

SIERRA LEONE REPORT

OCTOBER 2003

17/12-03

COUNTRY INFORMATION & POLICY UNIT

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1. SCOPE OF DOCUMENT

1.1 This report has been produced by the Country Information and Policy Unit, Immigration and Nationality Directorate, Home Office, from information obtained from a wide variety of recognised sources. The document does not contain any Home Office opinion or policy.

1.2 The report has been prepared for background purposes for those involved in the asylum / human rights determination process. The information it contains is not exhaustive. It concentrates on the issues most commonly raised in asylum / human rights claims made in the United Kingdom.

1.3 The report is sourced throughout. It is intended to be used by caseworkers as a signpost to the source material, which has been made available to them. The vast majority of the source material is readily available in the public domain. These sources have been checked for currency, and as far as can be ascertained, remained relevant and up to date at the time the document was issued.

1.4 It is intended to revise the report on a six-monthly basis while the country remains within the top 35 asylum-seeker producing countries in the United Kingdom.

2. GEOGRAPHY

2.1 The Republic of Sierra Leone covers an area of 71,740 sq km (27,699 sq miles) and borders Guinea and Liberia. Sierra Leone is divided into four regions, three are the Northern, Eastern and Southern provinces. The other is the Western Area, the capital Freetown is in this region. There are two distinct seasons: from November to April is the dry season and from the end of May to October is the rainy season with the heaviest rains from July to September. Sierra Leone has a population of approximately 4.5 million. Extended family groups and the paramount Chieftancies dominate a substantial rural population. Diamond mining has attracted settlers to many villages in the mining areas. As a result of civil conflict, there has been a massive influx of the rural population to the towns. The official and commercial language of the country is English, while Krio (Creole) Mende, Limba and Temne are also spoken. [1][4][5][90][91] For further information on geography, refer to Europa Yearbooks, source [1].

3. ECONOMICS

3.1 Sierra Leone is an extremely poor country with a market-based economy. 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, civil conflict has brought mineral extraction and agricultural production almost to a standstill, except for illicit diamond mining. [2]

3.2 The economy is highly dependent on agriculture, and most people are employed in farming. In light of the country conditions, an accurate average annual income is hard to estimate, but it is reported to be

approximately \$140. [1][90]

3.3 There is little manufacturing, and there are few exports. Foreign assistance makes up approximately 60% of the Government's budget. Years of fighting, corruption, and mismanagement have resulted in a devastated infrastructure. [2]

4. HISTORY

4.1 Sierra Leone became an independent state within the Commonwealth on 27 April 1961 with Milton Margai of the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) remaining as Prime Minister. The SLPP retained power until March 1967 when the All People's Congress (APC) led by Dr. Siaka Stevens gained a majority. However the APC was prevented from taking power by a military coup until April 1968. In April 1971 Sierra Leone became a republic with Dr. Stevens as executive president. Following the deterioration of the economy and political unrest the country moved to a one party system in June 1978 and the APC became the sole legal party. There followed a series of Government financial scandals which resulted in demonstrations and outbreaks of violence and on 28 November 1985 Major General Joseph Momoh, a cabinet minister in the APC and commander of the armed forces, became president. However, the new administration failed to improve the serious economic situation. The Revolutionary United Front (RUF) made its first incursions from Liberia in 1991. On 29 April 1992 members of the armed forces seized power. Captain Valentine Strasser, who later established the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC), led them. Captain Strasser was deposed in a bloodless coup in 1996, and replaced by Captain Julius Maada Bio. Presidential and legislative elections that took place in 1996, and the SLPP formed the Government. [1][4]

4.2 On 25 May 1997, disaffected soldiers staged a military coup, and called on Major Johnny Paul Koroma, who was in prison on treason charges at the time, to be their leader. Koroma formed the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) and in an effort to halt the war invited the RUF to join him. The military junta failed to attract international support and was shunned by the Sierra Leone people. The Nigerian-led Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), aided by Sierra Leone Civil Defence Forces (CDF), removed the military junta from Freetown in February 1998, and President Kabbah, who had sought refuge in Guinea, returned to Freetown on 10 March 1998. Rebel groups, mainly from the AFRC and former members of the Sierra Leonean armed forces again attacked and occupied most of Freetown on 6 January 1999. ECOMOG forces eventually forced the rebels out of Freetown. During the rebel invasion and occupation, over 5,000 people were killed and most of the eastern suburbs of Freetown destroyed. Both the rebels and ECOMOG forces reportedly committed widespread human rights abuses. A cease-fire was agreed in May 1999. [1][4] For further information on history, refer to Europa Yearbooks, source [1].

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5. STATE STRUCTURES

Part I

Part II

5. STATE STRUCTURES

The Constitution

5.1 In September 1991 a new constitution came into force. On 25 May 1997, following the military coup, the 1991 Constitution was suspended, political parties were banned and all demonstrations were prohibited. An Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) was created to govern the country, and during its period in office the AFRC was responsible for many human rights abuses. [1]

5.2 Following the overthrow of the junta forces and President Kabbah's return in March 1998, the 1991 Constitution was re-instated. President Kabbah re-iterated his Government's respect for human rights and the need for national unity, reconciliation and social and economic progress within the framework of the legal system. [11][12] The state of emergency laws, imposed in March 1998, that had limited some of the Constitutions provisions, was lifted on 1 March 2002. [1][4]

Citizenship

5.3 The requirements for citizenship are set out in the Sierra Leone Citizenship Act 1973. Citizenship by birth would appear to be acquired by birth in Sierra Leone, with a father or grandfather being born in Sierra Leone. Citizenship by descent would appear to be acquired by a person born outside Sierra Leone, whose father was a Sierra Leonean citizen. Citizenship can also be acquired by descent through the maternal line, provided that the mother was a Sierra Leonean citizen, and that the child did not acquire any other nationality by birth in a foreign country. There are provisions to acquire citizenship by naturalisation. [8]

