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**UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW
50TH SESSION**

**STATUS OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA
FOR THE 50TH SESSION OF THE
UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW**

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Introduction

1. The European Centre for Law and Justice (ECLJ) is an international, non-governmental organization dedicated to promoting and protecting human rights around the world. The ECLJ also holds Special Consultative status before the United Nations Economic and Social Council. This report discusses the status of human rights in the Republic of Liberia (Liberia) for the 50th session of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

Background

2. Liberia is a country located on the coast of western Africa and has a population of approximately 5.6 million people.¹ The population is predominantly Christian, with approximately 85.6% of the population identifying as Christian, 12.2% as Muslim, 0.6% belonging to traditional religions, and 1.5% belonging to no religion.²

3. Liberia's last review was held on November 2, 2020.³ As a result of the review, Liberia received 218 recommendations, 166 of which it supported.⁴ It was recommended by Sweden, and supported by Liberia, that the government “[t]ake measures to ensure and expand access for women and girls to safe and legal abortion.”⁵ It was also recommended by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and supported by Liberia, that the government “[p]rioritize resources for the identification of victims of trafficking, including internal trafficking, and more vigorously investigate and prosecute traffickers, including officials accused of complicity.”⁶ No recommendations were made regarding religious freedom.⁷

Legal Framework

Abortion

4. Article 20 of the Constitution of Liberia states that “[n]o person shall be deprived of life.”⁸ Similar language is also found in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

¹ *Liberia*, BRITANNICA, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Liberia> (Mar. 19, 2025).

² *Liberia Religions*, INDEX MUNDI, <https://www.indexmundi.com/liberia/religions.html> (Sept 18, 2021).

³ *Universal Periodic Review – Liberia*, OHCHR, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/lr-index> (last visited Apr. 2, 2025).

⁴ *Infographic – Liberia*, OHCHR, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/lib-docs/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session36/LR/LIBERIA_Infographic.pdf (last visited Apr. 2, 2025).

⁵ OHCHR, UPR OF LIBERIA (3RD CYCLE – 36TH SESSION) THEMATIC LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS 13, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/lib-docs/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session36/LR/UPR36_Liberia_Thematic_List_of_Recommendations.docx (last accessed Apr. 2, 2025).

⁶ *Id.* at 12.

⁷ *See id.*

⁸ CONSTITUTION OF LIBERIA 1986, art. 20, https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Liberia_1986.

(ICCPR), to which Liberia is a party.⁹ It states that “[e]very human being has the inherent right to life. This right shall be protected by law. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his life.”¹⁰

5. In Liberia, abortion is only permitted in limited circumstances. Under §16.3 of Liberia’s Penal Code:

Justifiable abortion. A licensed physician is justified in terminating a pregnancy if he believes there is substantial risk that continuance of the pregnancy would gravely impair the physical or mental health of the mother or that the child would be born with grave physical or mental defect, or that the pregnancy resulted from rape, incest, or other felonious intercourse. An illicit intercourse with a girl below the age of sixteen shall be deemed felonious for purpose of this paragraph.¹¹

6. Further, Liberia has a responsibility to uphold pro-life principles enshrined in other international agreements such as the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), and the 1994 Cairo Conference on Population and Development.

Human Trafficking

7. Under Article 12 of the Constitution of Liberia, “[n]o person shall be held in slavery or forced labor within the Republic, nor shall any citizen of Liberia nor any person resident therein deal in slaves or subject any other person to forced labor, debt bondage or peonage.”¹²

8. In 2021, the government adopted a new human trafficking law that established a minimum prison sentence of twenty years for individuals found guilty of sex and labor trafficking.¹³

9. Further, Article 8 of the ICCPR states that “No one shall be held in slavery; slavery and the slave-trade in all their forms shall be prohibited. No one shall be held in servitude.”¹⁴

10. Additionally, Liberia is also a party to the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.¹⁵ Under Article 9 sec. 1 of this Protocol:

1. States Parties shall establish comprehensive policies, programmes and other measures:

⁹ See *Status of Ratification*, OHCHR, <https://indicators.ohchr.org/> (last visited Apr. 2, 2025).

¹⁰ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights art. 6, *adopted* Dec. 16, 1966, 999 U.N.T.S. 171, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights> [hereinafter ICCPR].

