



# Global Nonviolent Action Database

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## Liberian women act to end civil war, 2003

**Time period notes:** *Although the women did not officially end their mass action campaign until the elections of 2005, and the group continued their pressure for peace and democracy until that point, the beginning of the disarmament process in December 2003 is considered the end of the peace campaign here.*

April 1,  
2003

to: December  
2003

**Country:** Liberia

**Country:** Ghana

**Location City/State/Province:** *Monrovia, Liberia and Accra, Ghana*

**Goals:**

An end to the civil war fighting in Liberia

## Methods

**Methods in 1st segment:**

- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 011. Records, radio, and television
- 015. Group lobbying
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 019. Wearing of symbols
- 020. Prayer and worship
- 021. Delivering symbolic objects
- 034. Vigils
- 037. Singing
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 057. Lysistratic nonaction › Sex strike

**Methods in 2nd segment:**

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 013. Deputations
- 015. Group lobbying
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 019. Wearing of symbols
- 020. Prayer and worship

- 037. Singing
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 057. Lysistratic nonaction › Sex strike
- 162. Sit-in

**Methods in 3rd segment:**

- 005. Declarations of indictment and intention
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 013. Deputations
- 015. Group lobbying
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 019. Wearing of symbols
- 020. Prayer and worship
- 022. Protest disrobings › Threatened
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 048. Protest meetings
- 057. Lysistratic nonaction › Sex strike
- 162. Sit-in
- 171. Nonviolent interjection
- 199. Nonviolent confinement

**Methods in 4th segment:**

- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 020. Prayer and worship
- 037. Singing
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

**Methods in 5th segment:**

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications

**Methods in 6th segment:**

- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 011. Records, radio, and television

**Notes on Methods:**

After segment 3, the focus of the campaign shifted because the peace agreement had been signed. This also meant a slight shift in methods at this point to protect the peace agreement. Methods for this period are not well known from sources used.

## Classifications

**Classification:**

Change

**Cluster:**

Democracy  
Human Rights  
Peace

**Group characterization:**

- Liberian women

## Leaders, partners, allies, elites

**Leaders:**

Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace (WLMAP) led by Leymah Gbowee, Asatu Bah Kenneth, Etweda “Sugars” Cooper, and Vaiba Flomo

**Partners:**

Janet Johnson Bryant (a journalist), Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET), Liberia Women Initiative (LWI)

**External allies:**

UN Peacekeeping Force

**Involvement of social elites:**

Thabo Mbeki (President of South Africa), General Abdulsalami Abubakar (chief mediator and former President of Ghana)

## Joining/exiting order of social groups

**Groups in 1st Segment:**

**Groups in 2nd Segment:**

- General Abdulsalami Abubakar
- Thabo Mbeki

**Groups in 3rd Segment:**

- UN Peacekeeping Force

**Groups in 4th Segment:**

**Groups in 5th Segment:**

**Groups in 6th Segment:**

**Segment Length:** *Approximately 1.5 months*

## Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

**Opponents:**

President Charles Taylor and his military forces, Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), and Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL).

**Nonviolent responses of opponent:**

Not Known

**Campaigner violence:**

Not Known

**Repressive Violence:**

Not Known

## Success Outcome

### Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

6 points out of 6 points

### Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

### Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

### Notes on outcomes:

The Liberian women brought peace to their country by forcing their President and the rebel factions to attend peace talks, pushing the signing of the peace agreement, and placing pressure on the transitional government to hold fair and democratic elections.

The women's campaign survived despite great hardships, including threat of violence, and lasted until the democratic elections were over and their goal was met.

The Liberian women's peace campaign grew from several hundred woman at the outset to thousands more women as the campaign continued. Women from displacement camps and local villages outside Monrovia joined the first members, bringing the total of the group to over several thousand.

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In 2000, Liberia's second civil war broke out. Liberian President Charles Taylor and his military forces, who had taken over Liberia in 1989 during the first civil war, experienced attacks from the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD). LURD consisted of various anti-Taylor militant groups led by warlords who were not given a role in Taylor's government. By 2002, over 200,000 individuals had died in the conflict. In 2003 yet another anti-Taylor rebel group, the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL), joined the fight to rid Liberia of the Taylor regime.

As the war raged throughout the countryside, soldiers on both sides of the conflict looted and burned villages, raped women, and recruited young boys to fight. Thousands of individuals fled their homes and made their way to Monrovia, the capital of Liberia, where they lived in camps without much food or drinking water.

In reaction to the conflict, social worker Leymah Gbowee decided to bring women from her church together to protest the war. (Gbowee was to win the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011.) First appealing to the Lutheran Church to which she belonged, Gbowee recruited several hundred Christian women to pray for peace. At one of their meetings in March 2003, a Muslim, Asatu Bah Kenneth, spoke to the crowd and proclaimed that she would bring Muslim women to join with the Christian women in demanding peace from the president and the warlords.

On April 1, the united group of Christian and Muslim women staged their first protest. Using the radio to spread the word, Gbowee and Janet Johnson Bryant, a journalist, encouraged the women of Monrovia to speak out for peace. Hearing their call on the radio, many internally displaced women joined the campaign as well. Wearing all white clothing the women gathered at the fish market every day for a week. They sat, danced, and sang for peace. Some held banners that read, "The women of Liberia want peace now."

