign and malevolent spirits and ancestors is usually represented by masquerades in which participants wear wooden masks. Though the man behind the mask is a mere mortal, the wooden mask shields his identity from the human gaze, and the ancestral spirit or any spiritual force that comes upon him is believed to take him beyond the level of non-initiates. In that case, it makes sense to keep secrets and mask intentions in a society living in awe of the unseen, supernatural world...[I]t is commonly held that the unseen gods and spirits represent the ultimate source of power, and humans have to arrange how to communicate with or appease such spiritual forces. (Olukoju, A. 2006, *Culture and Customs of Liberia*, Greenwood Press, Westport, p. 24 – Attachment 3)

Groups such as the Poro and Sande were accepted by twentieth century state authorities as legitimately performing both cultural and educational roles such that these were eventually formally acknowledged and institutionalised:

The Poro for boys and Sande for girls were the most important traditional associations in Liberia, and were encouraged to operate in rural areas by the government. President Tubman [1944-1971] even placed the Poro society under the Ministry of Local Government...As the ministry of culture put it, 'all boys and girls of our country should pass through the traditional schools in order to benefit from the norms and disciplines of our ancestors.' Tubman himself became the Grand Zo of the Poro throughout Liberia. The government sponsored the first 'national' Poro organization by designing a superior Zo (priest) who demanded loyalty from all Poro lodges. Tubman became nominal head of all Poro societies, and sought and received initiation into the society. (Saha, S.C. 1998, *Culture in Liberia*, Edwin Mellen Press, Lewiston, New York, 1998, p. 111 – Attachment 4)

One anthropologist who undertook fieldwork in Liberia in the late 1950s while noting the special importance and protection given to these societies also commented that membership of Poro and Sande, even in rural areas, was not universal.

Poro and Sande form a vital and integral part in the social and political structure of all the tribes which have them – which means all the Liberian tribes except the Kru: the Bassa are said to have taken them over recently, from among the Bassa in Monrovia...Initiation into Poro involved a symbolic swallowing of the boy by the masked 'devil' or Poro spirit, circumcision, and eventual rebirth as an adult. Once initiated, he might pass through a hierarchical series of 'lodges' each of which had its secrets from those of lower ranks, or he might remain an ordinary member. (Fraenkel, M. 1964, *Tribe and Class in Monrovia*, Oxford University Press, London, p. 172, 173 – Attachment 5).

However, the practice of totemism in traditional Liberian secret societies involved special powers being attributed to particular animals, such as the panther, snake, crocodile or leopard. It is in connection with these groups that reports of the practice of ritual killings and human sacrifice are most closely associated in countries constituting present-day Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia. One recent historian writes:

Reports of the consumption of human flesh and human sacrifice in pre-republican times are most often associated with exclusive secret societies. These were exclusive groups of people who were believed to be liable to possession by the spirits of carnivorous animals such as leopards and crocodiles, and who carried out ritual killings while in a state of possession. During the course of the twentieth century, the Liberian government outlawed these societies, but some of the nevertheless continued to function clandestinely...During the mid-twentieth century there were also increasing numbers of reports of the existence of various other occult groups, often said to include national politicians, who were said to partake of human flesh and to practice human sacrifice... (Ellis, S. 1999, *The Mask of Anarchy. The Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimension of an African Civil War*, New York University Press, New York, p. 222 – Attachment 6)

Beryl Bellman, who was able to join a number of secret societies during his research on Poro, also believes that illegal secret societies continue to exist in Liberia, observed, albeit before the civil war which began in 1989 that

There are various reports of associations that practice such acts as human sacrifice for the preparation of medicines. The government has campaigned to stop these groups and has recently prosecuted several of their practitioners. Although the government treats the illegal societies differently, they share many features with the legal secret societies: internal social organizations as well as members' beliefs about how medicines (sale) and sacrifices (sala) work through a power (kai) that is in the control of the respective Zo leaders. The legal societies do recognize the potency of the illegal medicines made from human parts...but rather than prepare those medicines from human parts, they use animal sacrifices...Today the legal societies recognize the authority of the government and the laws against performing these rituals. (Bellman, B. L. 1984, *The Language of Secrecy. Symbols and Metaphors in Poro Ritual*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, p. 47 – Attachment 1)

During the 1980s and in later years, reports of ritual killings were reported, although there is only speculation that these were associated with the Neegee Society:

[I]n 1985 for example, six people...were sentenced to death for a ritual killing in Maryland. In the three subsequent years, at least twelve people were hanged after conviction, and thirty-five presumed victims of ritual killings were identified, also in Maryland...There were regular reports of similar court cases involving less senior figures [of government] such as four members of an independent church arrested in 1988 on suspicion of 'killing, cooking and eating a child'. Although most reports do not imply that such groups were traditional secret societies, one article does suggest that the Neegee 'a secret society that is linked with deals in human parts and human sacrifice for the achievement of various mundane activities' was still in existence despite being illegal since 1912. (Ellis, S. 1999, *The Mask of Anarchy. The Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimension of an African Civil War*, New York University Press, New York, p. 255 – Attachment 6)

Ellis also suggests that both the influence of Christianity as well as the adaptation of esoteric practices by government figures in more recent decades is significant:

[I]n the pattern of human sacrifice which may be discerned after the 1940s...that members of such cults do not appear to have sacrificed their own kin, which was traditionally thought to be the most effective of all forms of sacrifice, but simply to have paid heartmen for victims. Human sacrifice, in other words, had become fully subject to market principles. (Ellis, S. 1999, *The Mask of Anarchy. The Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimension of an African Civil War*, New York University Press, New York, p. 256 – Attachment 6)

## **2. Does the Society operate in particular provinces of Liberia and if so which ones?**

Evidence of localised activity of the Neegee Society is not extensive. In its most recent international religious freedom report on Liberia, the US State Department notes that

Ritual killings, in which killers remove body parts from their victims for use in traditional rituals, reportedly occurred during the reporting period. There was little reliable information available about traditional religions associated with ritual killings, and the number of such killings was difficult to ascertain. Many believe that practitioners of traditional indigenous religions among the Grebo and Krahn, who are

concentrated in the southeast, engage in ritual killings. Body parts of a person believed to be powerful are considered the most effective for ritual purposes. In some cases, the rituals reportedly involve eating body parts to gain special powers. Fighters on all sides of the civil war reportedly engaged in such practices. Most reports of ritual killings came from Southeastern counties. (US Department of State, 2006, *International Religious Freedom Report – Liberia*, September, Section III – Attachment 7)

However, in August 2006, there were local reports that 21 people had been held by local Zoes in River Cess County who were alleged to have been involved with a local human leopard society.

