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# GUINEA

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## Republic of Guinea

**Population:** 8.4 million (4.2 million under 18)

**Government armed forces:** 9,700

**Compulsory recruitment age:** 18 (but not enforced in practice)

**Voluntary recruitment age:** 18

**Voting age:** 18

**Optional Protocol:** not signed

**Other treaties ratified** (see glossary):

CRC, GC AP I and II, ICC, ILO 138, ILO 182; ACRWC

***Children as young as 15 were recruited to government militias in 2001 and 2002.***

***By 2004 most members were over 18.***

***Guinea provided support to a Liberian armed political group, Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), which recruited children in Guinea, often forcibly. The Sierra Leonean armed group, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), reportedly abducted Guinean children.***

***Programs for the demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers began in December 2002.***

## Context

Despite being gravely ill, incumbent President Lansana Conté contested and won presidential elections in December 2003 that were reportedly rigged and were boycotted by opposition parties. The European Union refused to monitor or fund parliamentary or presidential elections, in anticipation of large-scale irregularities. In November 2003 suspected government opponents in the armed forces and civilians were arrested following rumours of an attempted coup.<sup>1</sup> A number of violent demonstrations took place during 2003, largely in protest at price increases.

Tens of thousands of refugees fleeing conflicts within the region continued to arrive in Guinea, which by March 2004 was hosting about 110,000, most from Liberia. Other refugees and over 100,000 Guineans in Côte d'Ivoire were forced by violence and fear of persecution to seek safety in Guinea in 2003.<sup>2</sup> The rights of refugees were not respected.<sup>3</sup>

The use of Guinea as a rear base by Sierra Leonean and Liberian armed political groups, and Guinea's involvement in conflicts in the region, led to ever-widening recruitment of child soldiers and the proliferation of small arms. Human rights groups and others, including the UN Panel of Experts on Liberia, frequently reported on the

support given to LURD by the Guinean authorities and military. Guinea repeatedly denied that it was a supply route for arms in violation of the UN arms embargo against Liberia.<sup>4</sup> The Panel accused LURD of recruiting in Guinea and other countries, and expressed concern at the link between arms trafficking and the diamond trade.<sup>5</sup> In May 2003 the Liberian authorities and fleeing civilians reported that Guinean troops were fighting alongside LURD in Liberia, an accusation denied by the Guinean authorities.<sup>6</sup>

Guinean peacekeepers in Sierra Leone allegedly facilitated the flow of weapons to LURD in early 2003. In mid-2003, munitions imported by Guinea from Iran were forwarded to LURD. In 2002, weapons that Guinea had received from the United Arab Emirates were also reportedly forwarded to LURD. Guinea received considerable US military aid despite its support for LURD and its involvement in the region's conflicts,<sup>7</sup> and in May 2003, one month before LURD's attack on the Liberian capital Monrovia, despite Guinean support of LURD which was well documented including by the UN Panel of Experts, the UN Security Council under US pressure refused to extend the arms embargo to Guinea. The deliberate blindness of the international community to Guinean support and hosting of LURD was a major factor in the recruitment of child soldiers and forcing of girls into sexual servitude in both Liberia and Guinea.<sup>8</sup> Only in August 2003, after LURD had reached Monrovia, with weapons supplied by Guinea, did the US authorities officially ask Guinea to end its support for LURD.<sup>9</sup>

In several instances RUF fighters abducted Guinean women and children and took them to Sierra Leone. Refugee camps in Guinea were also attacked by RUF fighters during 2002.<sup>10</sup> RUF incursions in 2000 and 2001 caused between 150,000 and 180,000 people to be displaced.<sup>11</sup>

Guinea reportedly supported the Côte d'Ivoire government in its activities in opposition to Liberia. At the same time, Guineans were said to have joined armed opposition groups in Côte d'Ivoire.<sup>12</sup> It was not known whether these groups included child soldiers.

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## Government

### National recruitment legislation and practice

The 1990 *Loi fondamentale* (constitution) states that international treaties take precedence over Guinean law. Under Order No. 072/PRG/SGG/90 of 25 June 1990, all Guinean citizens between the ages of 18 and 25 may be called to military service for 18 months (Article 1).<sup>13</sup> While conscription is provided for in law there is no military service and conscription is enforced only in times of need.<sup>14</sup>

Guinean law and army regulations prohibit the recruitment of under-18s into the armed forces.

However, very few people have birth certificates, and under-18s may be recruited. In some cases, impoverished parents and community leaders reportedly encourage under-18s to apply to the armed forces.<sup>15</sup>

### Child soldier use

From September 2000 to February 2001, up to 9,000 children and young adults responded to a patriotic appeal to defend Guinea against the increased threat from Sierra Leonean incursions and fighters. They were recruited into militias known as the *Jeunes volontaires* (Young Volunteers), operating under the Ministry of Defence. Militia members acted as lookouts, cooks and porters for the regular armed forces, helped clear the bush and took part in combat. Some were reported to be as young as 15 at the time of recruitment, although only a minority were still under 18 by March 2004.<sup>16</sup> From 2002 onwards militia activities substantially decreased and by March 2004 militia members had largely returned home, been incorporated into the armed forces or demobilized.