¹¹ LIBERIAN CODE OF LAWS REVISED §16.3,

https://www.rightofassembly.info/assets/downloads/1978_Penal_Law_of_Liberia.pdf.

¹² CONSTITUTION OF LIBERIA 1986, art. 12, https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Liberia_1986.

¹³ Anthony Stephens, *Liberia Gets Tough on Human Trafficking with Amended Law*, FPA (Dec. 22, 2022), <https://frontpageafricaonline.com/news/liberia-gets-tough-on-human-trafficking-with-amended-law/>.

¹⁴ ICCPR, *supra* note 10, at art. 8.

¹⁵ *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime*, UNITED NATIONS TREATY COLLECTION, https://treaties.un.org/pages/viewdetails.aspx?src=ind&mtdsg_no=xviii-12-a&chapter=18 (last visited Apr. 2, 2025).

- (a) To prevent and combat trafficking in persons; and
- (b) To protect victims of trafficking in persons, especially women and children, from revictimization.¹⁶

Abortion

11. Since Liberia passed its abortion law in 1976, the government has recognized and protected the dignity of preborn babies by only permitting abortion in extremely limited circumstances. Unfortunately, Libya has been swayed by two U.N. Member States with extremely pro-abortion administrations to craft a law expanding access to abortion in Libya.¹⁷ These U.N. Member States are attempting to impose their “morality” on Libya, calling for them to change their laws. The draft law would expand access to abortion until the 18th week of pregnancy. This is a drastic change from Liberia’s current abortion law, which restricts abortion except in cases where “there is substantial risk that continuance of the pregnancy would gravely impair the physical or mental health of the mother or that the child would be born with grave physical or mental defect, or that the pregnancy resulted from rape, incest, or other felonious intercourse.”¹⁸ While Liberia’s House of Representatives passed the draft law, further action has yet to be taken.¹⁹

12. Efforts to expand access to abortion in sub-Saharan Africa, like the efforts in Libya, have been disastrous. Since 2000, approximately twenty-one countries in sub-Saharan Africa have expanded access to abortion.²⁰ This has led to a massive increase in the number of abortions being carried out annually. Between 1995 and 1990, approximately 4.3 million abortions were carried out annually in the region.²¹ This number has skyrocketed to approximately eight million abortions being carried out annually in the region between 2014 and 2019.²²

13. If Libya were to expand access to abortion it will not only result in the deaths of preborn babies but will also severely harm mothers. A 2023 study conducted in Nigeria and the Central African Republic found that women who have undergone abortions can experience numerous health complications which can result in life-threatening complications.²³ This study found that

¹⁶ Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime art. 9 § 1, *adopted* Nov. 15, 2000, 2237 U.N.T.S. 319, https://treaties.un.org/doc/treaties/2000/11/20001115%2011-38%20am/ch_xviii_12_ap.pdf.

¹⁷ *LIBERIA – Liberia’s New Health Law Will Be Among Most Liberal in Africa for Abortion – if it Passes*, INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR WOMEN’S RIGHT TO SAFE ABORTION (Sep. 7, 2023), <https://www.safeabortionwomensright.org/news/liberia-liberias-new-health-law-will-be-among-most-liberal-in-africa-for-abortion-if-it-passes/>.

¹⁸ LIBERIAN CODE OF LAWS REVISED §16.3.

¹⁹ *Liberia’s New Health Law Will Be Among Most Liberal in Africa*, *supra* note 17.

²⁰ *From Unsafe to Safe Abortion in Sub-Saharan Africa: Slow but Steady Progress*, GUTTMACHER INST. (Dec., 2020), <https://www.guttmacher.org/report/from-unsafe-to-safe-abortion-in-sub-Saharan-africa>.