Speaking to a local radio station via mobile phone in Monrovia, the Superintendent on the County, Francis Page said the 21 citizens who are currently in the confine of the Zoes are still in animal (leopards) form, a situation which he said is above his jurisdiction, took place a week ago...Rivercess County is noted for its 'Neegee Society' a society which operates under water, and usually take away the lives of people whenever they are around major rivers or creek in their county for ritual and other demonic sacrificial purposes. (Brooks, J.C. 2006, 'Liberia: 21 Persons Turn Into Animals in Rural Liberia, Residents in Fear', *Liberian Times*, 25 August – Attachment 8)

It was later reported that these individuals had been released (Yates, C. B., 2006 'In Rivercess County – Zoes Held 21 In Custody', *The Inquirer*, 18 October – Attachment 9)

In a United Nations report on human rights in Liberia for the period August – October 2006, reports of trial by ordeal were noted and in the “absence of adequately functioning and accessible criminal and civil courts [such trials] filled a regulatory vacuum in the community and became a tool for financial or political gain. The practice perpetuates fear of witchcraft and suspicion in communities that lack education facilities, health care and development”. The report also commented on the River Cess County abduction:

In August, 21 people were allegedly abducted by Zoes and Bodios of River Cess County in order to use traditional means, thought to be trial by ordeal by sassywood, to investigate the disappearance of a 52 year old man allegedly orchestrated by members of the illegal Leopard Society. One man later escaped but his whereabouts were unknown by the end of October. The River Cess County Attorney made a number of recommendations to the County Superintendent as to how the fundamental rights of the 21 people should be protected but no reply was received from the County administration. It was later reported that the 20 remaining abductees were released in October, but this had not been confirmed by the end of October due to the very poor conditions of the roads in that area, preventing further monitoring. (United Nations Mission in Liberia 2007, 'Quarterly Report on the Human Rights Situation in Liberia August-October 2006', *Human Rights and Protection Section*, February, p. 43 – Attachment 10)

In March 2006 a Liberian newspaper reported occurrences of ritual killings in both Nimba and Maryland counties, although these were not linked to any particular society:

Three hours after the President departed from Harper, Madam Comfort Annan was out searching for her 3-year-old grand son Blessing Emmanuel in Nekanbo. Madam Annan said she last saw him alive playing with his friends in the neighborhood. The incident was reported to the Police, and the Commander Major Lyndon and his able staff mounted a search operation, only to discover the dead body of little Emmanuel on Sunday, February 26 with the lips, a piece of flesh on the thigh and a piece of the left ear extracted. A United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) Forensic Pathologist Mr. Servillano Ritualo conducted an autopsy on the body on March 2 but refused to release the autopsy report to the Press. A reliable source from the United Nations, who prefers anonymity, disclosed to the press that the autopsy report confirms that the child was murdered. Residents of Maryland are demanding justice and are looking up to President Sirleaf as they consider the murder of Blessing Emmanuel a challenge to her Government. (Nyeka, M.S. 2006 'Ritualistic Killers In Maryland Defy Pres. – 3-Year-Old Boy Killed', *Analyst Newspaper*, March 11 – Attachment 11)

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Dr Werner Junge described incidents of actual or attempted ritual murders by the Crocodile Society and the Leopard Society in Cape Mount, purported to have been brought from the southern county Bassaland (or Bassa County)

The Americo-Liberian representative of the government in Cape Mount – though he claimed to have stamped out the Leopard Society in Bassaland – was unable to unmask the perpetrators. Therefore, Junge directly sent his reports to the Minister of Interior in Monrovia. He was told, however, that further reports, or any interference on his part, were not desired 'in the interest of my own safety'...Desperately, the local population asked for help of paramount chiefs of more distant territories. In the end it was only after the intervention of one of them, a Gola chief, that the perpetrators were caught. Among those arrested was the head of a mission school, an old missionary who originated from Bassaland. "It was he who had brought this ancient and blood-thirsty religious order of the leopards from his native Bassaland, south of Monrovia, and revived it in Cape Mount, where this kind of human sacrifice had for long been extinct. For it was a case of ritual murder, (...)" (Junge, [*African Jungle Doctor: Ten Years in Liberia*]1952: p. 185).

...

Another source reports activities of 'leopard men' in Bassaland – during the early years of the Tubman Administration (1944-71). Again it is a foreign missionary who describes what happened in 1946-47. Abe Guenter spent some 35 years in Liberia, from 1945 till 1980, and was a missionary for the First Baptist Church. He mainly worked in the Suakoko area, in Central Liberia ('Bassaland'). Since he was a pilot and had a plane, he flew nearly all over the country. Thus, Abe Guenter also preached in what he called 'Krahn country', in eastern Liberia, and on the coast between Buchanan, Grand Bassa County, and Greenville, Sinoe County. He had encounters with the Devil Society, Alligator Society, and many more.

