

LIBERIA

CIVIL SOCIETY HUMAN RIGHTS PLATFORM

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CSO Human Rights Advocacy Platform

The **Platform** comprises **human rights** organizations across Liberia. It aims, amongst its goals, to consolidate **human rights advocacy** around Liberia to ensure its timely redress and change.

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1. Touching Humanity in Need of Kindness (THINK)
2. He For She Crusaders Liberia (HEFOSEL)
3. National Association Against Traditional Practice Affecting the Health of Women (NATPAH)
4. Her Voice Liberia
5. Women Solidarity, Inc. (WOSI)
6. Women Empowerment Foundation of Liberia
7. Citizen Initiative for Dialogue
8. Transitional Justice Working Group (TJWG)
9. Women Passion, Inc.
10. National Health Workers Union of Liberia
11. Human Rights and Protection Forum
12. Right Alert Liberia (RAL)
13. National Union of Organizations of Person with Disabilities (NUOD)
14. Sister Hands Liberia
15. Foundation for International Dignity (FIND)
16. Prison Fellowship Liberia (PFL)
17. Lesbian and Gay Association of Liberia Inc. (LEGAL)
18. National Teachers Association of Liberia (NTAL)
19. Student Unification and Development Association (STUDA)
20. Stop Aids in Liberia (SAIL)
21. Foundation for Human Rights & Democracy (FOHRD)
22. United Methodist Human Rights Monitor
23. Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia (AFELL)
24. Rural Women Human Rights (RWHR)
25. Better Future Foundation (BFF)
26. Pentecostal Mission Unlimited (PMU-LIB)
27. Liberia Massacre Survivors Association -(LIMASA)
28. Serving Humanity for Empowerment and Development (SHED)
29. Associazione Italiana Amici di Raoul Follereau (AIFO)
30. National Council of Chiefs and Elders of Liberia (NACCEL)
31. Independent Human Rights Investigators (IHRI)
32. National Human Rights Center of Liberia
33. Regional Watch for Human Rights (RWHR)
34. National Civil Society Council of Liberia
35. Rural Human Rights Activists Program (RHRAP)

Executive Summary :

1. After some difficult moment with civil war, Liberia is experiencing steps to consolidate peace and democracy. The country is among those which, in the west African region, have experience peaceful transmission of power. But when it comes to the situation of human rights, there remain many challenges on which various stakeholders either state or non state, national or international actors, are working to guarantee Liberian people the rights. Among those issues, the call for sustainable reconciliation is more and more pressing in Liberian society.
2. In May 2015, Liberia submitted its National Report to the Human Rights Council in accordance with paragraph 5 of the annex to Human Rights Council resolution 16/21. Following the submission of the report, Liberia accepted a number of recommendations related to implementation of¹ actions to deepen efforts and dialogue to establish an accountability mechanism for human rights violations committed in the past, and other important issues such as Truth and Reconciliation Commission to foster national harmony, gender-specific violence, abolition of death and others. In July 2018, the Human Rights Committee, the 123rd session, pointed out some important issues on which the Liberian government should take concerted measures to advance human rights situations and civil and political rights in particular. At that occasion, NGOs gathered in the Civil Society Organizations Platform raised concerns about accountability and justice for past crimes.
3. Through the present report, 35 NGOs gathered in the Civil Society Organizations Platform raise concerns about accountability and justice for past crimes, persons with disabilities, death penalty, prisons conditions, discrimination against women and gender based violence, right for adequate standard of living. The situation of human rights defenders is also an important issue that has been pointed out.