Their location at the fish market was a strategic one, as the land was visible from President Taylor's residence. Every day, Taylor's motorcade passed the women. As the week went on, over 2,500 women gathered on the market lawn. They agreed that they would go on a sex strike, denying their partners intimacy until the war had ended. Seeing that men were the perpetrators of the violence, the Liberian women felt that if they were to withhold sex, their partners would also pray for peace and support an end to the war.

That week, rebel forces along with Taylor's army attacked the displacement camps in Monrovia. The activist women held a

candlelight vigil to pray for those in the camps. As the violence escalated, the international community called for peace talks. The women seconded the call, urging Taylor and the rebels to negotiate. Both sides refused.

On April 11, the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace, as they had named themselves, issued a "Position Statement on the Liberian Crisis." Staying outside the political realm for fear of persecution, the women stated their goal as simply being that of peace. They erected a billboard at the fish market, which read, "The women of Liberia say peace is our goal, peace is what matters, peace is what we need."

Bearing this message, the women marched through the streets of Monrovia, while hundreds more joined the back of the group as it marched past their homes. Their march concluded at Monrovia's Municipal Office where the women assembled, demanding a meeting with Taylor to present him with their position statement. By this point over 1,000 women had gathered. Taylor then agreed to a meeting.

On April 23, the women visited Taylor. Gbowee presented him with the statement onstage while the rest of the women sat in the audience, holding hands and praying. After the meeting, Taylor agreed that he would attend peace talks.

Next the group targeted the rebels, demanding that they too agree to attend the peace talks. Upon hearing that the warlords would be meeting in Freetown, Sierra Leone, a contingent of the women traveled to the city. Locating the hotel where the rebel leaders were gathered, some of the Liberian women lined the streets while others sat in front of the hotel, refusing to leave until they were given a meeting with the warlords. Their sit-in brought media attention, helping to further spread their message of peace to the international community. The women soon met the leaders of LURD and MODEL and convinced them to attend the peace talks, to be held in Accra, Ghana.

In order to keep the pressure on the rebels and the President to reach a settlement, the women raised money to send a group to Accra. On June 4, the peace talks began. The women who had traveled from Liberia gathered on the lawn out front of the peace building, singing and holding signs. During the course of the Accra negotiations Taylor was indicted for war crimes by an international court in Sierra Leone. In order to escape arrest, he fled back to Liberia.

Soon after his fleeing, a full-scale war broke out in Monrovia even while the peace talks continued in Ghana. Civilians who felt unsafe were told to go to the football field and thousands sought refuge there. Despite the attacks on Monrovia, the women who had not gone to Ghana continued to pray at the fish market.

On July 21, the violence in Monrovia escalated as a missile hit the American embassy compound, killing many displaced Liberians who were sheltered there. The women in Ghana sent for reinforcements, planning to stage a major action in Accra. They went to the doors of the building where the negotiations were taking place and sat down, linking arms. They surrounded the building and refused to let the delegates leave until a settlement was made.

When the guards came to arrest the women, Gbowee threatened to remove her clothing, an act that would shame the men. Her threat prevented security from removing the women. To end the stand-off, the Ghanaian President, the chief mediator of the peace talks, agreed to meet with the women and hear their pleas for peace, provided they remove themselves from outside the negotiating building. The women agreed to do so on the condition that if the meeting were unsatisfactory they would be allowed to return to the building.

Three weeks later, on 11 August, Taylor resigned from the presidency of Liberia and terms for the peace agreement were announced. Taylor was exiled to Nigeria, UN Peacekeeping forces (UNMIL) were ordered to enter Monrovia, and a transitional government was put in place to begin the process of holding democratic elections. Having won their settlement, the Liberian women returned to their country. Upon arriving they held a march of victory. Hundreds of children followed the women through the streets shouting, "We want peace, no more war!"

On 4 August, international peacekeeping troops entered Liberia. The women gathered together and decided that they would have to stay involved to ensure that the transitional government implemented the peace agreement.

In December, UNMIL began the disarmament process, urging ex-combatants to surrender their weapons for cash. Hundreds of individuals with guns converged on the disarmament location. Though the event was expected to be peaceful, a small fight broke out and guns were used. The Liberian women intervened to help the disarmament; among other things they presented a radio address that encouraged the ex-combatants to remain calm.

Over the next two years, the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace group aided the government in bringing about democratic elections. They registered voters and set up polling stations. On November 23, 2005, the Liberian people elected their country's first female president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. (Sirleaf was to share the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011 with Gbowee.)

Upon the election, the Liberian women for peace officially concluded their mass action campaign and ended their gatherings at the fish market. They succeeded in ending their country's civil war and brought peace to their nation by supporting the democratic elections.

## Research Notes

### Influences:

Women's campaigns for peace in other African nations (1,2).

### Sources:

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### Additional Notes:

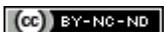
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### Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

Kylin Navarro, 22/10/2010

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