(Liberia Past and Present website –

[http://www.liberiapastandpresent.org/RitualKillings1900\\_1950b.htm](http://www.liberiapastandpresent.org/RitualKillings1900_1950b.htm)- Accessed 24 May 2007 – Attachment 12)

A missionary account incorporating a description of a Leopard Society-related incident in a town in Lofa County was also located:

Both Liberia and Sierra Leone have the death penalty for anyone who can be proved to belong to this ghastly fraternity. But even so, from time to time there are recurrences of the crime. Not more than a year ago (in '56) a lad was set upon and

slain within a very few miles of Bolahun, and his mangled remains tossed into a nearby creek. The government always meets with great difficulty in getting witnesses to testify in these cases, for no man is certain whether the leopards will retaliate by catching him next. Convictions in consequence are difficult to obtain. (Campbell, R. 1957, *Within the Green Wall. The Story of Holy Cross Liberia Mission 1922-1957* online at [http://anglicanhistory.org/africa/lb/campbell\\_green1957/21.html](http://anglicanhistory.org/africa/lb/campbell_green1957/21.html) – Accessed 7 June 2007 – Attachment 13)

American anthropologist George Schwab gives a general description of the water leopard and crocodile societies:

In Sapa a society called niya tchia (water leopard), taken over from the Bassa, has motives much like those of the Leopard Society...According to a Liberian official who had helped in ridding the Bassa country of a number of this association's lodges these people, sometimes known as 'tigah people', secrete themselves at favorable places along the water courses until their chosen victims are seen in a canoe. They then hastily stop their ears with some substance, pull a large gourd over their heads to the chin, and go under water long enough to steal upon the canoes and capsize them. They then cut the throats of their victims or stab them to death. In sections where there are no water courses suitable for canoes these 'water leopards' watch near places where people come to get water or to bathe, and kill them there. As in the Leopard Society, part of those killed are eaten and parts are retained for medicine. (Schwab, G. [1947] 1968, *Tribes of the Liberian Hinterland. Ed. with additional material by G. W. Harley. Report of the Peabody Museum to Liberia*, Kraus Reprint Corporation, New York, 1968, p. 299 – Attachment 19)

In a further 2006 incident, the disappearance of two people in Grand Bassa County was reported by local people to be associated with Neegee activity in the area

Two persons have reportedly been missing mysteriously in Grand Bassa County. Joe Mandeh, 80, a herbalist, reportedly got missing obscurely...According [to] a nephew of Mandeh, his uncle left the town on October 10, 2006, at noon and went into the bush to fetch some herbs and has not been found since...The second, a 32-year old man identified as Opa Dee got missing, in Kpelleh Town [after he] left his own on October 14, 2006 to fish in the St John River...Commissioner James explained upon hearing the report of the missing man, he immediately dispatched men in the area and they launched an intensive search, but to no avail. He further narrated the people in the area have linked the mysterious disappearance to what is referred to as "Neegee", water witchcraft activity. He disclosed that he has arrested several suspects for their alleged connection of the missing man and their alleged constant involvement in "neegee" activities in the township...The Superintendent of Neckren Statutory District, Josiah Jacobs has ordered the Justice of the Peace and the Township Commissioner to arrest all those previously linked to the "neegee" society who have been allegedly taking away the lives of other [sic]. (Public Agenda website 2006, 'Mysterious Disappearance in Bassa', November 1 [http://publicagenda.info/Mysterious\\_Disappearance\\_In%20Bassa.htm](http://publicagenda.info/Mysterious_Disappearance_In%20Bassa.htm) – Accessed 22 May 2007 – Attachment 14)

### **3. Is there any information about the purposes or practices of the Society?**

In addition to information provided earlier (see question 1 above), secret societies in general in Sierra Leone and Liberia have been seen as channels for and between the spirit world

In terms of their institutional personnel and apparatus of hereditary officials, masked spirits, rituals, etc. the secret societies are an embodiment of and a means of canalizing supernatural power. Collectively, they provide an institutional structure which bears certain similarities to the medieval church in Europe [and can]...prescribe certain forms of behaviour, and are the sole agency capable of remitting certain sins...[Within the secular life, they can be grouped under four main headings...]

- A. General education, in the sense of social and vocational training and indoctrination of social attitudes.
- B. Regulation of sexual conduct.
- C. Supervision of political and economic affairs.
- D. Operation of various social services, ranging from medical treatment to forms of entertainment and recreation.

(Little, K. L., 1949, 'The Role of the Secret Society in Cultural Specialization' in Ottenberg, S. & P. (eds), *Cultures and Societies of Africa*, Random House, New York, 1961, p. 200 – Attachment 15)

One scholar understands the traditional secret societies to have served a function in West African village life in mediating lineage disputes although his summary of their principal patterns is similar to others (such as Little):

The majority of West African secret societies can be looked at as variants of a broad institutional pattern which is recognizable throughout the area. This pattern has four major elements:

- a) Admission to the society is open to adult or adolescent males irrespective of lineage.
- b) Admission is by payment of fees and/or an initiation ritual in which the candidate is both tested for certain skills and dramatically separated from his previous social partners. Often, separation involves not only a cutting-off of ties with family and lineage, but also a forging of new ties with the guardian spirit of the society.
- c) The society is typically a judicial body, deciding the more intractable intra-village disputes. But it may also have policy-making functions. Its deliberations in this sphere are kept strictly secret from the public.

Execution of the society's decisions is typically by junior members whose identity is concealed by masks. (Horton, R., 1985, 'Stateless Societies in the History of West Africa', in Ajayi J. F. A. & Crowder, M. *History of West Africa*, Volume 1, Longman, New York, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, pp. 110, 111 – Attachment 16)

Another commentator focuses more exclusively on the 'magical' dimensions and interests of these societies:

The manifest purpose of these societies is to produce a medicine that is supposed to give its owner economic and political power. The potency of that medicine depends upon its being frequently anointed with human fat and blood, which are obtained by killing a person, frequently a relative of one of the members...The latent function of the leopard society is social integration on an interkin group or even intertribal level level, the deviant acts of murder and anthropophagy representing most powerful ties binding the participants together. (Seibel, H.D., 1972 'Social Deviance in Comparative Perspective' in Scott, R. A. & Douglas, J.D. (eds) *Theoretical Perspectives on Deviance*, Basic Books, London, [p. 3] – Attachment 17)



The Human Leopard Society is probably the most well-known of an organisation of this type, particularly following the investigation by a British Colonial Commission of Inquiry in Sierra Leone whose report was published in 1915. This inquiry found that societies it investigated comprised

“men of mature age, past their prime”, who met in secret conclave and regularly killed human victims in a form of sacrifice. They then ate the flesh of their victims, with a view to “increasing their virile powers”. This act of eating bound them together and was in keeping with their identity as leopards. In any event, “the prime object of the Human Leopard Society was to secure human fat wherewith to anoint the Borfima”, the name of a cult object kept by each such society. Another colonial account from Sierra Leone, from 1901, similarly reported that members of a leopard society had to kill a relative to obtain human fat to ‘feed’ their cult object. (Ellis, S. 1999, *The Mask of Anarchy. The Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimension of an African Civil War*, New York University Press, New York, p. 234 – Attachment 6).

