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Sierra Leone

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Sierra Leone is a constitutional republic with a directly elected president and a unicameral legislature; however, due to continuing civil conflict, the democratically elected government did not control the whole country effectively at any time during the year. This situation continued despite a cease-fire that went into effect on May 24, 1999, and the July 7, 1999 signing of a peace accord by the Government and insurgents led by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), who have fought successive governments since 1991. The President's party, the Sierra Leone People's Party, has held a majority in the Parliament since the 1996 elections. In May 1997, a group of army officers, which called itself the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), overthrew the elected government in a coup, driving it into exile in Guinea. The AFRC then invited the RUF to join the junta. The RUF/AFRC junta then was driven out of Freetown by forces of the Economic Organization of West African States (ECOWAS) Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), composed mainly of units from the armed forces of Nigeria, in February 1998. The Government was restored to power in March 1998, but fighting between government and rebels continued. Government-insurgent fighting, albeit on a significantly reduced scale, continued after the July 1999 Lome Accord, which included the RUF in a power-sharing arrangement in the Government. Following the signing of the Lome Agreement, many RUF leaders and fighters moved into Freetown.

In 1999 the U.N. Security Council approved a peacekeeping operation, the U.N. Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), and approved strength increases several times during the year. ECOMOG completely withdrew its forces from the country in April. During the year, there were several armed clashes between government forces and rebel forces, including the RUF. In the first half of the year, tensions rose between the Government and the RUF, and in a series of separate incidents in a 10-day period from late April to early May, more than 700 U.N. peacekeepers were taken hostage by RUF rebels. Some peacekeepers were killed in these incidents and at other times during the year. In May RUF leader Foday Sankoh was arrested after demonstrators were killed outside of his residence, and he remained in government custody at year's end. In November the Government and the RUF signed the Abuja Agreement, which included a 30-day cease-fire that largely still was being observed at year's end; however, the RUF did not respect other terms agreed to in the Abuja Agreement, including disarming and allowing peacekeepers into the part of the country under their control. At year's end, the RUF still controlled almost two-thirds of the country. The disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration program called for in the Lome Accord includes provisions to protect the human rights of the former combatants. Prior to May, nearly 25,000 ex-combatants of an estimated 45,000 had disarmed and entered the demobilization process. With the de facto withdrawal by the RUF from observance of the Lome Accord in May, many of the demobilized combatants rearmed and rejoined either the RUF or the West Side Boys, a splinter group of the ex-SLA. The officially independent judiciary functioned only in part of the country but demonstrated substantial independence in practice.

Among the Government's security forces, the police officially had primary responsibility for internal order; however, due to the continuing insurgency, the Sierra Leone Army (SLA), the Civil Defense Forces (CDF), and ECOMOG shared de facto responsibility with the police in security matters until the April withdrawal of ECOMOG troops from the country when UNAMSIL assumed responsibility. The CDF were traditional hunting societies loyal to paramount chiefs--traditional leaders with administrative and judicial powers--which formed into independent militias under a national structure. The Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), which staged a 1997 military coup, no longer exists. During the year, SLA units were reorganized and began undergoing a training program provided with the assistance of a foreign government; the program was ongoing at year's end. While government, ECOMOG, and UNAMSIL forces committed serious human rights abuses, the incidences of abuses were significantly less than during the previous year.

Sierra Leone is an extremely poor country, with a market-based economy and a per capita income of less than \$150 per year. Only an estimated 15 percent of adults are literate. Although the country is rich in natural resources and minerals (particularly diamonds, gold, rutile, and bauxite) and has large areas of fertile land suitable for farming, the 9-year insurgency brought mineral extraction and agricultural production almost to a standstill, except for illicit diamond mining. There is little manufacturing, and there are few exports; approximately 70 percent of the Government's budget comes from foreign assistance. Years of fighting, corruption, and mismanagement have resulted in a crumbling infrastructure.

The Government's human rights record was poor in several areas; while there were significant improvements in some areas, serious problems remained. Poorly trained or poorly led members of government forces and international forces committed most serious abuses. There were reports that government and ECOMOG forces operating in support of the Government committed extrajudicial killings and reportedly summarily executed suspected rebels and their collaborators. Government, ECOMOG, and UNAMSIL forces at times beat

noncombatants; however, there were fewer reports of human rights violations involving the SLA in the latter half of the year due to training and reorganization. Prison and jail conditions remained harsh and sometimes life threatening. Government and ECOMOG forces continued to occasionally arrest and detain persons arbitrarily. Prolonged detention and long delays in trials, due to the inability of the judicial system to function in some parts of the country and during some parts of the year, remained problems. Government security forces on a few occasions harassed, arrested, and beat some journalists and used libel laws against journalists; however, the Government took significant steps to end the restrictions on press freedom from the previous year. Violence and discrimination against women and prostitution remained problems. CDF units continued to induct child soldiers. Female genital mutilation continued to be a widespread practice. Discrimination against ethnic minorities persists. There was some forced labor in rural areas. Child labor persists.

