



Liberia 2011 OSAC Crime and Safety Report

Counterfeiting; Crime; Cyber; Elections; Extortion; Fraud; Information Security; Stolen items; Other; Terrorism; Theft; Threats

Africa > Liberia > Monrovia

4/27/2011

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Crime Threats

Monrovia is rated a high threat post for crime, much of which can be attributed to desperation, although there are a few criminal gangs whose activities are more or less organized. The vast majority of crime that occurs in Monrovia is “crimes of opportunity” like pick pocketing, snatch-and-grabs, and scams. Cyber crime appears to be on the increase, as the embassy security office has been receiving reports of theft of information from individual using WiFi at various hotels, restaurants, and residential areas.

Travelers are cautioned when visiting the areas of greater Monrovia known as Red Light, Waterside, Congo Town, ELWA Junction, and all market areas. These areas are extremely crowded with a lot of petty crime. These areas should be avoided after dark.

Road Safety

Road conditions in Monrovia have improved greatly in 2010 but remain underdeveloped in many counties outside of Monrovia. Traveling outside the city requires four-wheel drive, and during the six-month rainy season, many roads are impassible and many small towns and villages inaccessible. Due to infrastructure problems, street lights can be found only in certain parts of the city and virtually none outside the city. Also, traffic signals and signs are nonexistent. Driving in and around Monrovia can be challenging as drivers do not obey the rules of the road, often driving very irresponsible. Pedestrians can also cause problems, as they will dart across the streets and roadways. Traffic accidents are the single greatest danger in and around Monrovia.

Political Violence



Historical Perspective

Liberia has emerged from 14 years of civil war and is still a fragile, but functioning, country. The atmosphere in the country is calm. No specific or credible information is available to suggest that American citizens or U.S. facilities are specifically targeted, although periodically disgruntled groups march to the embassy to petition to have their complaints heard. Many Liberians consider themselves to be descendants of freed American slaves; therefore, all things American are typically embraced by Liberians.

Regional Terrorism and Organized Crime

Liberia and its neighboring countries have not faced any terrorist-related activity. However, organized crime does exist with connections to Nigeria, Ghana, and parts of Europe. Trafficking in precious metals/diamonds, counterfeit commercial goods, and currency are commonplace. Some Nigerians and Ghanaians living in Liberia operate advance fee scams. Liberia is one of the few West African countries that is not considered a main transshipment point for drug trafficking.

International or Transnational Terrorism

U.S. Embassy Monrovia has not received or developed any information that would suggest that there are operational elements or personnel linked to international or transnational terrorist groups. Like many West African countries, Lebanese Hezbollah has a commercial footprint in Liberia. Lebanese nationals with ties to Hezbollah are involved in many business ventures to include the importing and selling of vehicles and other everyday commodities. Although Liberia's borders are porous, its ports poorly maintained and monitored, and its airport below internationally accepted security standards, terrorists are not believed to be targeting Liberia.

The banking system is weak, but bank supervision is improving (with help from the U.S. Treasury and International Monetary Fund) and there is no evidence that banks operating in Liberia are being used to transfer funds to or from terrorist organizations.

Civil Unrest

Liberia is still a fragile country that has numerous opposition groups that oppose the current government. Occasionally there are anti-government protests, but these protests are monitored by the United Nations Police force and often end quietly. As a precautionary safety



measure, the RSO recommends that all protest /demonstrations be avoided. Liberia will hold its national presidential elections on October 15, 2011.

Post-Specific Concerns

Monrovia has limited electric service, a very limited piped water system, and no landline telephone service. The embassy generates its own electricity and supplies its own water by tanker truck or a reverse osmosis plant on the premises. Cell phone service is available and generally reliable.

Environmental Hazards

Monrovia receives approximately 200 inches of rain annually. It has a six-month rainy season (May–October). The heavy rains contribute to rapid deterioration of the roads, both paved and unpaved. The heavy rain fall damages many roads and bridges across the country, making them impassable. In the city, some flooding occurs due to the lack of adequate sewer systems. The heavy rains also can become health (mold) and maintenance problems.

Industrial and Transportation Accidents

Industrial accidents are very rare; however, vehicle accidents are very common, especially in Monrovia and on the highway to the airport. Contributing factors are: motorists who do not obey the few traffic laws that do exist, the police who are unable to enforce them, the high volume of motorcyclist, and the sparse street lighting. Compounded by the fact that vehicles drive at a very high rate of speed, a large number of those vehicles are in poor condition and unsafe. Accidents are commonplace and often result in deaths. Embassy personnel are prohibited from using local taxis, jitney cabs, or buses, which are all poorly maintained and can foster crimes of opportunity.

Kidnappings

Kidnappings are very atypical in Liberia.

Drugs and Narcoterrorism

Illegal drugs are present in Liberia as marijuana is grown for local consumption only. Harder drugs can be found as individuals from neighboring West African countries engage in small quantities of cocaine and heroin trafficking.



Police Response

The Liberia National Police (LNP) is a force of 3,800 officers and services a total estimated population of about 3.5 million, over 1.5 million of whom live in Greater Monrovia. Despite the Liberia National Police (LNP) being retrained under the United Nations Mission in Liberia, and, to a lesser degree recently, the U.S. government, the LNP's ability to provide assistance is very limited. The LNP lack the resources (training, vehicles, communication, money and management) to be an effective deterrent to crime. Except for a few small special units, the police are generally unarmed and operate without basic equipment such as vehicles and radio communications. UNMIL has 8,200 troops deployed, as well as several Foreign Police Units (FPU). UNMIL shoulders the primary responsibility for safety and security in Liberia.