#### **4. How are members of the Society recruited?**

#### **5. Is there any information on leadership of the Society? Is there a group of elders (Zoes) and if so how are elders selected?**

It has been argued that

[T]here is little or no evidence for a grand council of Poro...but some evidence that Poro and Sande protected a kind of class privilege. Secret society elders (Zoes) assumed hereditary office, ranked lineages were prominently represented in the councils of elders, and ex-slaves were initiated only in the less prestigious lodges. (World Bank Social Development Department 2005, ‘Community Cohesion in Liberia – A Post-War Rapid Social Assessment’, *World Bank Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction Unit*, January, p. 66 – Attachment 18)

Similarly,

Only the Zo of the Poro are able to make their societal medicines work for the benefit of the community. To be a Poro Zo one must come from the Zo patrilineage and must usually be the eldest son of a member of the Zo hierarchy. Although a Zo usually chooses one of his own children to take his place, his selection is made on the basis of the child’s interest and ability to work with medicines. The Sande, or women’s medicines are transmitted in a similar manner except that the line is passed from other to daughter instead of from father to son. (Bellman, B. L. 1984, *The Language of Secrecy. Symbols and Metaphors in Poro Ritual*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, p. 49 – Attachment 1).

In one account, members of Leopard and Crocodile societies were elite societies which required “the sacrifice of a member of one’s own domestic group in a cannibalistic feast...but where an elite society such as a leopard society existed in a Poro area, it is not clear exactly what was the relationship of this elite group to the Poro. There is agreement among all sources that the Poro lodges have always included a number of higher degrees or more specialised societies from which ordinary members are excluded” (Ellis, S. 1999, *The Mask of Anarchy. The Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimension of an African Civil War*, New York University Press, New York, pp 236, 237 – Attachment 6).

In an earlier account it was stated that

A Zo of medicine is a man who knows how to make the best medicine for the field in which he specializes. That may be treatment of a snake bite, in which case he will be known as a zo of the Snake Society. It may be that he is skilled with the knife; he will then be called a zo of the Poro. He may be supposed to know how to control lightning. He may specialize in bone-setting. If a zo is at the same time a big chief, it may be public knowledge that he knows the art of poisoning. In fact, any big zo is supposed to know about poisons and witchcraft. Otherwise, how could he dare to catch a witch or defend himself against poisoners? (Schwab, G. [1947] 1968, *Tribes of the Liberian Hinterland*. Ed. with additional material by G. W. Harley. Report of the Peabody Museum to Liberia, Kraus Reprint Corporation, New York, 1968, p. 299 – Attachment 19)

Similarly, Bellman describes in detail the elaborate ritual processes and practices, particularly associated with Poro initiation, including practices which disconnect initiates from their families, and that usually involve scarification:

The initiate's fathers' or other sponsors in the society present them with wooden swords, usually dipped in chicken blood. They are told to kill the ngamu [devil] with the swords and are asked which part of the devil they will carry back to town. They are then led throughout the community to visit the homes of various male relatives, who present them with head ties, which are put on them. That night they sleep in a specially chosen house for initiates are given a hot meal and a bath the next morning...Just before entering the village, the boys are taken to a stream, where they are scarred on their necks, chests, and backs. These scars are considered the teeth marks of the devil.

Children of Zo are treated differently:

The Zo...have their own medicines, The Poro provides the relevant men [order of reality] as a meaning context for them to put their respective medicines together for the general benefit of the larger community. To be a member of Poro does not make one privy to those medicines. The children of the Zo must learn them from their fathers independent of the instruction that the other members receive when they enter the society. Although they interact with the other initiates in most activities inside the initiation community, the children of the Zo undertake their different instruction, make separate sacrifices, and when any poultry is served, eat separately...Thus the Zo always distinguish themselves from the membership. (Bellman, B. L. 1984, *The Language of Secrecy. Symbols and Metaphors in Poro Ritual*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, p. 80, 105 -Attachment 1).

## **6. Is there any documented evidence or research on recruitment and succession practices of any other secret societies in Liberia?**

It has not been possible to locate information on how outlawed secret societies recruit members currently.

## **7. What is the attitude of state authorities towards secret societies such as the Neegee Society? Are people found to be members of such a society punished in any way?**

The first reported legislation against the leopard society was enacted at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and there were subsequent laws proscribing such societies:

In 1912 the government banned by law the leopard society and many similar societies and instituted draconian punishments for members...A later administrative code, which consolidated a number of regulations and laws dealing with hinterland affairs, specified that illegal societies included the human leopard society, the Neegee, Susha, Toya, Kela, Uama-yama societies, and 'all secret societies of a political nature'. Membership of such societies was punishable by twenty years' imprisonment. (Ellis, S. 1999, *The Mask of Anarchy. The Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimension of an African Civil War*, New York University Press, New York, p. 240–Attachment 6)

Through subsequent decades of the century, the republican government acted to eliminate these societies which were seen by some observers to have ceased to function as other than brutal mechanisms masking self-interest rather than serving any broader social good:

An individual prepared to use fully the considerable powers at the disposition of a paramount chief might find that membership of a secret society added substantially to the range of coercive instruments available, due to the ability of societies to commit killings without recourse to any judicial organ. In such cases, a secret society came to represent less a council of local elders than the entourage of a local despot...[T]he powers wielded by the zoes of the Poro, and even more so by elite societies given to human sacrifice, were held to be exercised properly when they were used on behalf of an entire community...That the traditional secret societies survived in many areas, albeit with a notably different character, was partly because their very secrecy made them so difficult to suppress. (Ellis, S. 1999, *The Mask of Anarchy. The Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimension of an African Civil War*, New York University Press, New York, p. 239, 240 – Attachment 6)

During the rule of President Edwin Barclay (1930-1944) severe measures were taken against secret societies involved with sacrificial killings

Barclay organized military expeditions in which dozens of human leopards were killed, such as that commanded by Colonel Elwood Davis, an African-American officer commissioned in the Liberian army. The English writer Graham Greene, traveling in Liberia in the mid-1930s, recorded a meeting [in *Journey Without Maps*] with him in which Davis claimed to have 'court' martialled and shot fifty members of the Leopard Society in a village near Grand Bassa' (Ellis, S. 1999, *The Mask of Anarchy. The Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimension of an African Civil War*, New York University Press, New York, p. 241 – Attachment 6)