²¹ *Id.*

²² *Id.*

²³ Estelle Pasquier et al., *High of Abortion Complications in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Settings: a Cross-Sectional Study in Two Referral Hospitals in Sub-Saharan Africa (AMoCo Study)*, BMC PREGNANCY & CHILDBIRTH 23, art. No. 143 (Mar. 4, 2023), <https://bmcpregnancychildbirth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12884-023-05427-6#:~:text=Our%20results%20suggest%20that%20women%20who%20accessed%20post-abortion.>

47.1% of the women studied in Nigeria and 44.5% of the women studied in the Central African Republic were classified as having potentially life-threatening complications as a result of abortions.²⁴ In addition to the physical complications women have experienced by having an abortion, studies have also shown that women have experienced negative psychological side effects, such as drug abuse and suicidal thoughts.²⁵ Because of the harm that abortion can have on the life of the mother, Liberia has an affirmative duty to reduce the recourse to abortion as also recommended by the 1994 Cairo Conference on Population and Development.²⁶

14. It is troubling that other countries are pressuring Liberia to expand access to abortion, especially when its current laws are consistent with a majority of U.N. Member States. In fact, out of the 193 U.N. Member States, a majority of them restrict access to abortion, including through either prohibiting abortion altogether, or permitting it only when the mother's life or health is at risk.²⁷ Further, only sixty-nine U.N. Member States permit abortion on demand with varying gestational limits, with forty-nine of them having gestational limits of twelve weeks or less.²⁸ This means that Liberia's proposed expansion of abortion to eighteen weeks is extreme, even among U.N. Member States that have legalized abortion on demand.

15. Liberia and the majority of the U.N. Member States that limit abortion are in the right. In addition to being responsible for protecting the lives of its preborn babies and mothers, Liberia and U.N. Member States also have a responsibility to uphold the rights enshrined in numerous fundamental human rights documents, which recognize the inherent dignity and the importance of preserving human life. The ICCPR explicitly states that “[e]very human being has the inherent right to life. This right shall be protected by law. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his life.”²⁹ Similar language is also found in the UDHR, which states that “[e]veryone has the right to life.”³⁰

Human Trafficking

16. Liberia serves as both a source and destination country for human trafficking, with victims being subjected to both forced labor and sex trafficking.³¹ From April 2023 to March 2024, the government identified 157 victims of human trafficking.³² This is an increase from the number of victims identified in 2022 when the government identified approximately ninety victims.³³ Many of the victims identified are women who are targeted and trafficked to the

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ Priscilla K. Coleman et al., *Women Who Suffered Emotionally from Abortion: A Qualitative Synthesis of Their Experiences*, 22 J. AM. PHYSICIANS & SURGEONS 113, 116-17 (2017), <https://www.jpands.org/vol22no4/coleman.pdf>.

²⁶ International Conference on Population and Development, *Report of the International Conference on Population and Development*, ¶ 8.25, U.N. Doc. A/CONF/F.171/13/Rev. 1, https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/sites/www.un.org.development.desa.pd/files/a_conf.171_13_rev.1.pdf.

²⁷ *The Worlds Abortion Laws*, CTR. FOR REPRODUCTIVE RTS., https://reproductiverights.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/WALM_2023-v3-Updated_12-20-23.pdf (Dec. 20, 2023).

²⁸ *Id.*

²⁹ ICCPR, *supra* note 10, at art. 6.

³⁰ G.A. Res. 217 (III) A, Universal Declaration of Human Rights art. 3 (Dec. 10, 1948).

³¹ *Liberia*, GLOBAL ORGANIZED CRIME INDEX, <https://ocindex.net/country/liberia> (last visited Apr. 2, 2025).

³² EUROPEAN UNION AGENCY FOR ASYLUM, COI QUERY RESPONSE – LIBERIA 4 (Sep. 24, 2024), https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2115614/2024_09_EUAA_COI_Query_Response_Q63_Liberia_Trafficking_in_Human_Beings.pdf.

³³ *Id.*

Middle East, mainly Oman, where they are forced to perform labor and domestic servitude.³⁴ Human traffickers target poor women with promises of job opportunities abroad.³⁵

17. To help strengthen its efforts to combat human trafficking, the government passed the Revised Act to Ban Trafficking in Persons in 2021.³⁶ The revised law increased the minimum sentencing for those convicted of human trafficking from one year to twenty years.³⁷ Further, it also allows the victims to receive restitution from their traffickers.³⁸ In April 2022, a human trafficker was convicted and sentenced for the first time under this new law.³⁹ The individual was arrested for trafficking more than ten Liberian women to Oman.⁴⁰

18. In January 2023, a former agent who worked for the National Security Agency was sentenced to twenty-five years in prison for trafficking two women to Oman.⁴¹ He lured these women by promising them jobs, free housing, education, and healthcare.⁴²

19. On April 21, 2022, authorities arrested an individual for trafficking a woman to Oman.⁴³ Once the victim arrived in Oman, her passport was taken from her, and she was raped.⁴⁴

20. While we are encouraged by Liberia's efforts to combat human trafficking by increasing minimum sentences for trafficking, the government's mismanagement of resources has undermined Liberia's efforts to combat human trafficking.