During the year, an ex-SLA splinter group called the West Side Boys and RUF rebels committed numerous serious abuses, including killings, abductions, deliberate mutilations, and rape. Rebel forces abducted civilians, missionaries, aid workers from nongovernmental agencies, and U.N. personnel; ambushed humanitarian relief convoys; raided refugee sites; and extorted and stole food. The RUF forces continued the longstanding practice of abducting villagers (including women and children) and using them as forced laborers, child soldiers, and sex slaves. Rebel atrocities prompted the internal displacement of hundreds of thousands of civilians over the past several years; however, such displacement was reduced significantly during the year. As many as half a million persons fled in past years to neighboring countries to escape the civil conflict and remained outside the country on their own or in refugee camps, primarily in Guinea and Liberia.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Section 1 Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom From:

a. Political and Other Extrajudicial Killing

There were reports that both government forces and ECOMOG forces operating in support of the Government committed extrajudicial killings. There were reports in the first half of the year that both SLA and CDF forces summarily executed suspected rebels and rebel collaborators; however, because of the insecurity in most of the country, it was difficult to gather detailed information on abuses or to corroborate reports. There also were reports in the first quarter of the year that ECOMOG soldiers summarily executed suspected rebels. There were no reports of extrajudicial killings after July by the newly trained and reorganized SLA units or CDF forces.

There is credible evidence that on several occasions throughout the year a government helicopter gunship fired on possible RUF positions within urban areas, including one market area, causing many civilian deaths (see Sections 1.g. and 2.d.). For example, there were reports that on July 9, the SLA attacked suspected rebel positions in Bunumbu with a gunship and killed a number of civilians, along with several RUF rebels. In attacks in May and June, there were reports that a gunship killed 27 persons and wounded 50 persons in the towns of Makeni, Magburaka, and Kambia.

On July 17, there was an unconfirmed report that CDF soldiers executed a RUF fighter who allegedly had been trying to surrender.

There were reports that ECOMOG soldiers committed human rights abuses, including killings, during the first quarter of the year. In January an ECOMOG soldier reportedly stabbed a civilian in a market without provocation; the man later died from his injuries. On April 28, ECOMOG personnel shot and killed one ex-SLA soldier and wounded another during an argument over a stolen vehicle; a riot ensued, and several persons were injured.

There were credible reports that the RUF and ex-SLA rebels committed a substantial number of summary executions of civilians in rebel-held areas throughout the country. However, because of the insecurity, access to rebel areas has been difficult, and in most cases the identities of the victims were difficult to establish. There were credible reports of persons being tortured or killed for attempting to flee RUF-occupied areas (see Section 2.d.).

On May 8, RUF rebels shot and killed at least 20 demonstrators outside of Foday Sankoh's residence in Freetown, including a journalist, and injured at least 80 others (see Sections 2.a. and 2.b.).

In a series of separate incidents in a 10-day period from late April to early May, more than 700 U.N. peacekeepers were taken hostage by RUF rebels. Some peacekeepers were killed in these incidents and at other times during the year.

On May 25, RUF rebels shot and killed two journalists, Kurt Schork of Reuters and Miguel Gil Moreno of Associated Press Television Network and injured two others during an attack on a SLA patrol. There were reports that on June 15, rebels attacked Port Loko; reportedly there were 15 casualties, and 10 rebels were captured. In August there were unconfirmed reports that suspected RUF rebels killed 9 civilians and abducted 15 others in an attack on the village of Folloh.

Some victims of rebel kidnap attempts also were killed (see Section 1.b.).

There were unconfirmed reports that RUF rebels also summarily executed other RUF rebels. For example, on February 4, RUF rebels stopped UNAMSIL vehicles and relieved the soldiers of their weapons. There were unconfirmed reports that the rebels may have been executed by other RUF rebels for disobeying orders not to

interfere with UNAMSIL vehicles.

Over the course of the decade-long conflict, rebel mutilations caused hundreds if not thousands of deaths; however, there were fewer reports of mutilations during the year.

At the beginning of November, the Guinean army bombed several villages in the northern part of the country in a bombing campaign against rebels from Sierra Leone and Liberia. In December Guinean troops attacked Rosint village in the northern part of the country, killed several civilians, abducted over 50 persons, and burned over 30 houses.

b. Disappearance

The RUF and West Side Boys continued to detain illegally individuals as part of a wide-scale harassment and terror campaign against the civilian population in certain areas of the country where they operated. Ex-SLA and RUF forces also continued the longstanding practice of kidnaping children, women, and men and compelling them to work as slave labor (see Sections 5, 6.c., and 6.f.). Women also were forced to act as sexual slaves. Unlike in the previous year, there were no confirmed reports that rebels kidnaped persons to use them as shields to prevent government attacks. The United Nations estimates that rebel forces abducted some 20,000 persons throughout the country during the 1991-1999 period. Only about 1,400 of them have been released and have gone through a formal reintegration process; most of those released were children. Many others have escaped, but the U.N. believes that many of those abducted still remain prisoners despite the Lome Accord's directive that all captives and prisoners of war be released.

On January 18, RUF rebels abducted a group of four aid workers from CARITAS and their driver, held them for several hours, and accused them of being spies. On January 31, armed rebels detained some UNAMSIL soldiers for several hours and relieved them of their weapons. There were reports that in February rebels attacked a bus near Masiaka and abducted 11 persons. On March 7, RUF rebels abducted five humanitarian workers but released them the following day.

