



Liberia  
Joint Stakeholder Report for the United Nations Universal Periodic Review:  
The Death Penalty

Submitted by Rescue Alternatives Liberia,  
a non-governmental organization  
The Advocates for Human Rights

and

The World Coalition Against the Death Penalty  
for the 49th Session of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review  
Submitted April 7, 2025

**Brief Description of Organizations behind this report**

**Rescue Alternatives Liberia (RAL)** is a criminal justice system reform; death penalty abolition, and anti-torture advocacy group with membership of several national, regional, and international coalitions/networks, including Transitional Justice Working Group, West African Human Rights Defenders Networks, Pan African Human Rights Defender Networks, The World Coalition Against the Death Penalty, and International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT). RAL which was established in 1994. RAL led Liberia Coalition of Human Rights Defenders' 4th NGO submissions to international and regional mechanisms. The first was to Liberia's UPR in 2010; second, to the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) during the Liberia review, and this.

**The World Coalition Against the Death Penalty (WCADP)**, an alliance of more than 170 NGOs, bar associations, local authorities, and unions, was created in Rome on 13 May 2002. The aim of the World Coalition is to strengthen the international dimension of the fight against the death penalty. Its ultimate objective is to obtain the universal abolition of the death penalty. To achieve its goal, the World Coalition advocates for a definitive end to death sentences and executions in those countries where the death penalty is in force. In some countries, it is seeking to obtain a reduction in the use of capital punishment as a first step towards abolition.

**The Advocates for Human Rights (The Advocates)** is a volunteer-based non-governmental organization committed to the impartial promotion and protection of international human rights standards and the rule of law. Established in 1983, The Advocates conducts a range of programs to promote human rights in the United States and around the world, including monitoring and fact finding, direct legal representation, education and training, and publications. In 1991, The Advocates adopted a formal commitment to oppose the death penalty worldwide and organized a death penalty project to provide pro bono assistance on post-conviction appeals, as well as education and advocacy to end capital punishment. The Advocates

currently holds a seat on the Steering Committee of the World Coalition against the Death Penalty.

## Executive Summary

1. On 16 September 2005, Liberia acceded to the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (OP2-ICCPR). The last known execution was in 2000. However, Liberia expanded the scope of the death penalty in 2008, which was met with international criticism although the de facto moratorium on executions held. Capital punishment remains a legal penalty in Liberia. Yet, Liberia is classified as a state that is "abolitionist in practice".
2. According to Amnesty International there have been no new death sentences in Liberia since 2021. At least 16 people were estimated to be on death row at the end of 2024. In July 2022, the Senate of Liberia passed a bill to abolish the death penalty, although it remained pending in the House of Representatives until the October 2023 general elections. Following the general elections, the bill needs to be revised before being submitted again to the legislature for adoption.
3. This report recommends Liberia abolish the death penalty. This report also recommends a wide variety of short-term measures relating to the death penalty, the prohibition against torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, access to justice, and detention conditions

## I. IMPLEMENTATION OF INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS OBLIGATIONS

### Death penalty

#### **Status of Implementation: Accepted, Not Implemented**

4. In the third-cycle UPR, Liberia accepted 18 recommendations to abolish the death penalty and to remove the death penalty from the Constitution of Liberia.
5. Liberia is classified as a state that is "abolitionist in practice". The last known execution in Liberia was in 2000.
6. Liberia acceded to OP2-ICCPR on 16 September 2005. However, Liberia expanded the scope of the death penalty in 2008, which was met with international criticism. Nevertheless, executions did not resume, and the de facto moratorium on executions remains in place.
7. Capital punishment remains a legal penalty in Liberia. Offenses punishable by death include: aggravated murder; other offenses resulting in death (for example, armed robbery and mercenarism); terrorism-related offenses resulting in death, including hijacking; treason; and espionage. There is no mandatory death penalty in Liberia.

8. In July 2022, the Senate of Liberia passed “An Act to Amend Title 26 of the Liberian Codes of Law Revised, Penal Law Chapter 11, 14, 15 and 50 relating to Sentences and Death Penalty” to abolish the death penalty. It was stalled at the House of Representatives. Elected in 2023, the new government under President Joseph Boakai’s Congress for Democratic Change party is revising the bill and will resubmit it to the national legislature. A new bill will need to be tabled and voted upon both at the House of Representatives and at the Senate. On 3 March 2025, Minister of Justice Cllr. N. Oswald Tweh confirmed that there had been significant progress towards resubmitting a bill to abolish the death penalty.
9. There were no new death sentences in Liberia in 2024. There was estimated to be at least 16 people on death row at the end of 2021.