¹ A/HRC/30/4/Add.1 - Para. 144, 150, 164,

Issue 1: Accountability and Justice for Past Crimes- TRC Report

- 1) Drawing from the submission of the TRC report since ten years, key recommendations are yet to be implemented by the Liberian Government, though some measure are on the way to address the plight of victims and hold perpetrators accountable for past human rights violations. However, not concrete commitment or legislation has been passed to support the TRC recommendation on accountability for past crimes. Following the second cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in 2015, Liberia accepted a number of recommendations regarding the reconciliation process but most of them are not implemented yet.
- 2) **TRC recommendations and extraordinary criminal tribunal on war crimes:** to address the issue of impunity and reconciliation, the government has created the National Palava Hut Forum as a complementary tool for justice and national reconciliation. It is a traditional dispute resolution mechanism established to promote and consolidate lasting peace and harmony throughout Liberia at the community level. But the TRC report also included a list of individuals recommended to be barred from holding public offices for thirty years (including President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf). NGOs are concerned about the fact that not only these alleged perpetrators mentioned by the TRC are not hold accountable but some of them even have official responsibilities. Some of these officials mentioned in the TRC 2009 report² who are currently serving in government include Senator Prince Y. Johnson, of Nimba County, Representative George S. Borley of Grand Gedeh County, Senator Dan Morias of Maryland County, Senator Sando Johnson of Bomi County among others. In 2016, the Human right Committee also emphasizes the necessity for those perpetrators to be “impartially prosecuted”³. But no significant effort have been made so far. At the national level, series of advocacy and follow-up activities have been under taken by national and international civil society institutions on the quest⁴ for justice calling on the government to act in time on the TRC recommendations⁵.
- 3) A joint committee of the 54th National Legislature of the Lower house of representatives, introduced a resolution for the implementation of the TRC recommendations and the establishment of war and economic crimes court for Liberia, of which more than 45 signatures in support of the draft resolution.

² TRC 2009 Report named them as Most Notorious perpetrator, p.350-353

³ Recommendation 11 of the Human Rights Committee

⁴ Moreover, the just concluded national economic dialogue held in Monrovia with over 350 participants representing all sectors in Liberia recommended the establishment of war and economic crimes court for Liberia. Additionally, the National Traditional Council of Chiefs and Elders concluded at a National conference in September 2019, resolved to promote similar TRC recommendations implementation by calling on the national government to establish war and economic crimes court for Liberia.

⁵ Institutions include: National Justice Conference of November 2019; Ref: www.frontpageafricaonline.com; July 2019 National Legislative Committee on War and Economic crimes; Daily Observer, www.liberiadailyobserver.com/news/legislative-conference-on-war-crimes-court-begin-today; September 7, 2019 National Economic Dialogue Conference of Liberia: www.liberianobserver.com/news/at-national-economic-dialogue-stakeholders.call-for-war-crimes;

Recently, President George Weah submitted to the national legislature a letter seeking for advice on the implementation of the TRC recommendations and the establishment of war and economic crimes court. The challenge envisaged by CSOs might include political inconsistency by the presidency and limited political will on the part of the presidency (executive branch of government to secure financial resources), resistance to block the passage of the bill by current officials in the National Legislature mentioned in the TRC report.

- 4) The opportunities foreseen would be to increase effort in mobilizing the current National Legislators who already signed in the draft resolution by increasing the signatories reached to over 70% of law makers in both houses. Follow-up to increase local awareness on the implementation of the TRC recommendations on accountability and justice at community level and persuade them to hold their law makers accountable on the TRC implementation. Pursue international human rights institutions and community to press the government to uphold the commitment by the president even up to the level of the UNGA 2019 statement by President George Weah. Another measure is to ensure massive outreach by the local and international media, civil society organizations and religious institutions. Meanwhile, International law mandates prosecuting serious crimes that violate international law such as war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide, and this duty to prosecute lies primarily with domestic authorities.ⁱ Moreover, Liberia has assumed obligations to prosecute serious crimes and implement the right to a remedy for victims of such crimes through ratification and accession to multiple international instruments.ⁱⁱ

Recommendations: The State should:

- ✓ Ensure that all alleged perpetrators of gross human rights violations and war crimes are impartially prosecuted and, if found guilty, convicted and punished in accordance with the gravity of the acts committed, regardless of their status or any domestic legislation on immunities, and remove any persons who are proven to have been involved in gross human rights violations and war crimes from official positions
- ✓ Roll-out the implementation of the TRC 2009 recommendations⁶ supported by the 2015 UPR recommendations; A/HRC/30/4/Add.1-Para.
- ✓ Take all necessary measures to implement the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and consider establishing a well-resourced body, comprising government representatives, the National Independent Commission on Human Rights and civil society organizations, to monitor the implementation of those recommendations ;
- ✓ Set up a Trust Fund Commission to facilitate the payment of Reparation to victims of the War Consider the draft legislation to facilitate the establishment of an Extraordinary Criminal Court to fairly and effectively prosecute past human rights violations and abuses
- ✓ Ensure adequate support and funding for programs designed in view of the TRC recommendations to improve Liberia's judicial and criminal justice system to ensure victims' access to justice and the right of the accused to a fair trial;

⁶ UPR 2015 UPR Recommendations; A/HRC/30/4/Add.1-Para.144,150,164, 165;

Issue 2: Discrimination Against Specific Groups

- 5) **Persons Living with Disability:** In 2012, Liberia signed and ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). The country has also signed and ratified other international instruments that provide a framework for the protection of persons with disabilities⁷.
- 6) The Liberian constitution⁸ prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities, but these provisions are not always enforced. Most of government buildings not easily accessible to persons with mobility impairment. Sign language interpretation are not provided for deaf persons in criminal proceedings or in the provision of state services. The situation remains the same.
- 7) **Children with disabilities:** Accordingly, few children with disabilities had access to education. Public educational institutions discriminated against students with disabilities, arguing resources and equipment were insufficient to accommodate them. According to the National Union of Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (NUOD), some students with disabilities attended specialized schools mainly for the blind and deaf--but only through elementary school. During the year the legislature passed and amended a Public Health Law to add a chapter on mental health that seeks to give persons with mental health problems equal access to health care and protect the properties, civil, and social rights of such persons. Students with more significant disabilities are exempt from compulsory education but may attend school subject to constraints on accommodating them. In reality few such students were able to attend either private or public schools.
- 8) **Albinos:** Discrimination against Albinos in Liberia is also a national concern by human rights community, especially, the Liberia Albino Society (LAS) revealed in 2015 that albinos face multiple forms of inhuman discrimination⁹. Albinos face verbal abuse or even ritual killings¹⁰.
- 9) **Leprosy Patients:** This is also true for leprosy patients and ex-leprosy patients. Once they receive treatment from the few rehabilitation centers in the country, they are rarely accepted back within their families because of a widespread believe that they are infective. Most times ex-leprosy patients end up creating towns in the vicinity of the treatment center where to dwell. (Please refer to the case of Wo's town in Ganta, Nimba County, Liberia).

⁷ Convention on the Rights of the Child, the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

⁸ Republic of Liberia 1986 Constitution, Chapter II, Article 8;

⁹ Liberian Observer .15 June 2015. Albinos Lament Discrimination. Accessed on 11 January 2018. Retrieved from:

¹⁰ Deutsche Welle.24 July 2013. Liberian albinos fight for rights. Accessed on 11 January. Retrieved from:

- 10) **LGBTI:** The Liberia Penal Code (14.7) prohibits consensual same-sex sexual activity. “Voluntary sodomy” is a misdemeanor with a penalty for conviction of up to one year’s imprisonment. LGBTI activists reported LGBTI persons faced difficulty in obtaining redress for crimes committed against them, including at police stations, because those accused of criminal acts used the victim’s LGBTI status as a defense. In February a senior LNP officer stated officers should not protect LGBTI individuals because their identity as LGBTI persons violated the law, although there is no such law.
- 11) The law prohibits same-sex couples, regardless of citizenship, from adopting children. LGBTI persons were cautious about revealing their sexual orientation or gender identities. A few civil society groups promoted the rights of LGBTI individuals, but most groups maintained a very low profile due to fear of mistreatment. Additionally, societal stigma and fear of official reprisal prevented some victims from reporting violence or discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. For example, one transgender woman reported being attacked in her apartment by five men who robbed, bound, beat, and raped her.