By the end of the 1940s,

Those secret societies most closely associated with human sacrifice, like the Neegee or water-leopards, the alligators and the human leopards, remained banned by law, even if...government officials of the executive and judiciary became increasingly tolerant of them or even complicit in their activities. The Poro and Sande societies,

on the other hand, by this time were not only exempt from the interdiction on secret societies but were actively encouraged by government which saw in them a useful institution of social control. (Ellis, S. 1999, *The Mask of Anarchy. The Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimension of an African Civil War*, New York University Press, New York, p. 243 – Attachment 6)

Given continuing reports of ritualistic murders early in 2006 (see for example Daygbor, J. 2006 “Ritualistic Activities Surface in Nimba”, *The Analyst Newspaper*, [www.analystliberia.com](http://www.analystliberia.com), 9 March — Accessed 1 June 2007 – Attachment 39) in a speech in Maryland County early in 2006, Liberian President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf told those involved in ritualistic killings to stop and not to underestimate her because she is a woman,

On February 25, President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf visited Harper City, Maryland County to extend gratitude to the people for voting her to the Presidency. The President’s address to the Marylanders at the Harper City Hall is been considered by the people as one of the best speeches ever heard in about 20 years. She spoke on the rehabilitation of the Harper-Zwedru Highway. She said, “I know what the road is like because during the campaign period I was on that road with my rain boots.” She also promised about the rehabilitation of the W.V.S. Technical College. The Iron Lady clamped down on the ritualistic killers to stop because she said God himself said in the Bible that “Thou shall not kill.” “Don’t try me; don’t try my government because you think that I am a woman,” the President said, a statement that received more applaud [sic] from the audience. (Nyeka, M.S. 2006 ‘Ritualistic Killers In Maryland Defy Pres.- 3-Year-Old Boy Killed’, *Analyst Newspaper*, March 10 – Accessed 1 June 2007 – Attachment 11)

## **8. How strong is the rule of law throughout Liberia currently?**

On 19 September 2003 the United National Security Council passed Resolution 1509 establishing the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), which was responsible for supporting implementation of the ceasefire agreement of 18 August 2003. That agreement effectively ended the 14 year long civil war which had originally begun in 1989. Official UN numbers of personnel deployed in Liberia as at 30<sup>th</sup> April 2007 were 15,262 uniformed staff, including 13,854 troops and 206 military observers; 1,202 police; 527 international civilian personnel, 925 local staff and 246 UN Volunteers (UNMIL Facts and Figures n.d., UN website – Accessed 5 June 2007 – Attachment 20)

On 30<sup>th</sup> March 2007, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1750, extending the UNMIL mandate until 30<sup>th</sup> September 2007. In that resolution, the Security Council noted recent progress and developments in the country which included acknowledgement of the leadership role of the UNMIL Secretary-General Special Representative and

for the important role it continues to play in supporting peace and stability in Liberia, and welcoming the close cooperation between UNMIL and the United National Operation in Cote d’Ivoire (UNOCI), as well as with neighbouring Governments, in coordinating security activities in the border areas in the subregion, *Noting* with appreciation the substantial progress made in the reintegration of ex-combatants, and recognizing that further progress will depend on the availability of formal sector employment for ex-combatants,

*Welcoming* UNMIL's policy to promote and protect the rights of women and calling on Liberian authorities to continue their efforts to enhance cooperation with the United Nations country team and civil society, in order to aid in efforts to combat sexual exploitation and abuse,

*Recognizing* that significant challenges remain in the consolidation of Liberia's post-conflict transition, including massive development and reconstruction needs, the reform of the judiciary, extension of the rule of law throughout the country, the development of the Liberian security forces and security architecture, and consolidation of State authority,

Reiterating the continuing need for UNMIL's support for the security of the Special Court for Sierra Leone,

*Determining* that the situation in Liberia continues to constitute a threat to international peace and security in the region...(UN Security Council 2007, Resolution 1750 (2007), 30 March – Attachment 21).

The 14 year long civil war severely damaged Liberia's physical and social infrastructure. The country was estimated in 2005 to have about US\$3.5 billion external debt (whereas the government annual budget is less than US\$200m) and about 80% of the population have incomes below the poverty line. There are many NGOs providing basic and critical humanitarian assistance and the country has been the subject of many reports by UN, NGO and other specialist agencies in recent years.

The entire country has been affected by 14 years of intermittent conflict. Between five and ten per cent of the population of about 3 million has been killed. Over a million people have been displaced. Some have been forced to flee as many as five times. It is estimated that 80% of the country's housing stock has been damaged or destroyed in fighting. Sexual violence and atrocity have been widespread. Trauma and ruination, grief and loss, are faced by many. (World Bank Social Development Department 2005, 'Community Cohesion in Liberia – A Post-War Rapid Social Assessment', *World Bank Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction Unit*, January, p. 2 – Attachment 18)

In the immediate post-war period the following description from a 2006 report on human rights in Liberia typifies independent assessments of the rule of law in Liberia:

Since the last visit of the independent expert in April 2005, progress has been made in several sectors. Improvements in the security situation have enhanced freedom of movement and facilitated the conduct of national elections and a presidential run off in October and November 2005, respectively...

...

Despite progress...there remain many challenges particularly in the rule of law sector. Access to justice continued to be hampered by poor court management, bribery and corruption, including at the higher levels. Although circuit courts were officially reopened on 6 August 2005, many courts outside Monrovia remain barely functional in the absence of key personnel, including prosecutors and defence attorneys. Rape and sexual assault of women and children occur at a disturbingly high rate, with very little attention given by law enforcement authorities (UN Commission on Human Rights 2006, 'Situation of human rights in Liberia. Report of the independent expert on technical cooperation and advisory services in Liberia', 6 February, p. 2 – Attachment 22)

An early independent post-war assessment of the condition of the judicial system described the scope of the problems which faced the country (International Legal

Assistance Consortium 2003, “Assessment of the Liberian Judicial System”, [56pp] – Attachment 23) and further reports described interim progress (e.g. International Crisis Group 2006, ‘Liberia – Resurrecting the Justice System’, Brussels, 6 April – Attachment 24).