In a series of separate incidents in a 10-day period from late April to early May, more than 700 U.N. peacekeepers were taken hostage by RUF rebels. Some peacekeepers were killed in these incidents. By August 1, all of the peacekeepers had been rescued or released.

On July 24, West Side Boys rebels reportedly abducted 18 passengers during a bus attack. At the end of July, the West Side Boys attacked a group of foreign workers and detained one person. On August 25, the West Side Boys abducted 11 foreign soldiers and 1 SLA officer. Five soldiers were released several days later; the remaining hostages were rescued during a mission that resulted in the death of a British paratrooper, injuries to 11 foreign soldiers, the deaths of 25 rebels, and the capture of 18 other rebels. In August there were unconfirmed reports that suspected RUF rebels killed 9 civilians and abducted 15 others in an attack on the village of Folloh.

There were reports that at the beginning of June, pro-government militiamen released approximately 140 children, many of whom were ex-soldiers, to the U.N. Children's Fund.

According to the U.N. Children's Fund, as of December approximately 4,000 children registered as missing during the war had yet to be located. Rebels released a number of child soldiers during the year. For example, in January ex-SLA rebels released approximately 150 children.

In addition to demanding ransom payments for civilians they abducted, in past years, rebel forces targeted Roman Catholic priests and nuns, largely on the assumption that the Church would pay ransom for their return and because troops from ECOMOG used their missionary radio network in support of the Government (see Section 2.c.).

There were reports that Guinean troops abducted persons from Sierra Leone after attacks by RUF and Guinean dissidents.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The Constitution prohibits torture; however, there were credible reports that government entities, including the SLA, the CDF, and ECOMOG forces occasionally tortured, beat, and otherwise abused noncombatants suspected of being rebels. According to human rights observers, the conduct of the SLA improved during the second half of the year after training and reorganization.

There were reports that attacks during the year by a government helicopter gunship on possible RUF positions in urban areas caused civilian and rebel injuries and deaths (see Section 1.a.). For example, there were reports that in attacks in May and June, a gunship killed 27 persons and wounded 50 persons in the towns of Makeni, Magburaka, and Kambia.

Reports of abuses by the CDF continued to rise throughout the year. There was an increase in the number of rapes committed by CDF forces, which in past years reportedly had not engaged in rape. For example, in July some CDF members raped three women that they accused of transporting goods to rebel-held areas. There were reports that on October 10, four CDF members beat and detained a journalist and released him after 2 days (see Section 2.a.).

There were reports that CDF forces manned roadblocks and bridges and routinely extorted large sums of money from travelers. Drivers often were subjected to abuse, including beatings, when they were unable to pay. For example, Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported that on August 15, CDF forces severely beat two truck drivers and detained one of them for several hours because they could not produce the requested bribe.

On April 28, ECOMOG personnel killed one ex-SLA soldier and wounded another during an argument over a stolen vehicle; a riot ensued, and several persons were injured (see Section 1.a.).

There were reports that UNAMSIL soldiers committed human rights abuses against suspected rebels in May. An investigation was ordered by UNAMSIL; however, no further information was available by year's end.

On May 17, British paratroopers reportedly injured at least one civilian during a confrontation with RUF rebels at Lungi Lo.

On February 4, ex-SLA rebels allegedly became angry after not receiving the payment promised to them for disarming and began throwing stones at vehicles. The rebels robbed several passengers and pulled at least one person from a vehicle and beat him.

RUF and ex-SLA combatants such as the West Side Boys also committed numerous abuses against civilians during the year. On February 24, foreign observers visited 15 RUF combatants who were being held by their RUF colleagues for having tried to join the disarmament process and who were severely beaten. On March 8, rebels abducted Aaron Kargbo and Aruna Sherrif, both Adventist Development and Relief Agency staff members, and left them in critical condition on the side of a road. In a series of separate incidents in a 10-day period from late April to early May, more than 700 U.N. peacekeepers were taken hostage by RUF rebels. Some peacekeepers were killed in these incidents. On May 8, RUF rebels injured at least 80 demonstrators outside of Foday Sankoh's residence in Freetown and killed at least 20 others (see Sections 2.a. and 2.b.). On July 24, the West Side Boys attacked a bus, injuring three passengers.

RUF forces and ex-SLA combatants such as the West Side Boys continued to use rape as a terror tactic against women. There were many credible reports of gang rapes and that groups of women were raped.

During the year, although there were fewer reports of deliberate mutilation, including the chopping off of hands, arms, ears, and legs; attempted and successful decapitations; and severe cuts with machetes by the RUF, there was no indication that the practice was discontinued completely. U.N. officials and humanitarian organizations estimated that hundreds if not thousands of individuals, including children, had one or both limbs amputated over the decade-long conflict. During the overall course of the conflict, it has been estimated that for every one of those wounded who eventually succeeded in securing medical aid, at least three or four died en route from their wounds, shock, the hazards of the journey, or from lack of adequate medical assistance. There were credible reports that the RUF continued the practice of carving the initials "RUF" into the skin of civilians it abducted.