Corruption hinders the development of the police, as bribes and extortion are frequent. Many criminal incidents are unsuccessfully investigated, removing any hope of an arrest or recovery of property.

U.S. Embassy Switchboard	+23177054826 (Business Hours)
U.S. Embassy Marine Post One	+23177515851 (After Hours)
U.S. Embassy Duty Officer	+23177207326

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

American citizens should call the LNP Operations Center at +2314800117 or +23177550940. However, the ability of the police to actually respond is very limited. Therefore, the embassy should be contacted for assistance in an emergency.

Medical Emergencies

Medical facilities are poorly equipped and staffed and are generally incapable of providing even basic services. Medicines are scarce, and some are counterfeit and distributed beyond their expiration date. Doctors, clinics, and hospitals expect immediate cash payment for health services often before rendering services.

Contact Information for Local Hospitals and Clinics:

Hospitals
JFK MEDICAL CENTER



Contact Person: Lawrence Sherman, MD
Address: Tubman Blvd., Congo Town, Liberia
Office Phone: (231) 06-578-615

ST. JOSEPH'S CATHOLIC HOSPITAL

Contact Person: Lily Sanvee, MD
Address: Tubman Blvd., opposite 2nd Old Road Junction, Congo Town
Office Phone: (231) 06-226-207
Other Phone: (231) 06-550-617

ELWA HOSPITAL

Contact Person: Richard Sacra, MD
Address: ELWA Junction, Paynesville, towards Roberts International Airport
Office Phone: (231) 05-663-131
Other Phone: (231) 06-513-411

Clinics

SOS Clinic

Contact Person: Theophile Houndekon, MD
Address: SOS Clinic, Congo Town
Office Phone: (231) 06-580-432

Local Dentist

Contact Person: Hassan Ezzedine, DDS
Address: Randall Street, by DITCO
Office Phone: (231) 06-510-565

In the event of a serious emergency, medical evacuation is recommended, and medical evacuation insurance is strongly recommended for those not covered by their employer.

Air Ambulance Services

Name of Organization: International SOS Air Ambulance Service (ISOS)
Contact Person: Dirk Loreth, ISOS Aviation Manager Europe, Middle East and Africa
Address: From Frankfurt, Johannesburg, Accra or Dakar
Office Phone: +49-6102-3588-453/+49-172-7666923/+33-1-5563-3155
Emergency Phone: +49-6102-358-8100 (EUR) or +011-215-245-4707 (USA)
Alarm Center: Frankfurt-(49) 6102-358-8100/Paris-(33) 155-633-155/Europe-(44)



20-8762-8008

Services Available: Medical Emergency Assistance/Stabilization

Probable Response Time: From 4 to 24 hours depending on the city of departure

Vaccinations & Risk of Disease

Malaria is prevalent and travelers should consult their physician for anti-malaria medication. All travelers must have up-to-date immunizations and a yellow fever vaccination in their shot record.

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Many situations can be avoided as long as the traveler takes simple precautions: maintaining a high level of situational awareness, avoiding poorly lit areas, and being wary of people. Street vendors attempting to sell their wares and beggars will often surround travelers especially in and around the central market area. This is occasionally used as a distraction technique for pickpockets and other petty thieves. These precautions apply throughout Monrovia.

Counterfeit U.S. currency and other money scams are common (Nigerian advanced fee fraud). While money changers operate on the street, visitors are encouraged to use the formal banking system. Liberia uses U.S. dollars. Most prices in hotels and restaurants are denominated in U.S. dollars. Liberia also has a local currency (Liberian dollars). The exchange rate has fluctuated between 65 and 70 Liberian to one U.S. dollar. Credit cards are accepted at various hotels and shops, but the Regional Security Office discourages their use and recommends travelers use only cash. Wire transfers through Western Union or MoneyGram are available. Several banks in Monrovia provide wire transfer services and will accept traveler's checks.

American citizens should have valid visas prior to traveling to Liberia. Airport visas are not issued except in extraordinary circumstances and by pre-arrangement. American citizens traveling to Liberia should consult the Department of State's Country Specific Information (CSI) for more information and register with the U.S. Embassy Consular Section upon arrival or on-line at <https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs/ui/>

Contact Information

The embassy is located at 111 United Nations Drive, Mamba Point, Monrovia, Liberia.



The U.S. Embassy: +231-77-054826 or fax: +231-77-010370.

The Regional Security Officer: ext. 1270/1271/1272.

Medical Unit: ext. 1360/1361

Consular Affairs: ext. 1492/1491

Political/Economic Sections: ext. 1207/1708/1280/1206

MSG Post One: +231-077-515851

U.S. Embassy Duty Officer: +231-077231-673

Consular Section Website: <http://travel.state.gov>

U.S. Embassy Monrovia Website: <http://monrovia.usembassy.gov>

After-hours, any member of the embassy can be contacted via Post One (24 Hour Marine Guard) at ext. 1250.

OSAC Country Council Contact Information

The Monrovia Country Council is currently inactive. The nearest is the Accra Country Council in Ghana.

OSAC constituents may reach out to the RSO for information related to OSAC:

RSO Christopher J. Gillis at +231-77-054-826 ext. 1272

ARSO Kip Aber at +231-77-054-826 ext. 1271