A subsequent UN report published early in 2007 continues to reflect the weak condition of the country’s legal framework and law enforcement:

Cases continued to be reported of possible excessive use of force by police officers and police custody beyond the 48 hour constitutional limit. Private security guards working on rubber plantations failed to observe the limits of their authority. Some instances of mob justice and vigilante action occurred as a worrying response to the incapacity of the police to protect the community from crime. There have been ongoing concerns regarding the inability of the judiciary to uphold human rights standards, constitutional guarantees and legal procedure...No progress was observed in the administration of juvenile justice. Cases involving juveniles were often not handled in accordance with the law, while juvenile delinquency measures could not be implemented due to the absence of suitable institutions.

...

On 4 September, the Minister of Justice issued a press statement acknowledging the “vulnerability of our national security” and the “Government’s constitutional obligation to defend and protect lives and property in the country”. The statement called on local communities to establish community watch teams but warned against mob justice.

...

At this stage of the peace-building process, the Liberian judiciary is not able to protect fundamental human rights. Corruption remains a serious challenge to the rule of law, while large numbers of detainees are held in pre-trial detention for lengthy periods without trial. (United Nations Mission in Liberia 2007, ‘Quarterly Report on the Human Rights Situation in Liberia August-October 2006’, *Human Rights and Protection Section*, February, p. 5, 28, 30 – Attachment 10)

By the time of the October 2005 elections, 1,800 Liberian National Police personnel had been trained; however, the US State Department’s 2006 country report further comments that the Liberian National Police (LNP)

...were slow to respond to criminal activities and often ineffective, which resulted in an increase in armed robberies during the year. Corruption and impunity were problems, and police officers were not paid for up to three months at a time. Police had limited logistics, communication and forensic capabilities and did not have the capacity to adequately investigate many crimes, including murders.

...

Although the law provides for the right of a person who is charged to receive an expeditious trial, lengthy pretrial and prearraignment detention remained serious problems. Approximately 90 percent of prisoners at Monrovia Central Prison were pretrial detainees. Trial delays were caused by judicial inefficiency, lack of court facilities and qualified judges, and corruption.

...

There were reports of executive branch influence over the judiciary. Judges regularly received bribes or other illegal gifts from damages that they awarded in civil cases. Judges sometimes requested bribes to try cases, release detainees from prison, or find defendants not guilty in criminal cases. By statute members of the bar must be graduates of a law school; however some judges and magistrates were not

lawyers...In September 2005 the Supreme Court ordered the closure of all noncommissioned justice-of-the-peace courts; however, some courts still operated during the year. No replacement courts were in place at year's end.

...

On May 2, the Supreme Court justice dismissed 34 magistrates for abandoning their posts. Some judges assigned throughout the country were unable to hold court due to lack of security, supplies, equipment, or a courthouse. International donors supported additional prosecutors and defenders, resulting in approximately 15 qualified prosecutors and 19 public defenders in the country. Uneven application of the law remained a problem throughout the judicial system. Traditional forms of justice administered by clan chieftans remained prevalent in some localities. (US Department of State 2007, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2006: Liberia*, 6 March, Section 1(e) – Attachment 25)

## **9. Are state agencies able to protect people in rural areas?**

All recent information indicates that there has been slow progress in recovering from the effects of the war and that state authority is weak in rural provinces. In a report from a UN Special Commissioner, law enforcement and the judicial system were described in the following way:

Courts at all levels, particularly outside Monrovia, do not operate in accordance with the law. Many courts are either not operational or face severe operational problems, or are staffed by unqualified and unsupervised personnel, with the consequence that suspects and victims alike are exposed to extortion and abuses. All the courts in Tubmanburg, namely the circuit, magistrate, traffic and revenue courts, are located in a decrepit building. All judicial personnel, including judges, magistrates, clerks and support staff are accommodated in the only two available rooms...[T]he only two tables in the courts were provided by the Office of the United National High Commissioner for Refugees, while the rental of the building was paid by UNMIL Legal and Judicial Support Services Division. Basic materials, such as the laws of Liberia, are not available, and owing to lack of accommodation, judges and attorneys are forced to commute from Monrovia. There were no Defence Counsels to assist litigants in court. They were reluctant to deploy to Bomi because their security was not guaranteed. (UN Commission on Human Rights 2006, 'Situation of human rights in Liberia. Report of the independent expert on technical cooperation and advisory services in Liberia', 6 February, p. 7 – Attachment 22)

Throughout Liberia, shortages of suitable detention facilities, continuing corruption and extensive delays in bringing matters to hearing continue to be reported. It is clear that some traditional justice systems continue to operate:

Three men suspected of practicing witchcraft in Pleebo District, Maryland County, were beaten by villagers in early October to force a confession. They were charged by LNP with poisoning through witchcraft but were taken to hospital for treatment of their injuries. The men were released from police custody because there was no vehicle to take them to Harper. Although the Pleebe Magistrate indicated that he would issue arrest warrants for the villagers suspected of attacking the three men, by the end of October no further action had been taken by the authorities to investigate and prosecute those responsible. So called "community police" are a voluntary body of residents, established in some areas ostensibly to support the work of the LNP (e.g. by supplying information on suspicious activities observed in the neighbourhood). They are not armed and they are not intended to carry out police duties. In River Gee

County, members of the “community police” were often appointed by District Commissioners, with little or no input from the LNP, and appeared to act as a private security force of the relevant Commissioner. The very small number of LNP officers in River Gee County, only three, made it even more difficult to control the activities of this group. (United Nations Mission in Liberia 2007, ‘Quarterly Report on the Human Rights Situation in Liberia August-October 2006’, *Human Rights and Protection Section*, February, p. 29 – Attachment 10)

In a later report, the UN Human Rights and Protection Section recorded some improvement in the government’s strengthening of the rule of law, including the outlawing of trial by ordeal. It was observed, however, the “human rights protection at the local level remained poor.” (United National Mission in Liberia 2007, ‘Quarterly Report on the Human Rights Situation in Liberia November 2006 – January 2007’, *Human Rights and Protection Section*, May , p. 29 – Attachment 26)

The 2007 Human Rights Watch world report also records the difficulties encountered by police, inadequate transport and resources and the presence of former combatants in police force (LNP) ranks.