There were reports of injuries sustained in RUF-held areas that were attributed to landmines; however, observers believe that they were caused by unexploded ordnances.

On October 7, there were reports that relatives of the Minister of Transport and Communication beat a journalist, Mustapha Bai Attila (see Section 2.a.). No police or judicial action was taken against the individuals.

Prison and police lockup facilities conditions generally are harsh; at best they are Spartan, and at worst life threatening. The Pademba Road maximum security prison, which was designed for 325 prisoners, routinely houses hundreds more. Diet and medical care were inadequate, and only a handful of toilets were available for use. Male and female quarters were separate. Adults and juveniles were incarcerated together; however, there were no reports of the abuse of juveniles in prison. Convicted felons, those in the middle of the judicial process, and those who had not yet been charged formally also were incarcerated together. Other prison facilities were equally rudimentary, and conditions in the holding cells in police offices were extremely poor.

The Government generally has permitted prison visits; however, the Government did not allow the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC), U.N. human rights officials, and other observers to visit the prisons, assess conditions, and see inmates between May and August. UNAMSIL human rights officials were permitted to visit Pademba Road Prison in August; during their visit they found 30 minors, 13 of whom were suspected RUF child combatants, incarcerated with adults. The ICRC declined to visit Pademba Road Prison because the Government would not accept ICRC conditions, including private visits with prisoners.

d. Arbitrary Arrest, Detention or Exile

Government and ECOMOG forces continued at times to arrest and detain persons arbitrarily. Although the Constitution and the law provide for a speedy trial, in practice the lack of judicial officers and facilities often produced long delays in the judicial process. Due to the civil conflict, the judicial system did not function in some parts of the country at any time during the year and functioned in other parts of the country only during part of the year. Many criminal suspects were held for months before their cases were examined or formal charges were filed.

In May officers from the Criminal Investigation Department arrested editor Abdul Kouyateh for endangering state security by requesting an interview with Foday Sankoh; he was released on October 11 (see Section

2.a.).

The CDF, which does not have arrest and detention authorities, in particular was criticized for having arrested and detained prisoners. On August 15, HRW reported that CDF forces severely beat two truck drivers and detained one of them for several hours because they could not produce the requested bribe. On October 10, four CDF members beat and abducted a journalist after he published an article about the Kamajors, one of the ethnic groups in the CDF, and the SLA, but released him after 2 days.

There were credible reports that ECOMOG forces detained civilians fleeing rebel-held territory and subjected them to harsh treatment in the belief they were rebel collaborators (see Section 1.c.).

It was reported that a large number of RUF rebels were held in detention without charge throughout the country. Over a hundred suspected RUF in detention were released in August; however, many others still were believed to be held, including suspected child combatants (see Section 1.d.). For example, on April 8, there was a skirmish between RUF rebels and UNAMSIL, and there were reports that at least one RUF member was detained. At the end of July, 23 suspected RUF women and girls were arrested and detained at the Lungi police station.

As of December 1, 568 persons were detained in Pademba Road Prison, including 22 women and 13 children. A total of 291 persons, mostly RUF members and supporters of other armed groups, remained in detention without charge at year's end under emergency powers declared by the Government. Reportedly these detainees have been held incommunicado, have not been informed of their legal status, and do not have access to legal advice.

The Government does not use forced exile.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The Constitution provides for an independent judiciary, and the Government respects this provision in practice; however, the judiciary functioned only in part of the country, but demonstrated substantial independence in practice when it did function.

The judicial system consists of the Supreme Court, appeals courts, and a high court whose justices are chosen by the Head of State. Local courts administer traditional law with lay judges; appeals from these lower courts move to the superior courts.

Although there often are lengthy delays between arrests, the impositions of charges, and judicial proceedings, trials are usually free and fair; however, there is evidence that corruption has influenced some cases. Traditional justice systems continued to supplement the central government judiciary extensively in cases involving family law, inheritance, and land tenure, especially in rural areas.

The right of appeal from a court-martial to the Court of Appeal was deleted from the Armed Forces Act of 1961 by the Royal Sierra Leone Military Forces Act of 1971; however, in July Parliament approved the Armed Forces of the Republic of Sierra Leone (Amendment) Act, which reinstated the right of members of the armed forces to appeal a sentence handed by a court-martial to the Court of Appeal.

There were no reports of political prisoners.

f. Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The Constitution and law prohibit such practices, and government authorities generally respected these prohibitions.

Throughout the year, there were numerous instances in which rebel forces invaded, looted, and destroyed private property and terrorized civilians (see Sections 1.a. and 1.b.).

The kidnaping and forced conscription of children into rebel forces were serious problems (see Sections 1.b., 5, 6.c., and 6.f.). For years rebels have kidnaped young boys and girls to augment their forces and at times forced them to abduct other children. Frequently commanders also had boys act as bodyguards. The RUF utilized "Small Boy Units" (SBU's) and "Small Girl Units" (SGU's), which served in combat.

