

LIBERIA 2021 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Liberia is a constitutional republic with a bicameral national assembly and a democratically elected government led by President George Manneh Opong Weah and the political alliance Coalition for Democratic Change. The country held presidential and legislative elections in 2017, which domestic and international observers deemed generally free and fair. The then Montserrado County Senator George Weah won the presidential runoff in December 2017 in an election that was generally considered free and fair. In December 2020 the country held midterm senatorial elections that observers deemed largely peaceful, although there were some reported instances of vote tampering, intimidation, harassment of female candidates, and election violence. Opposition and independent candidates won 12 of the 15 Senate seats contested, according to election results announced by the National Election Commission. On November 16, by-elections for the House of Representatives were held in Bong, Bomi, Nimba, and Grand Gedeh counties to fill vacancies created after the December 2020 midterm senatorial elections. Once again, election observers deemed the proceedings largely peaceful, although there were some reported instances of vote tampering, intimidation, harassment of female candidates, and election violence.

The Liberia National Police maintain internal security, with assistance from the Liberia Drug Enforcement Agency and other civilian security forces. The Armed Forces of Liberia are responsible for external security but also have some domestic security responsibilities if called upon. The Liberia National Police and Liberia Drug Enforcement Agency report to the Ministry of Justice, while the Armed Forces of Liberia report to the Ministry of National Defense. Civilian authorities generally maintained effective control over the security forces. There were credible reports that members of the security forces committed some abuses.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: arbitrary killings by police; cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment by police; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; arbitrary arrest or detention; serious problems with the independence of the judiciary; restrictions on freedom of the press,

sectors. Hazardous occupations were especially dangerous in the informal sector, such as illegal fishing, logging, and mining, where the lack of regulation and remediation contributed to fatalities and obscured accountability.

On August 18, at least seven persons were injured at the Sethi Ferro Fabrik Incorporated modern steel manufacturing company in Gardnersville following an explosion at the facility. According to eyewitnesses, the explosion occurred following a surge to an electric induction arc furnace that was being used to melt steel by one of the workers at the facility. The Environmental Protection Agency and Liberia National Police arrived on the scene to assess and investigate the cause of the explosion and its effect on the environment.

On August 21, Emmanuel Joe, an employee of the Liberia Agriculture Company in Wee Statutory District, Grand Bassa County, was killed by a rubber processing machine when a breaker was reportedly turned on by another worker while the victim was cleaning it.

Informal Sector: Most citizens were unable to find work in the formal sector and therefore did not benefit from any of the formal labor laws and protections. Most citizens (estimated at 80 percent) worked in the largely unregulated informal sector, where they faced widely varying and often harsh working conditions. Informal-sector workers included rock crushers, artisanal miners, agricultural workers, street sellers, most market sellers, domestic workers, and others. In the diamond and gold mines, in addition to physical danger and poor working conditions, the industry is unregulated, leaving miners vulnerable to exploitive brokers, dealers, and intermediaries. Illegal mining of gold was rampant throughout the country and posed serious safety risks, resulting in the deaths of several persons every year.