Recommendations: The State Party should:

- ✓ Adopt comprehensive legislation against discrimination that includes a definition of all forms of discrimination and an expanded list of prohibited grounds of discrimination, including national or ethnic origin, religion, disability, sexual orientation and gender identity and any other status, and provide for effective remedies in case of violations.
- ✓ Provide appropriate mechanism that addresses victims of discrimination, including survivors of the Ebola virus, Persons with Disabilities, Persons and Children Living with HIV and Albinos and adults in same sex relationships;
- ✓ Ensure legislature to address the acts of violence, discrimination, and other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity¹¹;

Issue 3: Death Penalty

- 12) In 2005, Liberia acceded to the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) aiming at the abolition of the death penalty. Under the Protocol, Liberia was required to impose a moratorium on executions and amend its laws to eliminate the death penalty. Under the 2008 criminal law amendment, Liberia reintroduced the death penalty only for armed robbery, terrorism, and hijacking, resulting in death, all offenses, such as murder, treason which had been death-eligible under the 1976 law. The courts may have construed the 1976 Penal Code as unaffected by the 2005 accession to the Second Optional Protocol. The courts continue to hand down death penalties for offenses such as murder, although no execution of death has taken place since 2008.

¹¹ UPR Recommendations; A/HRC/WG/30/4/Add.1-Para.8, 22,71,105,186

- 13) In February 2015¹², Liberia stated to the UN Human Rights Council that there were 9 people on death row. To-date, courts have handed down at least death sentences, but some may have been overturned on appeal or benefited from a pardon. Because “Accession” has the same legal effect as “Ratification”, the European Union, the Liberia Bar Association, Louis Arthur Grimes School of Law and other international and national NGOs as well as Civil Society Groups organized series of symposiums to educate judicial officials about the Second Optional Protocol of the ICCPR, and need to abolish death penalty.
- 14) Murder is punishable by death under the 1976 Penal Law but was not reintroduced as a capital offense under the 2008 criminal law amendment. The status of capital provisions under the 1976 law is ambiguous. However, in practice, the courts continue to treat murder as punishable by death. In 2009 and 2010, Liberian courts handed down death sentences for crimes of murder, and in 2013 sentenced a man to death for murder and rape. Under Liberian law, causing the death of a person while committing, attempting to commit or fleeing after committing certain felonies or a felony “involving force or danger to human life” leads to a presumption that the death was caused “under circumstances manifesting extreme indifference to the value of human life.”
- 15) Both terrorism and hijacking were punished by death under the 1976 Penal Law. Terrorism and hijacking were both reintroduced as capital offenses in 2008 with amended definitions. Under the 1976 law, the law used mandatory language to impose capital punishment, did not provide alternative sentences, and mandated that the hanging would be carried out in public. Moreover, hijacking was punished by death regardless of whether death, personal injury or property damage ensued.

Recommendations: The State should:

- ✓ Ratify the Second Optional Protocol on the Covenant
- ✓ Remove any provisions in its legislation that provide for the death penalty, commute all existing death sentences and refrain from carrying out any executions.

Issue 4: Prisons and Detention Centers

- 16) The very poor conditions of prisons and detention facilities across Liberia, and the inhuman treatment of prisoners, continue to be of grave concerns. Despite some notable efforts on the side of the Government of Liberia with support from the UN and other partners especially over the last six years, violations of the rights of persons detained or incarcerated continue unabridged. Since 2011, there has been a systematic increase in the number of prisoners. As of August 2017, prisons records

¹² ICCPR 2018 National report/Liberia

across Liberia show a total number of 2,354 (1,960 in prisons and 394 in detention facilities) – the majority 1,297 (about 55%) of them being pre-trial detainees. Unfortunately, not much is being achieved to address the high prevalence of pre-trial detainees and the poor conditions of prisoners and prisons.