There were reports that Guinean troops destroyed private property and burned homes (see Section 1.a.).

g. Use of Excessive Force and Violations of Humanitarian Law in Internal Conflicts

There were reports that Government, UNAMSIL, and ECOMOG troops, which continued to perform a peacekeeping role in the country until April, committed some human rights abuses against RUF collaborators and suspected rebels. There were reports that a government helicopter gunship reportedly fired on possible RUF positions within urban areas, causing rebel and civilian casualties and contributing to the displacement of some of the population from RUF-held areas (see Section 1.a.).

The CDF continued to accept, train, and induct children into its ranks despite having pledged in June 1999 to stop the practice.

RUF rebel forces and West Side Boys routinely committed numerous serious abuses, and sought to coerce, intimidate, and terrorize those who either refused to cooperate with them or supported the Government. While these abuses continued during the year, reports were significantly lower than in previous years. In large parts of the country outside the effective control of the Government, these groups kidnaped children and women to work for them and men to carry equipment; raped women as a means of punishment and to inspire fear and cooperation; and forcibly inducted children into their ranks under penalty of their own mutilation or death (see Sections 1.c., 1.f., and 5). They forced individuals to commit atrocities under penalty of their own mutilation or death; harassed peacekeepers; and seized peacekeepers' weapons. The RUF continued its practice of amputations and mutilations, although at a greatly reduced rate from the past year (see Section 1.c.). There were reports of injuries from unexploded ordnances laid by RUF rebels (see Section 1.c.).

Relief organizations suspended activities in parts of the country at several times during the year due to increased fighting and the obstruction of access by rebels. For example, in early March, Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) suspended activities in parts of the country due to the hostage taking by rebels and other instances of looting, threats, detention of staff, and extortion (see Sections 1.b., 1.c., 1.d., and 1.f.).

Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The Constitution provides for freedom of speech and of the press; however, Government security forces on a few occasions harassed, arrested, and beat some journalists and used libel laws against journalists. The Government took some steps to end the restrictions of the previous year. The written press and radio reported freely on security matters, corruption, and political affairs generally without interference.

On February 16, authorities arrested the managing editor of Rolyc Newspaper, Ayodele Lukobi Johnson, and reporter Ayodele Walters charged them with "sedition, libel, and publishing false news" after they published a negative article about President Kabbah. In May officers from the Criminal Investigation Department arrested Abdul Kouyateh, the acting editor of the private Freetown weekly Wisdom Newspaper, for endangering state security by requesting an interview with Foday Sankoh. He was released on October 11.

On October 7, relatives of the Minister of Transport and Communication beat Mustapha Bai Attila, a blind reporter from the radio station Voice of the Handicapped, who on several occasions had exposed corruption at the parastatal company Sierratel.

Joseph Mboka, a journalist who was detained in May 1999, was released after 2 weeks. Emmanuel Sanossi, a journalist from Cameroon who was detained in August 1999, was released after several weeks.

On October 10, four CDF members beat and detained a journalist for the Standard Times newspaper after he published an article about the SLA and the Kamajors, one of the ethnic groups in the CDF. He was released 2 days later.

Over 50 newspapers were published in Freetown alone, covering a wide spectrum of interests. Most of the newspapers were independent of the Government, and several were associated with opposition political parties. The number of newspapers fluctuated weekly; many contained sensational, undocumented stories and repeated items carried by other newspapers. Newspapers openly and routinely criticized the Government and its officials, as well as the rebel forces.

Due to low levels of literacy and the relatively high cost of newspapers and television, radio remained the most important medium of public information. Several government and private radio and television stations broadcast; both featured domestic news coverage and political commentary.

The parastatal Sierratel communications company provided Internet access in Freetown, although the condition of its telephone lines often made Internet connectivity problematic.

On May 8, a local journalist was killed by RUF rebel gunfire during a demonstration outside of Foday Sankoh's residence. At least one other journalist was injured and another threatened during the incident (see Sections 1.a. and 2.b.). On May 25, rebels shot and killed two journalists and wounded two others during an attack on a SLA patrol (see Section 1.a.).

The Government generally respected academic freedom. All institutions of higher learning were open during most of the year; however, infrastructure destroyed during the conflict has not yet been restored fully.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The Constitution provides for freedom of assembly, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. While in general the Government did not deny requests to use public areas for meetings or demonstrations, many of which took place throughout the year, the Government did not allow RUF meetings and rallies because of the declared State of Emergency, which was enacted in February 1998 following the ousting of the AFRC and was renewed in August 1999.

On May 8, 8,000 to 9,000 persons, including doctors, lawyers, teachers, petty traders, union leaders, and others marched through Freetown and demonstrated outside Foday Sankoh's residence in Freetown to protest the behavior of the RUF, the detention of hundreds of U.N. peacekeeping troops, and Foday Sankoh. Peacekeepers fired into the air but were unable to keep the demonstrators from continuing toward Sankoh's house. RUF members opened fire on the demonstrators, killing at least 20 persons and injuring at least 80 others.

The Constitution provides for freedom of association, and the Government respected this right in practice. There were numerous civic, philanthropic, and social organizations, and the registration system was routine and apparently nonpolitical. No known restrictions were applied to the formation or organization of the 18 opposition political parties and 60 registered civic action nongovernmental organizations (see Section 4).

c. Freedom of Religion

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government respected this right in practice.