**The joint stakeholders of this report recommend the government of Liberia to:**

- Support and adopt the bill “An Act to Amend Title 26 of the Liberian Codes of Law Revised, Penal Law Chapter 11, 14, 15 and 50 relating to Sentences and Death Penalty”.

**Prohibition of torture & ill-treatment**

**Status of Implementation: Accepted, Not Implemented**

10. In the third-cycle UPR, Liberia accepted 2 recommendations to establish a national preventive mechanism according to the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and improve the living conditions of incarcerated persons in Liberia.
11. Article 21 subsection (d) of the Constitution of Liberia states, “No person charged, arrested, restricted, detained or otherwise held in confinement shall be subject to torture or inhumane treatment; nor shall any person except military personnel, be kept or confined in any military facility; nor shall any person be seized and kept among convicted prisoners or treated as a convict, unless such person first shall have been convicted of a crime in a court of competent jurisdiction. The Legislature shall make it a criminal offense and provide for appropriate penalties against any police or security officers, prosecutor, administrator or any other public official acting in contravention of this provision; and any person so damaged by the conduct of any such public official shall have a civil remedy therefor, exclusive of any criminal penalties imposed.”
12. In September 2004, Liberia acceded to the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture.
13. Article 19 of the Convention Against Torture and other Cruel, Inhumane, Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT) requires that each state party shall

submit to the Committee Against Torture, at regular intervals, a report on the measures it has taken to give effect to the provisions of the convention.

14. As part of Liberia's commitment under the CAT, the government of Liberia is preparing to submit its initial report to the Committee on Torture in April 2025. This report will detail the measures the government has undertaken to fulfil Liberia's treaty obligations, including efforts to prevent and address torture and ill-treatment in Liberia, according to the Minister of Justice, Cllr. N. Oswald Tweh.

**The joint stakeholders of this report recommend the government of Liberia to:**

- Repeal regulations permitting trials by ordeal and amend the Penal Code to criminalize the organization of such trials, which are a form of torture.
- Enact laws at the National Legislature that criminalize torture in Liberia.

### **Children: protection against exploitation**

#### **Status of Implementation: Accepted, Not Implemented**

15. In the third-cycle UPR, Liberia accepted 8 recommendations<sup>1</sup> to effectively implement the National Action Plan to combat child labor, as well as the provisions on forced labor in the Penal Code, and the provisions on mandatory primary education in the Children's Law, including girls and children with disabilities. The National Action Plan was never implemented due to a lack of political will.

16. Child labor is visible in all the concession areas as a result of bad labor practices by these concessions, coupled with a sharp increase in early and forced child marriage in some areas, often influenced by religious or traditional customs.

**The joint stakeholders of this report recommend the Independent National Commission on Human Rights of Liberia to:**

- Take ownership of the implementation of the National Action Plan in collaboration with civil society organizations and the Ministry of Justice.

### **Constitutional & legislative framework**

#### **Status of Implementation: Accepted, Not Implemented**

17. In the third-cycle UPR, Liberia accepted 3 recommendations<sup>2</sup> to bring customary law into line with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), as part of the constitutional review process.

18. The government of Liberia, as reflected in the National Legislature, has yet to harmonize the two laws (customary law and the constitution). The constitution sets the minimum legal age of marriage at 18 years old, while customary law sets the minimum legal age of marriage at 16 years old. At the same time, under the Rape Law an individual who is found guilty of having sexual relations with a victim under 18 years of age is charged with statutory rape, punishable for life imprisonment.
19. Because of the conflicting laws, people in some areas continue to practice early and forced marriage, often influenced by religious or traditional customs. This practice commonly results in reduced access to education for the girls who are forced into early marriage and also can result in complications in childbirth.

**The joint stakeholders of this report recommend the government of Liberia to:**

- Take effective measures to prohibit and eliminate child and/or forced marriage as well as all forms of child labor exploitation.
- Harmonize customary law with the Constitution to ensure that the minimum age of marriage is 18 years old.