17) The Liberian Government, in conjunction with UN and other development partners, has taken some positive steps such as improving sanitation in Monrovia Central Prison and including prison health services in a 10-year national health and policy plan. There have been efforts to construct additional and modern prisons facilities as in the case of the Sanniquellie Prison constructed in 2010 with funding from the UNPBF and to renovate and expand existing prisons as in the case of the Gbarnga, Voinjama and Harper Central Prisons also with support from the UNPBF and the Justice and Security Trust Fund (JSTF). Some of these efforts include recruitment, training and deployment of additional Corrections Officers to the counties as well as setting up of efficient record keeping system at the Prisons to keep records of each prisoner.

18) **Recommendations:** The State should:

- ✓ Strengthen its efforts to substantially improve detention conditions by scaling up the work of the Magistrate Sitting Program to all places of detention;
- ✓ Effectively implement measures to reduce overcrowding, in particular through the promotion of alternatives to detention such as bail and house arrest;
- ✓ Provide adequate resources for prosecutors and judicial officers to undertake effective prosecution, case management and adhere to criminal procedures;
- ✓ Legalize of the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) in the court's system to work towards addressing overcrowding in Prison Facilities.

Issue 5: Discrimination against women and Gender Based-Violence

19) **Gender based violence:** The 2011 Education Law of Liberia provides that no child shall be subjected to harmful cultural practice, including FGM during school period. However, many children of school-going age continue to undergo FGM. A “National Working Group against FGM” was set up to secure the criminalization of FGM.¹³

20) However, the 53rd Parliament of Liberia struck out a criminalization clause in the Domestic Violence Act based on the culturally sensitive nature of the practice. One week to the transition in government, an Executive Order was issued by President Johnson Sirleaf seeking to ban FGM for girls under 18 years for a year. The Executive Order nonetheless, leaves room for FGM to be performed with consent from adults. The Domestic Violence Bill was passed by members of Parliament in 2017 but was not signed by the former President Sirleaf. Thus, the former President was prompted

¹³ 2019 *Liberia Domestic Violence Act (16.21)*

to issue an Executive Order on Domestic Violence prior to her departure from office. The Executive Order on Domestic Violence (Jan. 19, 2018), adopts a broad definition of what amounts to domestic violence. It is *“in general any act that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life between parties in an existing or former domestic relationship.”* According to the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection 2015 and 2016 reports, incidences of rape, ritualistic killing were on the raise.

21) **Abortion:** Young girls in Liberia are exposed to sex by age 9, and about 3 out of 10 Liberian girls get pregnant before the age of 18. The Liberian Penal Law was amended to incorporate new abortion provisions. Under Section 16.3 of the Law, the performance of abortions is prohibited except when a licensed physician believes that there is a substantial risk that continuation of the pregnancy would gravely impair the physical or mental health of the mother, or that the child would be born with a grave physical or mental defect, or that the pregnancy resulted from rape, incest, or other felonious intercourse. Intercourse with a girl under 16 years of age is forbidden and deemed felonious for the purpose of the law.

22) As a result of this law, many girls cannot legally use abortion because their pregnancies are often due to poverty or lack of information about appropriate sexual behavior. They fear to get tested due to fear of arrest, prosecution, imprisonment and stigmatization¹⁴. In order to reduce public stigma of FSW and MSM, the Independent National Human Rights Commission is working with other government agencies to raise awareness on the situation of these groups and the need for them to have increase access to health. A National Investment Plan for Building a Resilient Health System (2015-2021) was developed in 2014 to replace the National Strategic Framework 2010-2015. The Strategic Framework exists to provide an overall framework to restore the losses caused by the Ebola outbreak and to provide health security for all Liberians¹⁵. Victims of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence through government polices receive immediate treatment which includes emergency contraception, prevention and treatment of STI, prevention of tetanus, HIV post-exposure prophylaxis (ARVs) and counselling.¹⁶