Despite the deployment of UN peacekeepers and some 1,000 civilian police, violent crime increased including hijacking, armed robbery, and murder. This was indicative of weaknesses in the Liberian National Police, including very poor logistic and transport facilities and low deployment outside the capital. UN police increased patrols in high crime areas but, in a worrying development, the justice minister called on Liberians to form vigilante groups. Numerous individuals accused of common crimes were beaten to death by mobs.

Several violent demonstrations took place by demobilized personnel from the Armed Forces of Liberia, Anti-Terrorist Unit, and Special Security Service, demanding severance benefits.

The newly trained Liberian police continued to engage in unprofessional and sometimes criminal behavior including extortion, excessive use of force, and sexual harassment. Concerns remain regarding the vetting of past human rights abusers in a 2004-05 screening and selection exercise administered by UNMIL. Problems with the process included lack of clear criteria for the elimination of potential human rights abusers, failure to allocate adequate human resources to conduct thorough and systematic background checks on applicants, and inadequate involvement of Liberian human rights groups and the general population. (Human Rights Watch 2007, *World Report 2007: Liberia – Events of 2006* Attachment 27)

## **10. Are refugees and others who fled Liberia or were internally displaced during the war able to return to their homes and reclaim property?**

Estimates of the numbers of people who became refugees or were internally displaced during the civil war vary significantly, depending on the source. At the end of the war there were likely to have been at least 0.5 million, many having fled to Sierra Leone, Guinea, Ghana and Cote d’Ivoire in particular. Given intermittent conflict over more than 10 years and the magnitude of the displacement of the population, there have been many investigations during this time and a review of the literature to 2002 identifies issues associated with assistance programs, integration and re-settlement (Nilsson, D. 2003, ‘Liberia – The Eye of the Storm. A Review of the Literature on



Internally Displaced, Refugees and Returnees' (Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, Uppsala – Attachment 28).

The UNHCR co-ordinated a substantial assistance program which began at the end of 2004, and many thousands of refugees and other internally displaced persons have returned home independently in the last three years. Support to returnees in the form of food and household items and a cash travel allowance has also been provided through this program. (UNHCR 2005, 'Liberia 2006 Strategies and Programmes', p. 5 – Attachment 29). In May 2006, "the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which had assisted IDP returns, declared that all IDP camps were officially closed. Some IDPs remained in the closed camp areas even though assistance was no longer provided. By December UNHCR had provided return assistance to 326,824 persons since the return operation began in November 2004." (US Department of State 2007, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2006: Liberia*, 6 March, Section 2(d) - Attachment 25)

In August 2005, the UNHCR declared that "it is no longer warranted to advise that all Liberian asylum-seekers should be granted refugee status on a prima facie basis." It recommended that Liberian asylum-seekers both in and outside Africa should undergo individual refugee status determination in accordance with the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol. It acknowledged that as there could be "possible continuing violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, particularly through the targeting of civilians by possible uncontrolled still armed elements (on ethnic and/or political grounds), some Liberians may qualify as refugees under the 1951 Convention/1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees. Those not recognized as refugees should continue to be favourably considered for complementary forms of protection." (UNHCR 2005, 'UNHCR's Position on the Treatment of Liberian Asylum Seekers and Return to Liberia', 3 August, cited in UK Home Office 2006, *Liberia Country of Information Report*, April, pp. 47-48 – Attachment 30)

A subsequent position statement was issued in March 2006, which identified particular problems in relation only to the Mandingo ethnic group, with the UNHCR generally supportive of the return of individuals found to be ineligible for refugee status. Care was also warranted in considering the claims of victims of "particularly atrocious forms of persecution suffered in the past" and where the "continuing impact of the past persecution could put the individuals at risk of serious harm to their well being if returned." (UNHCR 2006, 'UNHCR's Position on International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Liberia', 31 March, pp. 4, 5 – Attachment 31)

There were some reports of conflict between occupiers and those returning to reclaim land and property during 2006. These reports have particularly identified disputes between the Mandingo ethnic group and others ('LIBERIA: Ethnic tension high as returnees claim homes, land' 2006, UN Office for the Coordination of International Affairs, 22 May 2006 – Accessed 6 June 2007 – Attachment 32) and more recently 'LIBERIA: Refugee returns creating ethnic "time bomb"' Reuters, 8 February 2007 – Accessed 6 June 2007 – Attachment 33).

The background to some of these inter-ethnic tensions are historical and seem to relate to the exclusion of non-citizens from the right to own land and where under the

constitution the state allocated unassigned land. The strong presence of Mandingo traders in Nimba County, where most of the reports over land disputes in 2006 originated, is likely to have been significant. More importantly,

The 1847 constitution provides that only person of African descent can hold citizenship, a provision reconfirmed in the 1986 constitution. For many years the Liberian state was ruled by a settler-dominated one-party regime, the True Whig Party...Two West African trading diaspora (Mandingo and Fula) have tended, historically, to ally with settler interests. This support was transferred to military rulers after the Doe coup in 1980. Some indigenous elements, opposed both to the settler and army regimes, have continued to stigmatize the Mandingo as not truly Liberian. (World Bank Social Development Department 2005, 'Community Cohesion in Liberia – A Post-War Rapid Social Assessment', *World Bank Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction Unit*, January, p. 56 [see also pp 20-21, 47-52, 56-61]– Attachment 18)

The government is reported to have established Property Committees throughout the country that have responsibility to deal with property-related issues and disputes (UNHCR 2006, 'UNHCR's Position on International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Liberia', 31 March, pp. 4, 5 – Attachment 31).