21. In 2024, the government allocated \$230,170 for anti-human trafficking activities.⁴⁵ However, reports indicate that much of this money has not reached the front lines and the Ministry of Labour has been accused of failing to get the funds to its intended destination.⁴⁶ This has left the anti-human trafficking taskforce, a unit responsible for investigating cases of human trafficking and rescuing victims, without the resources needed to carry out its job. One member of the task force shared:

We can't even afford basic fuel for our vehicle, let alone maintain it. The vehicle is critical for transporting victims to court or responding to trafficking cases in the field, but they're either out of service or used for unrelated purposes.⁴⁷

³⁴ *Id.* at 5.

³⁵ *Id.*

³⁶ *Id.* at 7.

³⁷ *Id.*

³⁸ *Id.*

³⁹ *Id.* at 12.

⁴⁰ *Government Wins Human Trafficking Case*, THE NEW DAWN LIBERIA (Apr. 21, 2022), <https://thenewdawnliberia.com/government-wins-human-trafficking-case/>.

⁴¹ Anthony Stephens, *Liberia: Former State Security Agent Gets 25 Years for Human Trafficking*, FRONT PAGE AFRICA (Jan. 19, 2023), <https://frontpageafricaonline.com/news/liberia-former-state-security-agent-gets-25-years-for-human-trafficking-trafficker-claims-a-state-conspiracy%EF%BF%BC/>.

⁴² *Id.*

⁴³ Garmah Never Lomo, *Church Pastor Jailed for Allegedly Trafficking a Liberian Woman*, NEWS PUBLIC TRUST (Apr. 23, 2022), <https://newspublictrust.com/church-pastor-jailed-for-allegedly-trafficking-a-liberian-woman>.

⁴⁴ *Id.*

⁴⁵ David A. Yates, *Logistical Challenges Undermine Liberia's Anti-Human Trafficking Efforts*, DAILY OBSERVER (Sep. 26, 2024), https://www.liberianobserver.com/news/logistical-challenges-undermine-liberia-s-anti-human-trafficking-efforts/article_9f9377bc-7be5-11ef-9bb5-a7e6e8a08c34.html.

⁴⁶ *Id.*

⁴⁷ *Id.*

He further shared that their vehicle is used for non-trafficking activities and they are often unable to use to carry out investigations or assist victims.⁴⁸ He added that “[i]t’s nearly impossible to carry out our responsibilities effectively. We are supposed to be rescuing victims, but without the tools, it’s just not happening.”⁴⁹ The lack of resources and mismanagement of funds undermines Liberia’s efforts to combat trafficking, especially when they have just enacted a more robust law to combat human trafficking. Without proper management, authorities are not able to adequately enforce the law.

Recommendations

22. We want to urge Liberia to protect life at all stages, just as it has done for its entire history. To do this, Liberia must reject all efforts that call for legalizing and expanding access to abortion. As we have demonstrated above, Liberia’s laws are currently in line with a majority of U.N. Members States and protect the rights of all human beings, rights that are enshrined in fundamental human rights documents. Because of this, Liberia is justified in rejecting abortion expansion as it both violates these human rights documents and will result in the death and suffering of its citizens.

23. While we are encouraged by Liberia’s efforts to combat human trafficking through adopting a more stringent anti-trafficking law, we are concerned about the mismanagement of resources that are hindering Liberia’s efforts to combat human trafficking. This has made it difficult to investigate cases of human trafficking and protect the victims. We urge Liberia to appropriately ensure that its anti-trafficking initiatives get the resources they have been allocated so that the perpetrators are brought to justice, and the victims receive the aid and support they desperately need.

⁴⁸ *Id.*

⁴⁹ *Id.*