Recommendations: The State Should:

- ✓ Pass the proposed Bill on FGM to criminalize this practice in line with the 2010 Universal Periodic Review recommendations;
- ✓ Undertake measures to identify and prosecute acts of violence, forced abductions and ritualistic killings by secret societies;
- ✓ Embark on national awareness raising on the rights of women and the gender roles to combat discrimination against women;
- ✓ Undertake nationwide awareness on sexual and reproductive health rights (including legal abortion) in order to forestall the commission of illegal and clandestine abortion

- ✓ Develop national action plan on Sexual and Reproductive Health Services and upscale services for young people.

Issue 6: Rights to adequate Standards of Living, work, social security, education, health and human rights

- 23) **“Rights to Health:** Girls account for less than one-half of all students and graduates in primary and secondary schools, with their proportion decreasing progressively at higher levels. Sexual harassment of girls in schools was commonplace, and adolescent girls were often denied access to school if they became pregnant. Some violations of the rights to education by government are found in Article 6 of the 1986 Liberian Constitution by the establishment of Private Partnership Program.
- 24) Though Liberia has made some efforts with the legislation of policies/laws to guarantee the protection and promotion of women, girls and children’s rights in adherence to its recommendations¹⁷ amongst which are the “2011 Education Law” which provides that no child shall be subjected to harmful cultural practice (including FGM) during school period, however, many children of school-going age continue to undergo FGM. The September 29, 2016 “Equal Representation and Participation Act” provides for exclusive seats for women, youth, and persons with disabilities in legislature, the “June 2019 Domestic Violence Law” guaranteed under Chapter 3 of the 1986 Constitution of Liberia. Women, girls and children’s rights are still being fully violated. For intense, between January to August 2019, the forceful recruitment and initiation of school aged girls into FGM practice has increased by approximately 35% in the 11 practicing Counties of Liberia (*National Working Group Against FGM January to August 2019 statistical report*). Limited adherence to policies is also preventing women having equal representations in governance with current statistic of 1 female to 29 males at the Senate, 10 females to 63 males at the House of Representative and 2 proper female Ministers being appointed under this current administration (UN Women 2019).
- 25) **Enforce Eviction.** A number of gross human rights violations and abuses have greatly affected Liberian including women, children, and girls, thereby affecting their well-being and safety. In one of the instances, over 2,000 residents of Fendall community were made homeless¹⁸ as the result of the demolition exercise¹⁹ carried out by

¹⁷ 2015 UPR 2nd cycle of Universal Periodic Review

¹⁸ April 12, 2016; Ref: www.liberianobserver.com/news/evictions-in-fendall-displace-hundreds

¹⁹ Source: www.frontpageafricaonline.com/news/2016news/fendell-residents-head-to-ecowas-court-claming-us-40M-aimed-damages

authority of the University of Liberia upon the orders or direct instruction by former President Ellen Sirleaf in a letter signed by her but the residents have sought legal redress at the ECOWAS Court sitting in Abuja, Nigeria. Ms. Viola Lincoln, the group's spokesperson, led over one hundred of her friends to unleash their anger and frustration with the delay of the court's ruling on the case with the Government of Liberia over the legitimate ownership of the land on which homes, schools, health and business centers, worth hundreds of thousands of United States dollars, were demolished.