### Government support for LURD

As LURD's activities intensified in Liberia from 2002, it recruited children as young as 13 in refugee camps in Guinea and at the Guinean border, where they were conscripted with other refugees and forced to carry arms and ammunition from Guinea into Liberia. The Guinean military was largely complicit in this recruitment, although in some instances members of the Guinean security forces prevented it. Children as young as ten years old carried LURD commanders' personal belongings or other provisions back to Liberia from Guinea. Adolescent girls were reported to have been forcibly taken from refugee camps, raped or kept as sex slaves and later returned to the camps.<sup>17</sup> LURD was reported to have placed family members in Kouankan, Guinea's largest refugee camp, where it maintained an openly armed presence and it continued to return there for rest and recreation, stocks and new recruits.<sup>18</sup>

LURD child soldiers, often under the influence of drugs given them by their commanders, witnessed and participated in killings and rapes of civilians in Liberia. In June 2003 LURD pledged to end the recruitment of child soldiers and demobilize those in its ranks, but appeared to take no action to this end.<sup>19</sup> At the end of March 2004 LURD was reported to be present in Kouankan camp and in Nzerekore and Macenta towns, and still recruiting child refugees.<sup>20</sup>

## Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR)

In November 2003 some 2,000 Guinean child soldiers, believed to include about 400 girls and child soldiers returning from Liberia, were estimated to require demobilization and reintegration.<sup>21</sup>

In March 2004 UNICEF reported that 348 Young Volunteers had finished their vocational training as part of a demobilization and reintegration program. A further 6,200 Young Volunteers, many of whom had been recruited as children, had been identified in military garrisons across the country, largely posted at roadblocks. Despite the risk of their recruitment into armed political groups in the region or their potentially destabilizing role within Guinea, a program for their demobilization and reintegration had not been implemented due to lack of funds. Other Young Volunteers had reportedly left the militia or joined armed political groups within the region.<sup>22</sup> Training had taken place for officers and local leaders on the Optional Protocol with the aim of preventing further recruitment of children, leading to the creation of a child protection committee in each of the country's four military regions. UNICEF expressed concern that underfunding could jeopardize the program.<sup>23</sup>

\* see glossary for information about internet sources

- 1 Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l'Homme (FIDH), *Guinée: Une démocratie virtuelle, un avenir incertain*, No. 386, April 2004, <http://www.fidh.org>.
- 2 UNICEF, *Guinea donor update*, 8 March 2004, <http://www.reliefweb.int>.
- 3 *Amnesty International Report 2003*, <http://web.amnesty.org/library/engindex>.
- 4 Report of UN Panel of Experts on Liberia, UN Doc. S/2003/498, 24 April 2003, <http://www.un.org/documents>.
- 5 Report of UN Panel of Experts on Liberia, UN Doc. S/2002/470, 19 April 2002.
- 6 Alphonso Toweh, "Liberia says Guinean troops join rebels in battle", Reuters, 19 May 2003.
- 7 Human Rights Watch (HRW), *Weapons sanctions, military supplies and human suffering: Illegal arms flows to Liberia and the June-July 2003 shelling of Monrovia*, Briefing Paper, 3 November 2003, <http://www.hrw.org>.
- 8 Confidential source, Guinea, June 2004.
- 9 International Crisis Group (ICG), *Guinée: Incertitudes autour d'une fin de règne*, Africa Report No. 74, 19 December 2003; *Liberia: Security challenges*, Africa Report No. 71, 3 November 2003, <http://www.crisisweb.org>.
- 10 *Amnesty International Report 2002*, Sierra Leone.
- 11 Confidential source, Guinea, May 2004.
- 12 ICG, *Guinée: Incertitudes autour d'une fin de règne*, op. cit.

- 13 The question of conscientious objection to military service, Report of the UN Secretary-General to UN Commission on Human Rights, UN Doc. E/CN.4/1997/99, 16 January 1997, <http://www.ohchr.org>. Other sources state that military service lasts for 24 months.
- 14 Confidential source, Guinea, May 2004.
- 15 Confidential source, Guinea, May 2004.
- 16 Confidential source, Guinea, May 2004.
- 17 IRIN, "Liberia: Preparing for the transition from war to normal life", 12 December 2003, <http://www.irinnews.org>; HRW, *Liberian refugees in Guinea: Refoulement, militarization of camps, and other protection concerns*, November 2002.
- 18 Confidential source, Guinea, May 2004.
- 19 HRW, *How to fight, how to kill: Child soldiers in Liberia*, February 2004.
- 20 Confidential source, Guinea, May 2004.
- 21 UNICEF, *A window on West Africa's war-weary children*, 4 November 2003.
- 22 Confidential source, Guinea, May 2004.
- 23 UNICEF, *Guinea donor update*, op. cit.