In the past, rebel forces have attacked both churches and mosques and targeted Christian and Muslim religious leaders. In addition to demanding ransom payments for civilians they abducted, in the past, rebel forces have targeted Roman Catholic priests and nuns, largely on the assumption that the Church would pay ransom for their return and because troops from ECOMOG used their missionary radio network in support of the Government. On March 8, rebels abducted Aaron Kargbo and Aruna Sherrif, both Adventist Development and Relief Agency staff members and left them in critical condition on the side of a road. On July 21, rebels from the West Side Boys abducted 4 church workers allegedly because they feared an attack by the Government and released them after 10 days. On September 7, RUF insurgents abducted two missionary priests, Father Victor Mosele and Father Franco Manganello, in Pamalap, Guinea, and brought them to Sierra Leone. The priests were not mistreated and were allowed some freedom of movement; they later escaped.

d. Freedom of Movement Within the Country, Foreign Travel, Emigration, and Repatriation

The Constitution provides for these rights, and the Government generally respected them in practice; however, according to occasional reports, government troops manning roadblocks attempted to extort food or money from travelers (see Section 1.c.). Citizens were required to get a police clearance within 72 hours before international travel, but such clearances were issued nonrestrictively; the Government did not attempt to limit citizens' departure or return for political or discriminatory reasons.

RUF rebels and West Side Boys also manned roadblocks to extort money and goods from travelers.

More than an estimated 1 million citizens—almost one-quarter of the population—still either are displaced internally or have fled the country to escape the continuing insurgency. Reported attacks by a government helicopter gunship on possible RUF positions within urban areas contributed to the exodus of the population from RUF-held areas (see Sections 1.a., 1.c., and 1.g.). More than 500,000 persons remain in refugee camps in Guinea and Liberia; others remain in The Gambia, Cote D'Ivoire, Ghana, and other African nations, while still others are in countries outside of Africa.

There were reports that due to the exodus of a large number of persons from RUF-occupied areas, the RUF attempted to terrorize the remaining population to prevent them from leaving. There are credible reports of persons being tortured or killed for attempting to flee (see Section 1.a.).

At year's end, thousands of Sierra Leoneans returned to the country from Guinea because of attacks and ill treatment by RUF forces and Guinean forces. Some of these internally displaced persons (IDP's) were housed in camps, but many live in Freetown. The large influx of IDP's and the lack of resources caused tension between local residents and the returning IDP's. In one instance in November, a fight broke out between the IDP's and local residents at an IDP camp in Bo. At least 13 persons were injured seriously.

There is no formal process for granting political asylum or refugee status. The Government cooperated with the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees and other organizations on repatriation matters and continued to provide first asylum to over 5,000 Liberians who fled to Sierra Leone because of conflict in their home country in earlier years. There were no reports of the forced return of persons to countries where they feared persecution.

Section 3 Respect for Political Rights: The Right of Citizens to Change their Government

The Constitution provides for the right of citizens to change their government, and the 1996 elections won by Ahmed Tejan Kabbah and his Sierra Leone People's Party were the first free and fair multiparty elections in the country in 30 years. Several political parties were represented in the unicameral legislature and in the cabinet. Locally elected councils and a traditional chieftancy system control local government. Preparations for local

elections, which were to have taken place in 1999, were postponed in accordance with the 1991 Constitution because of continued fighting. The July 1999 Lome Accords included the RUF in a power-sharing arrangement in the Government, and in July 1999, the Parliament ratified a bill allowing the RUF to transform itself into a political party. Foday Sankoh, the RUF leader, was offered and accepted the chairmanship of the Commission for the Management of Strategic Resources, National Reconstruction and Development with the status of vice president. In November 1999, the Revolutionary United Front Party (RUF) received a provisional registration certificate from the interim National Election Commission. In May the RUF broke away from its agreements under the Lome Accord, returned to insurgency, and ceased to interact in a political capacity.

Women are underrepresented in government and politics. There are relatively few women in senior government positions: Only 2 of the 18 cabinet positions were filled by women, and of the 80 members of the unicameral legislature, only 7 were female.

Section 4 Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

A number of domestic and international human rights groups operated without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. Government officials were generally cooperative and responsive to their views; however, due to insecurity caused by the rebel insurgency, the activities of human rights monitors were limited to government-held areas. Representatives of various local and international NGO's, foreign diplomats, the ICRC, and U.N. human rights officers were able to monitor trials and to visit prisons and custodial facilities during most of the year; however, between May and August the Government did not allow the ICRC, U.N. human rights officials, or other observers to visit prisons to assess conditions or meet with inmates (see Section 1.c.). The ICRC declined to visit Pademba Road Prison because the Government would not accept ICRC conditions, including private visits with prisoners.

On February 22, Parliament approved the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Bill which would create a TRC to provide a forum for publicly airing the grievances of victims and the confessions of perpetrators from the civil war; however, the Commission had not been established by year's end.

Section 5 Discrimination Based on Race, Sex, Religion, Disability, Language, or Social Status

The Constitution prohibits discrimination against women and provides for protection against discrimination on the basis of race and ethnicity, except for the long-time prohibition against citizenship for persons with a non-African father. This provision effectively blocks citizenship for much of the sizable Lebanese community and for other persons with non-African fathers.

