

## **Liberians Should Stay in the U.S., Report Advises Obama Administration**

Written by

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Dorsey & Whitney, LLP and The Advocates for Human Rights last week released a paper highlighting the reasons the United States government should extend Deferred Enforced Departure (DED) for Liberians, which is set to expire on March 31, 2009. The report, *Liberia Is Not Ready 2009: A Report of Country Conditions in Liberia and Reasons the United States Should Extend Deferred Enforced Departure for Liberians*, recommends that the U.S. government take immediate action to ensure Liberians are not deported.

Deferred Enforced Departure allows certain immigrant populations to remain in the United States. When civil war erupted in Liberia in 1989, thousands fled to the U.S., seeking peace and safety. An estimated 3,600 Liberians currently are enrolled in the Deferred Enforced Departure program, allowing them to remain and work in the United States. Unless they are granted an extension, these Liberians will be uprooted and vulnerable to deportation as of March 31, 2009.

Although the war ended in 2003 and Liberians elected a new government in 2005, Liberia's economy, infrastructure, and social services remain devastated. "We need to be concerned about helping solve the problems in Liberia, not adding to Liberia's challenges and putting people's lives and health at risk by sending people back," said Robin Phillips, Executive Director of The Advocates for Human Rights. The majority of the population still lives without clean drinking water, access to health care, or electricity. The adult mortality rate in Liberia averages 537 per 1,000 people and life expectancy is 42 years. Of particular concern is the high infant mortality rate in Liberia, which today stands at 157 per 1000 live births, compared to 7 per 1000 live births in the U.S. In addition to serious humanitarian concerns, Liberians who are forced to return will face a devastated school system that does not have the capacity to teach all Liberian children and a rising crime rate exacerbated by an unemployment rate of 85 percent.

The 2009 paper updates Dorsey's earlier report released in August, 2007 on Liberian country conditions. The report examines the most recent accounts of the conditions in Liberia. The findings in the report underscore the vital need for the U.S. to extend DED and to enact legislation allowing Liberians to apply for permanent immigration status in the United States.

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