In 2002 the Liberian government also acknowledged its commitment to ensuring that all returning internally displaced people would receive the full protection of the law declaring that

...no internally displaced Person(s) shall suffer and [sic] form of harassment, intimidation, Discrimination, Prosecution or any form of punitive action on account of having fled his or her town or county of origin or place of habitual residence and sought facilitative relocation...[that] all IDPs shall have rights to their original land being restored upon their return. In addition, IDPs will have access to land for settlement and agricultural use in accordance with the laws and tradition of Liberia [and that] all measures shall be taken to facilitate to the extent possible, the recovery by the IDPs of their land, all-immovable and to the extent possible, movable property which may have lost or left behind. (Republic of Liberia 2002, 'Declaration of the Rights and Protections of Liberian Internally Displaced Perosns' [sic] (IDPS), 26 September – Attachment 34)

In an extended assessment of the experience of returned internally displaced people the Jesuit Refugee Service has reported that "the general perception of the process is positive" and most appeared to have obtained current information on their community before returning. Most returnees returned to their community of origin. In addition,

Very few cases of land disputes were mentioned in the communities visited. In those few instances though, community authorities, typically the town chief and the assembly of elders, worked to resolve the disputes, sometimes relocating people if necessary. Relocations are eased though, because in the interior, land often belongs to the local communities, which distribute it equally between residents. Therefore, when there is a dispute, the community can easily give a new piece of land to one or the other plaintiff. In some areas visited, like in Kolahun town, the community took care to ensure that the properties of people still displaced were not occupied by other residents.

...

In general, the security situation is said to be fine and to have improved especially since people's return to local communities. Criminal matters are referred to government institutions while domestic issues are resolved within the community. Each community has its own regulations and every infringement is punished according to a pre-established system of penalties, including community work or fines. (Jesuit Refugee Service Advocacy Report 2006, 'Six Months after the Official Closure of the IDP Camps', n.d. [21 December 2006], pp, 29, 30, 31 – Attachment 35)

## **11. Would a person with no family be able to survive independently in Monrovia today?**

At least as late as the end of 2006, some public buildings in Monrovia were still being occupied by people who had fled to the capital in the final stages of the war. As previously indicated, Liberia is likely to have been a country which some commentators would have described as a failed state and was listed twelfth in the most recent common listing of "failed states" (Global Fund for Peace, 2006 'Failed State Index', Global Policy Forum website <http://www.globalpolicy.org/> – Accessed 6 June 2007 – Attachment 36).

The capital city of Monrovia had electricity restored in July 2006 and now has street lights but water and electricity is not available or affordable to many inhabitants. Roads are poor, there is not yet a functioning landline telecommunications system, living conditions are extremely hazardous and national unemployment in the formal sector of the economy is estimated to be currently between 80-85%. Malnutrition is common, infant mortality is high and literacy levels particularly for women are abysmally low. The minimum wage is US\$0.25 per hour for unskilled laborers and agricultural workers. The US State Department has reported that minimum wage incomes would be insufficient to provide a decent standard of living. Working conditions were also precarious:

The law provides for paid leave, severance benefits, and safety standards, but enforcement was targeted solely at foreign-owned firms that generally observed these standards. The Ministry of Labor lacked the ability to enforce government-established health and safety standards. The law does not give workers the right to remove themselves from dangerous situations without risking loss of employment.

Due to the country's continued severe economic problems, most citizens were forced to accept any work they could find regardless of wages or working conditions. The Ministry of Labor lacked the resources to monitor compliance with labor laws. (US Department of State 2007, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2006: Liberia*, 6 March, Section 6 (e) – Attachment 25)

Amongst returning displaced persons, generally vulnerable people appear to be at most risk:

Many vulnerable people can be found in return communities. Most fall into categories of elderly, handicapped, orphaned and/or...single mothers, even though in most communities, single mothers are not considered to be vulnerable. In fact, these women are often expected to take on the additional role of primary care-taker for their family's vulnerable members. There is rarely any community initiative to assist vulnerable people. They are

dependent on family members or, when they do not have any family, the generosity of neighbours. (Jesuit Refugee Service Advocacy Report 2006, 'Six Months after the Official Closure of the IDP Camps', n.d. [21 December 2006], pp, 28-29 – Attachment 35)

No difficulties unique to single individuals other than those which are common to other residents of Monrovia today have been identified from the sources consulted. A report on a visit to Liberia published in the UK *Observer* in April 2007 includes the following description of Monrovia

What infrastructure there was has been destroyed – roads, ports, municipal electricity, water, sanitation, schools, hospitals – all desperately lacking or nonexistent; 86 per cent unemployment, no street lights...’ Through the car window, dead street lamps can be seen – they were stripped of their components during the war. Lightning continues to reveal the scene: small huts made of mud bricks, sheets of corrugated iron and refuse; more bored young men, sitting in groups, dully watching the cars go by. The cars are of two types: huge Toyota Land Cruisers like this one, usually with UN stamped on their bonnets, or else dilapidated Nissans, the back windows of which reveal six people squeezed into the back seats, four in the front. Our driver, John Flomo, is asked whether the essentials – a water and sanitation system, electricity, schools – existed prior to the war. ‘Some, yes. In towns. Less in the country.’ Even the electricity that lights the airport is not municipal. It comes from a hydro plant belonging to Firestone, the American rubber company, famous for its tyres. (Smith, Z., ‘Letter from Liberia’ 2007, *The Observer*, 29 April – Attachment 37)

The Liberian National Investment Commission provides a comprehensive overview of opportunities for investment in Liberia currently in its 2007 guide which, foreshadowing the progressive lifting of UN sanctions on the export of commodity items such as timber, minerals, and diamonds, believes there are grounds for a very small measure of optimism and provides a detailed survey of infrastructure and the economy (National Investment Commission 2007, ‘The Investor’s Guide to Liberia’, Monrovia – Attachment 38).

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UK Home Office <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/>

US Department of State <http://www.state.gov/>

#### **United Nations (UN)**

United Nations website <http://www.un.org>

UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) website

<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rsd>

United Nations Mission in Liberia <http://www.unmil.org/>

#### **Non-Government Organisations**

Human Rights Watch <http://www.hrw.org/>

Amnesty International <http://www.amnesty.org>

#### **International News & Politics**

BBC News <http://news.bbc.co.uk>

The Economist <http://www.economist.com>

## **Region Specific Links**

Liberia Past and Present website <http://www.liberiapastandpresent.org/index.html>

Stanford University Africa pages website <http://www-sul.stanford.edu/depts/ssrg/africa/liberia.html>

## **Search Engines**

Google scholar <http://www.google.com>

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