Women

Violence against women, especially wife beating, is common. The police are unlikely to intervene in domestic disputes except in cases involving severe injury or death. Domestic violence is not recognized as a societal problem; however, rape is recognized as a societal problem and is punishable by up to 14 years' imprisonment. There is a significant amount of prostitution: Many women, especially those displaced from their homes and with few resources, resort to prostitution as a means to secure income for themselves and their children. Rebel forces used rape as a terror tactic (see Sections 1.c. and 1.g.) and forced women and girls to act as sexual slaves (see Sections 1.b., 6.c., and 6.f.). There are almost no medical or psychological services for women who were raped after they were abducted.

The Constitution provides for equal rights for women; however, in practice women face both legal and societal discrimination. In particular their rights and status under traditional law vary significantly depending upon the ethnic group to which they belong. The Temne and Limba tribes of the north afford greater rights to women to inherit property than does the Mende tribe, which gives preference to male heirs and unmarried daughters. However, in the Temne tribe, women cannot become paramount chiefs. In the south, the Mende tribe has a number of female paramount chiefs. Women are nevertheless very active in civic organizations and NGO's, were instrumental in pressuring the previous government to allow free and fair multiparty elections in 1996, and were vocal representatives of civil society during the peace talks in Lome in 1999.

Women do not have equal access to education, economic opportunities, health facilities, or social freedoms. In rural areas, women perform much of the subsistence farming and have little opportunity for formal education. Women are very active in civic and philanthropic organizations, and a significant number are employed as civil servants.

Children

Although the Government is committed to improving children's education and welfare, it lacks the means to provide basic education and health services for them. The law requires school attendance through primary school; however, schools, clinics, and hospitals throughout the country were looted and destroyed during the 9-year insurgency, and most have not been rebuilt. A large number of children receive little or no formal education. Schools are financed largely by formal and informal fees, but many families cannot afford to pay them. The average educational level for girls is markedly below that of boys, and only 6 percent of women are

literate. At the university level, male students predominate. The Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender, and Children's Affairs has primary responsibility for children's issues.

Up to an estimated 5,000 child soldiers at a time served alongside adults on both sides during the civil conflict, but in greater numbers on the RUF side; some observers place the number at almost double that figure. The recruitment of children for military service by the CDF remained a problem, and there is credible evidence that the CDF forces continued to accept children as volunteer soldiers.

The kidnaping and forced conscription of children into rebel forces were serious problems (see Sections 1.b., 1.f., 6.c., and 6.f.). For years rebels kidnaped young boys and girls to augment their forces and to abduct other children. Girls are forced to perform as sexual slaves (see Sections 5, 6.c., and 6.f.). In some cases rebel forces have forced these children to commit atrocities involving family members. However, even children who escape and wish to leave the ranks sometimes are rejected by their families and communities because of their perceived involvement in rebel activities.

Female genital mutilation (FGM), which is condemned widely by international health experts as damaging to both physical and psychological health, is widely practiced among all levels of society, although with varying frequency. The less severe form of excision is practiced. Some estimates, including by UNICEF, of the percentage of women and girls who undergo the practice range as high as 80 to 90 percent; however, local groups believe that this figure is overstated. FGM is practiced on girls as young as 5 years old. No law prohibits FGM. A number of NGO's are working to inform the public about the harmful health effects of FGM and to eradicate it; however, an active resistance by secret societies countered the well-publicized international efforts against FGM.

People with Disabilities

Public facility access and discrimination against the disabled are not considered to be public policy issues. No laws mandate accessibility to buildings or provide for other assistance for the disabled. Although a few private agencies and organizations attempted to train the disabled in useful work, there was no government policy or program directed particularly at the disabled. There does not appear to be outright discrimination against the disabled in housing or education. However, given the high rate of general unemployment, work opportunities for the disabled are few.

Some of the many individuals who were maimed in the fighting, or had their limbs amputated by rebel forces, are receiving special assistance from various local and international humanitarian organizations. Such programs involve reconstructive surgery, prostheses, and vocational training to help them acquire new work skills. The Lome Accord also called for the creation of a special fund to implement a program for rehabilitation of war victims, although the fund had not yet been established by year's end. Attention to amputees increased the access of others with disabilities to health care and treatment.

National/Ethnic/Racial Minorities

The country's population is ethnically diverse and consists of at least 13 ethnic groups. These groups generally all speak distinct primary languages and are concentrated outside urban areas. However, all ethnic groups use Krio as a second language, little ethnic segregation is apparent in urban areas, and interethnic marriage is common. The two largest ethnic groups are the Temne in the northern part of the country and the Mende in the southern part; each of these groups is estimated to make up about 30 percent of the population.

Ethnic loyalty remained an important factor in government, the armed forces, and business. Complaints of corruption within ethnic groups and ethnic discrimination in government appointments, contracts, military commissions, and promotions were common. There did not appear to be a strong correspondence between ethnic or regional and political cleavages. Ethnic differences also did not appear to contribute appreciably to the RUF rebellion, the 1997 coup, or the civil conflict. No ethnic or regional base of voluntary popular support for the rebels was identifiable, and they controlled territory by terror and coercion rather than by popular consent.

