

Liberia

The Wayamo Foundation and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung retrace the key events in the search for accountability for international crimes committed in Liberia during the first and second civil wars between 1989–1996 and 1999–2003.



APR. 1980

Samuel Doe comes to power through a coup

Master Sergeant Samuel Doe carries out a military coup against President William Tolbert Jr who is executed. Doe establishes a People's Redemption Council and suspends the constitution. He presides over a repressive government for a decade.

Samuel Doe © Wikimedia, CC BY-SA 4.0
William Tolbert, Jr in 1976 © Wikimedia, CC BY-SA 4.0

24 DEC. 1989

Start of the first civil war in Liberia

Charles Taylor and his Libya-trained, National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) rebels invade Liberia from Côte d'Ivoire in an attempt to overthrow Doe.

National Patriotic Front of Liberia soldiers in Monrovia in 1990
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AUG. 1990

ECOMOG sent to Liberia in attempt to implement ceasefire

ECOWAS sends a peacekeeping force to Liberia known as the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG). This marks the beginning of a long peacekeeping effort that is later taken over by the United Nations.

Nigerian ECOMOG troops near Monrovia, Liberia © SSGT. Paul R. Caron U.S. Air Force

SEPT. 1990

President Samuel Doe tortured and killed

Samuel Doe is captured and brutally killed by the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL), a breakaway rebel group of the NPFL. The fighting between warring parties continues.

Nigerian ECOMOG troops near Monrovia, Liberia © SSGT. Paul R. Caron U.S. Air Force

17 AUGUST 1996

Peace accords end first civil war

After several peace accords are signed and broken, the "Abuja II" peace accords eventually end the war. The accords call for a ceasefire, disarmament of combatants, free and fair elections, and sanctions for non-compliance.

17 JULY 1997

Charles Taylor wins election to become President of Liberia

Taylor wins election with more than 75% of the vote. Elections are held under the implicit threat that the fighting would resume, were he to lose the vote.

Portrait of Charles Taylor
© Thierry Ehrmann, Flickr, CC BY 2.0

1999–2003

Second civil war in Liberia

In 1999, attacks by rebels who identify themselves as Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) begin. By 2003, LURD controls the north, while the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (Model), controls the south. Government forces are pinned down to one final stronghold, Monrovia.

Rebel fighters during the Second Liberian Civil War
© James G. Antal, R. John Vanden Bergh, Public Domain

JUNE 2003

Peace Talks held in Accra, Ghana, indictment against Taylor unsealed

Charles Taylor agrees to participate in peace talks in Ghana aimed at ending the civil war. While he is in Ghana, the Office of the Prosecutor of the Special Court for Sierra Leone unseals a 17-count indictment accusing Taylor of war crimes and crimes against humanity over his alleged backing of rebels in Sierra Leone. Ghana declines to arrest Taylor and he returns to Liberia.

11 AUGUST 2003

Charles Taylor accepts offer of asylum in Nigeria

Taylor agrees to step down as president and hands over power to vice-president Moses Blah. Taylor leaves Liberia for exile in Calabar, Nigeria. Blah serves the remainder of Taylor's term before handing over power to a transitional interim government.

18 AUGUST 2003

Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed

The parties to the conflict sign the comprehensive peace agreement bringing an end to the second civil war. The agreement provides for an intervention force to monitor the ceasefire, calls for the establishment of a TRC, and provides for the establishment of a two-year transitional government, among other measures. Elections are scheduled to occur no later than October 2005.

NOV. 2005

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf elected president of Liberia

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf becomes the first woman to be elected as an African head of state. She begins an ambitious program to rebuild a nation ravaged by war.

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, President of the Republic of Liberia
© Cia Pak, UN Photo CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

FEB. 2006

Truth and Reconciliation Commission inaugurated

President Sirleaf inaugurates the TRC commission with a mandate to investigate gross violations of human rights and international humanitarian law among other egregious crimes committed in Liberia between January 1979 and 14 October 2003.

TRC hearings in 2008
© TRC of Liberia

MAR. - APR. 2006

Charles Taylor arrested and transferred to the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL)

Following international pressure, Nigerian authorities arrest Taylor as he attempts to flee the country. He is flown to Liberia and promptly handed over to the SCSL, where he pleads not guilty to an amended 11-count indictment. He is later transferred to The Hague where his trial is held.

The UN Security Council approved the transfer of Taylor to The Hague
© Zack Lee, Flickr CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

9 JANUARY 2009

Charles Taylor's son sentenced to 97 years in prison on torture charges

Charles McArthur Emmanuel, also known as Chuckie Taylor, was arrested in 2006 for a passport violation and indicted on torture, firearms and conspiracy charges. He was convicted in 2008 for the indicted crimes, which he committed while he was the commander of the Anti-Terrorist Unit between 1999 and 2003 in Liberia.

29 JUN. 2009

Liberian TRC submits final report

The TRC submits its report to parliament, recommends persons who ought to be prosecuted, lists others who should be barred from public office, among other recommendations to promote justice, national reconciliation and healing.

The Capitol Building in Monrovia
© David Stanley, Flickr CC BY 2.0

6 FEB. 2012

George Boley convicted on immigration charges in the US

Following his arrest on 15 January 2010, ex-Liberian Peace Council leader Boley is convicted for US immigration offences. The conviction marked the first time the use of child soldiers had been used as a grounds for removal from the US. He was deported to Liberia one month later. Boley won a seat in the Liberian legislature in the 2017 elections.

