World Council of Churches, Liberia Council of Churches

UPR of Liberia – Stakeholder report

<u>Curbing Violence to Ensure a Stable Society</u>

Introduction

This report is submitted by the World Council of Churches, in coalition with the Liberia Council of Churches (LCC). The LCC was established in 1982 to primarily promote Christian unity, witness and service. Throughout and following the civil war, it provided programs of mediation, advocacy, relief, and reconciliation. The LCC and the National Muslim Council of Liberia organized the Interfaith Mediation Committee which laid the groundwork for negotiations on ending the Liberian civil conflict. That inter-religious position was eventually adopted as the Liberia Peace Plan by the Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS).

The 2008 National Population and Housing Census reported that about 86% of Liberians are Christians, which places a huge responsibility on the Christian community on the maintenance of peace and stability. The membership of the LCC has been actively engaged in addressing incidences of violence and trauma through education, training and support.

The LCC is working with all national stakeholders including the Government of Liberia, church, religious and, external partners, towards:

1. The consolidation of peace and stability in Liberia
2. The strengthening of religious harmony and peaceful co-existence, and
3. Contributing to the extension and expansion of social and other services.

<u>Background</u>

Liberia was founded by freed American slaves in 1821 and declared Independence in 1847. It adopted a Republican form of government modeled on that of the United States, but with the founding of the nation came confrontations between the new settlers and existing tribal elements which were usually violent. In 1870 the country experienced the first coup with the overthrow of President Edward James Roye. Between 1980 and 1990, a series of violent actions laid the premise for the eruption of a civil war that led to the deaths of 10% of the population.

<u>The impact of conflict</u>

Over 15 years of civil war between 1989-2005, and the subsequent outbreak of the Ebola Viral Disease between 2014 and 2016 paralyzed national life, destroying social and economic fabrics and resulting in a significantly traumatized nation. The impact has especially been felt by the young people of the nation who make up more than 60% of the population, for whom the situation has been further exacerbated by the lack of opportunities.

The World Bank estimates that 9 out of every 10 persons in Liberia are without income-generating employment, and in 2016, estimated that 54% of the population was living under the poverty line (less than $2.00 per day). 18% of this figure were reported to be living in extreme poverty[1].

This in turn has led to increased incidences of sexual, gender and domestic violence, prostitution, drugs and substance abuse, especially in the streets of the nation's capital, Monrovia and other urban areas in the country. The percentage of young men and women turning to drugs and violence as a consequence of the frustration over the lack of progress in their personal lives is alarming. More ghettos are being created and more young people, suffering various forms of depression, consider communal street life - free from authority or control - as the solution to their predicament.

Sexual violence and associated mental health

In September 2010, Save the Children estimated that during the country's 14-year civil war, 50-70% of women and girls were sexually assaulted. The report further asserted that assessments on gender-based violence led by the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare and the WHO in 2005 and 2006 revealed the most common form of violence against women was rape; it accounted for 74% of the various forms of gender-based-violence carried out during the civil conflict.

Following the conflict, high rates of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) were reported by the Journal of the American Medical Association[2], including major depressive disorders and suicidal tendencies among those interviewed who had a history of sexual violence. The research estimated that based on Liberia's population, approximately 3.46 million, roughly 800,000 adults are likely to be suffering from PTSD, 750,000 adults MDD, 205,000 adults have suicidal 'ideations' and 112,000 have attempted suicide. The research concluded, not surprisingly, that given the high burden of psychiatric illnesses in the general population who may need specialist medical care for the treatment of post-traumatic stress, depression, substance abuse and sexual violence, psychiatric care should be core components of the recovery and rehabilitation program for the Liberian population.

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[1] https://data.worldbank.org/country/liberia
[2] Association of combatant status and sexual violence with health and mental health outcomes in post conflict Liberia. Journal of the American Medical Association, 300(6), 676-690

Political and electoral violence

Violence in all its shapes and forms - particularly political and electoral violence - continues to threaten the peace and stability of Liberia. Recent acts of violence have included the flogging of the Deputy Director of the Liberia National Police on July 31st 2019, at the Headquarters of the ruling Congress for Democratic Change (CDC) in Congo Town, Monrovia while trying to help calm the political tension that engulfed the Capital City, Monrovia, on that day. On the same day, the Headquarters of the Opposition "Liberty Party" and some of its members were attacked by members of the ruling CDC. This followed the defeat of the Candidate of the CDC party in a bi-election on July 29th 2019 by the Liberty Party Candidate for Senator for Montserrado County. On August 17th 2019, a rally of the Opposition Collaborating Political Parties in Electoral District 15 was attacked by a rally of elements of the ruling CDC Candidate.

Following this violence, the LCC met with church leaders and conducted a press conference condemning the acts of violence and rejecting the actions of people claiming to be acting in support of political candidates. The LCC fielded a fact-finding team to investigate the violence and established of an Ecumenical Observatory Group against violence, to protect the peace, democracy and stability of Liberia, and to enhance accountability, justice and the rule of law in the country. The group will monitor, document and report on all cases and perpetrators of violence, inciting languages, political intolerance and threats to peace, democracy and stability in the country, periodically – calling for national and international actions against perpetrators or inciters of violence.

Recommendations

The LCC makes the following recommendations:

1. The Liberian Government must take concrete steps to address violence in the country by bringing to justice perpetrators of violence and other acts of misconduct. The Government must demonstrate governing authority to protect lives and property.
2. The United Nations and the entire international community must pay more attention to developments in Liberia to avoid the country slipping again into violence and mayhem.
3. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report must be fully implementation to include actions to promote reconciliation, economic justice and lustration, and ensure that the memories of the events of the civil war are preserved.
4. Grave violations of war crimes which were committed during the civil conflict should be subject to accountability through appropriate channels.
5. An intentional collaboration between the Government of Liberia and all political parties in ensuring a violent-free environment in the country