Residents of non-African descent face institutionalized political restrictions. The Constitution restricts citizenship to persons of patrilineal Negro-African descent. This constitutional restriction effectively denies citizenship to many long-term residents, notably the Lebanese community.

Section 6 Worker Rights

a. The Right of Association

The Constitution provides for the right of association, and in practice workers had the right to join independent trade unions of their choice. About 60 percent of the workers in urban areas, including government workers, are unionized, but attempts to organize agricultural workers and mineworkers have met with little success. All labor unions by custom join the Sierra Leone Labor Congress (SLLC), but such membership is voluntary. Police and members of the armed services are prohibited from joining unions. There are no reliable statistics on union membership, but the membership numbers have declined as a percentage of all workers because of the virtual collapse of the small manufacturing sector.

The Trade Union Act provides that any five persons may form a trade union by applying to the registrar of trade unions, who has statutory powers under the act to approve the creation of trade unions. The registrar may

reject applications for several reasons, including an insufficient number of members, proposed representation in an industry already served by an existing union, or incomplete documentation. If the registrar rejects an application, the decision may be appealed in the ordinary courts, but applicants seldom take such action.

Workers have the right to strike, although the Government can require 21 days' notice. No strikes were reported during the year. No laws prohibit retaliation against strikers, even a lawful strike. An employee fired for union activities may file a complaint with a labor tribunal and seek reinstatement. Complaints of discrimination against trade unions are made to a tribunal.

Unions are free to form federations and to affiliate internationally. The SLLC is a member of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions.

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

The 1971 Regulation of Wages and Industrial Relations Act provides the legal framework for collective bargaining. Collective bargaining must take place in trade group negotiating councils, each of which has an equal number of employer and worker representatives. Most enterprises are covered by collective bargaining agreements on wages and working conditions. The SLLC provides assistance to unions in preparations for negotiations; in case of a deadlock the government may intervene. The Industrial Court for Settlement of Industrial Disputes, as required by Section 44 of the 1971 Act, was created and began hearing cases during the year.

There are no export processing zones.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The Constitution prohibits forced and bonded labor, including that performed by children; however, forced labor remains a problem. Under the Chiefdom's Council Act, individual chiefs may impose compulsory labor and may require members of their villages to contribute to the improvement of common areas. This practice exists only in rural areas. There is no penalty for noncompliance. There were reports of some compulsory labor, possibly including labor by children in rural areas.

Ex-SLA and RUF rebels forcibly impressed young boys and girls into their ranks and forced them into involuntary servitude and to perform as sexual slaves. Many became fighters with the rebel forces. Women were also forced to act as sexual slaves (see Sections 1.b., 5, and 6.f.).

Rebel forces also forced civilians, including children, to labor as porters and as workers in diamond fields under their control despite the signing of the peace accord in July 1999.

d. Status of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The minimum age for employment is officially 18 years, although children between the ages of 12 and 18 years may be employed in certain nonhazardous occupations, provided they have their parents' consent. In practice this law is not enforced because there is no government entity charged with the task. Children routinely assist in family businesses and work as petty vendors. In rural areas, children work seasonally on family subsistence farms.

Because the adult unemployment rate remains high, few children are involved in the industrial sector. Foreign employers have hired children to work as domestics overseas at extremely low wages and in poor conditions. The Department of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation is responsible for reviewing overseas work applications to see that no one under the age of 14 is employed for this purpose.

The law requires school attendance through primary school; however, there is a shortage of schools and teachers (see Section 5). Many children consequently enter the work force with few skills and with limited, if any, literacy.

The Government has not ratified ILO Convention 182 on the worst forms of child labor.

The Constitution prohibits forced and bonded labor, including that by children; however, such practices exist (see Sections 5, 6.c., and 6.f.).

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

A 1997 law set the minimum wage at approximately \$12 (21,000 Leones) per month; it has not been adjusted since then. The minimum wage is not sufficient to provide a decent standard of living for a worker and family. Most workers support an extended family, often including relatives who have been displaced by the insurgency in the countryside, and it is common to pool incomes and to supplement wages with subsistence farming.

The Government's suggested workweek is 38 hours, but most workweeks for those who are employed exceed that figure.

Although the Government sets health and safety standards, it lacks the funding to enforce them properly. Trade unions provide the only protection for workers who file complaints about working conditions. Initially a union makes a formal complaint about a hazardous working condition. If this complaint is rejected, the union may issue a 21-day strike notice. If workers remove themselves from dangerous work situations without making a formal complaint, they risk being fired.

f. Trafficking in Persons

No law prohibits trafficking in persons, and there were reports that rebel forces kidnaped young boys and girls, forcibly impressed them, and forced the children to serve them and to perform as sexual slaves (see Sections 5 and 6.c.). Women also were forced to act as sexual slaves (see Sections 1.b., 5, and 6.c.). Rebel forces also forced civilians, including children, to work as porters and in diamond fields (see Section 6.c.). The Government is attempting to combat this practice through its efforts to compel the RUF to disarm and demobilize.

[End.]

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