A child soldier of the Liberian rebel group LURD
© United States Army, Public Domain

26 APR. 2012–30 MAY 2012

Charles Taylor convicted for international crimes

The SCSL finds Taylor guilty on all eleven counts of war crimes, crimes against humanity and other serious violations of IHL for planning, aiding and abetting crimes committed by rebel forces in Sierra Leone. He is sentenced to 50 years imprisonment the following month, to be served in the UK. The decision is upheld on appeal.

Former President of Liberia, Charles Taylor, at the Special Court for Sierra Leone © SCSL

OCT. 2013

Launch of national Palava Hut program

President Sirleaf launches the "Palava Hut Program", a traditional conflict resolution mechanism through which victims get the opportunity to confront perpetrators in public hearings. The aim of the program is to provide an avenue for reintegration, reconciliation and community-based atonement.

President Sirleaf, Tawakel Karman and Leymah Gbowe receiving the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize
© Marta B. Haga, Utenrikksdepartementet CC BY-ND 2.0

17 SEPTEMBER 2014

Suspected NPFL commander arrested by Belgian authorities

Martina Johnson is under investigation in Belgium for suspected Crimes Against Humanity committed during the first Liberian Civil War, while she was alleged to be a commander of the NPFL.

21 APRIL 2017

Arms dealer sentenced in absentia by Dutch Court

Guus Van Kouwenhoven, a Dutch businessman, was sentenced in absentia to 19 years imprisonment by the Dutch Court of Appeal for aiding and abetting war crimes, breaching UN sanctions and involvement in arms trafficking during the second Liberian civil war. Kouwenhoven fled to South Africa where he has been fighting extradition proceedings since.

1 JUNE 2017

Charles Taylor's ex-wife arrested in the UK

Agnes Reeves Taylor, ex-wife to former president Charles Taylor is arrested in the UK and charged with torture and conspiracy to commit torture, allegedly committed while she was a member of the NPFL during the first Liberian civil war.

26 DEC. 2017

George Weah elected president

Weah wins the presidential run-off, marking the first time there is a peaceful transfer of power from a democratically elected president to the next in decades. Charles Taylor's ex-wife Jewel Taylor, Weah's running mate, becomes vice president.

George Weah, a former footballer
© U.S. Embassy in Monrovia, Wikimedia CC BY 2.0

19 APR. 2018

ULIMO-K commander convicted in the US

Mohammed Jabbateh (ULIMO-K) is convicted in the US on fraud and perjury charges relating to his asylum application, where prosecutors had to prove rape, torture, etc. as part of immigration proceedings. He is sentenced to 30 years in prison, which is upheld on appeal in 2020.

Jabbateh, also known as "Jungle Jabbah"
© Civitas Maxima Twitter, CC BY 2.0

23 JULY 2018

Swiss NGO launches complaint against ULIMO commander for torture

Swiss NGO Civitas Maxima launches a complaint against Kunti Kumara, former ULIMO commander before the Office of the Prosecutor in Paris. He is arrested 3 months later on 4 September 2018.

SEPTEMBER 2019

Weah seeks guidance on implementation of TRC report

Weah submits a letter to the national legislature seeking guidance on legislative and other measures that would see the implementation of the TRC report, including the establishment of the Economic and War Crimes Court.

6 DEC. 2019

Agnes Reeves Taylor released

The Central Criminal Court in the UK dismisses all charges in torture trial against Agnes Reeves Taylor on the grounds that she was not acting in an official capacity at the time she was alleged to have committed crimes, a prerequisite of the 1988 UK Criminal Justice Act.

The statue of Justice on the roof of the Old Bailey in London
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12 APRIL 2020

Juantee Thomas Smith Woewiyu dies

Woewiyu dies of Covid-19 in the US while awaiting sentencing. He was convicted on 3 July 2018 by a US court for immigration related offences relating to his application for naturalisation as a US citizen. He had been charged with fraud and making false statements about his membership in the NPFL during the civil war.

26 NOVEMBER 2020

Kunti Kumara to stand trial for torture in France

Investigative judge orders Kumara be sent for trial for crimes related to torture and barbaric acts.

1 FEBRUARY 2021

Trial against former RUF spokesman opens in Finland

Gibril Massaquoi, a Sierra Leonean national and former SCSL informant is accused of involvement in mass atrocities in Liberia. He is arrested on 10 March 2020 in Finland.

18 JUNE 2021

ULIMO commander convicted for war crimes in Switzerland

Allieu Kosiah, a former ULIMO commander was charged with 25 counts of war crimes allegedly committed in Lofa County, Liberia between 1993 and 1996. His trial marks the first time a Liberian is convicted for war crimes under universal jurisdiction. He is sentenced to 20 years in prison.

JUNE 2021

Transitional Justice Commission

Liberian Senate recommends that the president establish a Transitional Justice Commission.

15 SEPTEMBER 2021

AFL commander found liable for committing war crimes and crimes against humanity in US civil court

Moses Thomas, a former colonel in the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL), is found liable for torture, extrajudicial killing, and attempted extrajudicial killing under the Torture Victim Protection Act, as well as for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment under the Alien Tort Statute. The four plaintiffs in the case were survivors of a church massacre that occurred during the Liberian civil war on 29 July 1990. Thomas left the United States and returned to Liberia in 2019.