26) According to Mrs. Lincoln, the 13th Judicial Circuit Court's judge Mardea Tarr has delayed to hand down ruling into the case since 2016 because its magnitude, its **"beyond her jurisdiction."** The court, which is situated in Kakata, Margibi County, took over the case from the Temple of Justice when an agreement could not be reached for government to produce the deed showing its ownership. "On April 19, 2016, our properties were demolished and this led us to take the matter to court. We presented our deeds and all other relevant documents granting us due ownership of our properties, but until this year in which they presented a deed dated January 3, 2018, the government could not produce any paper," she said. "The government told us that they owned the land, but when we went through the legal proceedings at the Supreme Court, the judge said our claim of ownership to the land was an eminent domain and therefore the case was transferred to Margibi County. Judge Yusuf Kabba asked the landowners from Fendall community to bring their mother deeds and these people's deeds dated back in 1933-38, but when the government was asked to present hers, there was nothing to show," Dean narrated. He said after receiving the Sixth Circuit Court's certificate from the clerk, they served the UL authorities an invitation to go before the judge to submit into evidence all documents expressing ownership, but UL submitted lately a deed said to be **"fake"** and of very recent date (January 3, 2018). With a lawsuit claiming US\$40M against the Government already filed by the homeless residents awaiting hearing and determination at the Civil Law Court "A" at the Temple of Justice, all of the residents who spoke at the meeting "We will not keep the peace while we are grieving, we need to proceed to the ECOWAS Court with this case," said one of the aggrieved residents.

Recommendations: The State should:

- ✓ Act appropriately on the plight of residents of the Fendell community force evictions victims, demolitions, threat to life and their security;
- ✓ Ensure a speedily determination by law to establish rightful owners of the land and due compensation for the properties demolished;
- ✓ Address potential negative development trends particularly leading to human rights violations as evidence of disparities for vulnerable groups;
- ✓ Support technical capacities of CSOs, local governmental and/or non-governmental partners;
- ✓ Ensures that the rights of vulnerable groups are taken into account

Issued 7: Protection of Human Rights Defenders (2015 UPR Recommendations 55)

27) From 2015 to present, human rights defenders, activists, advocates and justice campaigners have expressed concern at an apparent increase in the persecution of civil society groups, illustrated by comments from former President Sirleaf questioning their legitimacy. During her annual address in January 2014, President Sirleaf accused civil society groups of 'challenging national sovereignty' and in February, the President accused civil society of harming Liberia's economy. Cases of intimidation, harassment and molestation of the rights of activists including the media continue to take the political landscape in Liberia from 2018 to present. Moreover, government have and continue to provoke and masterminded serious attack on the media²⁰. There is no law or policies to protect human rights defenders in Liberia. Over the time human rights defenders including justice campaigners, journalists, continue to face risks of hostile environment²¹ in the country.

28) Recommendations:

- ✓ That the government and relevant institutions develop and enact specific laws and policies to recognise and protect the work of human rights defenders which give full force and effect to the international Declaration on Human Rights Defenders at national level;
- ✓ Demonstrate strong, high-level political support for HRDs through public statements by State officials – including the President – which recognize their important and legitimate work.
- ✓ Make statements and take actions to affirm the universality of human rights and condemn discrimination in the country, including on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity;
- ✓ Ensure legislation that protect human rights defenders, activists and there by support the protection for human rights defenders inside Liberia against attacks and intimidation, and ensure that those who intimidate or attack human rights defenders are brought to justice;

²⁰ <https://unmil.unmissions.org/newsletter-monday-26-march-2018>

²¹ www.dw.com/en/liberia-hostile-environment-puts-journalist-at-risks/a

ⁱ See Human Rights Commission, *Updated Set of Principles for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights through Action to Combat Impunity (Updated Principles)*, (Feb. 8, 2005), E/CN.4/2005/102/Add.1, preamble and principle 19; UN General Assembly, *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (hereinafter “ICCPR”), 1966, Art. 2(3). See also UN General Assembly Resolution 60/147, preamble and parts VII and VIII, U.N. Doc. A/RES/60/147 (Dec. 16, 2005), <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/RemedyAndReparation.aspx>.

ⁱⁱ This includes: ICCPR, *supra* 4, at Art. 2; United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, 1984, Art. 14; United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989, Art. 39; Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and Relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I) of 8 June 1977, 1977, Art. 91; and the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, 1981, Art. 7. Liberia is also a member of the International Criminal Court, which provides for the prosecution of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity by the ICC when national courts are unable or unwilling, since 2004. Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, 1998, preamble and art. 17.