**Conditions of detention**

**Status of Implementation: Accepted, Not Implemented**

20. In the third-cycle UPR, Liberia accepted 3 recommendations<sup>3</sup> to improve detention conditions, including to reduce prison overcrowding.
21. Since the third-cycle UPR, Liberia has established a regular monthly Human Rights in Prison Coordination Platform meeting. This platform, which brings together various stakeholders, serves as an ad-hoc National Preventive Mechanism. The platform enables coordinated efforts to address human rights concerns within Liberia's 16 prisons.
22. The Ministry of Justice continues to monitor human rights issues in prisons through the Human Rights in Prison Coordination Platform which meets monthly to discuss and address issues like poor infrastructure, overcrowding, health concerns, and limited rehabilitation programs. The Ministry of Justice recognizes that the rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders are vital to ensuring a safe and secure society. While the vision of creating a successful rehabilitation system has been hampered by limited resources, the government remains committed to improving correctional facilities.
23. The Ministry of Justice is working to recruit and train more corrections officers, refurbish and build new prison facilities, and establish Parole Board and Probation and parole systems. These efforts are part of the broader agenda in government's five-year strategic plan: an allocation of US\$150,000 to begin work at the Cheesemanburg prison, in addition to US\$450,000 for further prison renovations and US\$200,000 for the construction of the Ministry of Justice new complex. However, since Liberia accepted these recommendations, the government of Liberia has not yet improved detention conditions.

24. Prison conditions in the country are deplorable, coupled with prison overcrowding, primarily due to pre-trial detention. Prison facilities are taking more than the actual number of detainees the facilities were constructed for. Detainees/prisoners were finding it difficult to sleep freely as the prisons were congested. Some of the prison cells are leaking, and during the rainy season, detainees/prisoners are sleeping in wet cells. Clean water for detainees/prisoners to bathe is non-existent, while feeding has become very difficult for inmates as they are fed one time in a day with one cook spoon of food per person. There is no medication for detainees/prisoners. Ill inmates are living on the mercy of the almighty God. Only the Monrovia Central Prison has a Magisterial Sitting (Fast track court) for speedy trial of pre-trial detainees, but that court is not effective.
25. Prior to the submission of this report, the Monrovia Central Prison had 1,506 detained persons. Out of this number, 1,060 were in pre-trial detention while 446 inmates were sentenced, but the prison was constructed for 389 individuals.
26. The Bureau of Corrections and Rehabilitation (BCR), which is under the Ministry of Justice, does not have the capacity to manage the prison sector because it does not have a budgetary allotment.

**The joint stakeholders of this report recommend the government of Liberia to:**

- Enact a law that gives the Bureau of Corrections and Rehabilitation (BCR) an autonomous status to receive a budgetary allotment in order to better manage the prison sector properly and effectively.

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<sup>1</sup> 103.203 Carry on with the efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labour; 103.204 Take measures to eliminate all forms of child labour and to ensure that all children, including girls and children with disabilities, have access to education; 103.205 End the practice of child labour and discrimination against Ebola survivors; 103.206 Implement and enforce legislation prohibiting child labour and pursue strengthened coordination among institutions in addressing issues related to children; 103.207 Take effective measures to prohibit and eliminate child and/or forced marriage as well as all forms of child labour exploitation; 103.208 Thoroughly investigate and enforce existing regulations on incidents of forced child labour and increase criminal penalties to better deter the recruitment, employment or facilitation of such labour; 103.209 Effectively implement the national action plan to combat child labour and enforce the provisions on forced labour in the Penal Code and the provisions on mandatory primary education in the Children's Law; 103.210 Take further measures to prevent child labour and child exploitation.

<sup>2</sup> 103.22 Bring customary law into line with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; 103.36 Ensure that the constitutional review process considers human rights standards as a basis for the proposed constitutional amendments; 103.37 Continue with the ongoing constitutional reforms in line with international best practices and obligations.

<sup>3</sup> 103.78: Strengthen efforts to bring all prisons in Liberia into full compliance with the international obligations of Liberia; 103.79: Reduce prison overcrowding and improve prison conditions and; 103.80: Take the necessary measures to improve detention conditions in prisons.