5.4 One of the requirements to acquire citizenship by birth or descent, is that a person is of "Negro African descent". A result of this provision is that members of Sierra Leone's Lebanese community are prevented from automatically acquiring citizenship by birth or descent. [2][8]

5.5 Legal requirements for naturalisation also effectively deny citizenship to many long-term residents, notably members of the Lebanese community. However, some of the Lebanese population have been naturalised, and were able to vote in the 2002 elections, although the exact figure is not known. There were no ethnic Lebanese members of Parliament. [2]

Political System

5.6 Parliamentary and presidential elections were held on 14 May 2002. They were conducted in a peaceful atmosphere, but there were a few incidents of violence. [33][34][35] Many international monitors declared the elections free and fair. However, there were credible reports that those who held seats abused their position to maintain power. Manipulation of vote counting, and partisan action by the National Electoral Commission (NEC), was also reported. On 24 January 2002, the Government began voter registration for the elections; however, there were reports that the Government's voter registration efforts were unbalanced, with more support going to areas that were dominated by the ruling party. There were also widespread reports of underage voter registration, and of voter coercion by party bosses and traditional leaders. However, these abuses reportedly did not affect substantially the overall outcome of the election. [2]

5.7 There were nine candidates in the presidential elections. The incumbent President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP), received 70.06% of the votes cast. Ernest Bai Koroma, All People's Congress (APC), received 22.35% of the votes cast. Former military ruler John Paul Koroma also stood for the presidency, as the candidate for the Peace and Liberation Party (PLP), he came third, with 3% of the votes cast. While he did not win the presidential election, he was elected to the Parliament, taking one of the two seats won by the PLP. [1][36][37][39]

5.8 The Sierra Leonean Parliamentary elections were also held on 14 May 2002. The Parliament is formed of 124 members, with Paramount Chiefs being appointed to 12 seats. In the parliamentary elections, the SLPP obtained 83 seats, the APC 27 seats, and the PLP 2 seats. The Revolutionary United Front Party (RUF), which is the political party into which the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) was transformed, fielded both a presidential candidate, and parliamentary candidates. Their presidential candidate, Pallo Bangura, received 1.73% of the votes cast. In the parliamentary elections, the RUF received approximately 1% of the vote cast. [1][36][38] A full cabinet was formed. [39]

Judiciary

5.9 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, and 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 continue 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 2000 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. [1][2] A Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) has been set up, to establish a true record of the civil war, give Sierra Leoneans (both victims and perpetrators) an opportunity to describe their experiences, and promote reconciliation. [2][32]

5.10 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. A majority of cases, at the magistrate level, were prosecuted by police officers. Many of these officers have had little or no formal legal training. [2]

5.11 The pardon, granted under the Lomé Peace Accord, did not apply to human rights abuses, perpetrated during the period of civil conflict. A Special Court was set up by the UN at the request of the Sierra Leonean Government to try 'those most responsible for crimes against humanity, war crimes and other serious violations of international law' committed since 30 November 1996 (the date of the conclusion of the Abuja Agreement). The Sierra Leonean authorities had already arrested Foday Sankoh, for his suspected involvement in the killing of demonstrators that had occurred outside of his Freetown home in May 2000, and he was also indicted by the Special Court. [2][4][28][29]

5.12 The Special Court has begun pre-trial hearings, and has issued a number of indictments in connection with war crimes and human rights abuses. The accused, are from both ex-rebel groups and groups that acted in support of the Government. Foday Sankoh, Issa Sesay and Morris Kallon are prominent members of RUF, Sam Hinga Norman was a prominent leader of CDF the militia that supported the Government, and Alex Brima was a member of the AFRC regime. Johnny Paul Koroma former leader of AFRC, and Sam Bockarie a former leader of RUF, were among those indicted, but avoided arrest. [9][10] The Special Court has issued further indictments against individuals, and these have been without regard to their political position during the period of civil conflict. Those who have been indicted have included both Government supporters, and those who have opposed it. As of September 2003, thirteen people had been indicted, of these nine were in custody, one was dead, and two were at large. One other, Sam Bockarie, was reported to have been killed in Liberia. [77][97]

5.13 On 4 June 2003, the Special Court issued an indictment against Charles Taylor, former President of Liberia, because of his past support for RUF. Sam Bockarie was reported to have been killed during fighting in Liberia in May 2003, and a body alleged to be his was returned to Freetown in June 2003 for forensic examination. [31][77][92] In July 2003, it was announced that Foday Sankoh had died in custody, he had been ill for some time. His poor health had resulted in him been unfit to stand trial. [77][93]

5.14 Although many children were involved in human rights abuses, the Special Court will not seek to prosecute children. Its statute allows the prosecution anyone over the age of 15. The Chief Prosecutor has expressed his intention to establish 'crimes against children' as war crimes. The Court's remit is to bring to justice 'those most responsible' - those who gave the orders, or created the circumstances for atrocities to be committed. The Court has sought to dislodge the widespread notion that the Special Court will prosecute tens of thousands of individuals, many of whom had been children at the time the atrocities were perpetrated. [25][30]

Legal Rights/Detention

5.15 Prolonged detention and long delays in trials remain common, but this is due to the inability of the judicial system to function in some parts of the country. [2][23]

Death Penalty

5.16 Sierra Leone retains the death penalty. [23] The last time that it was used was in October 1998, when 24 soldiers were executed for their part in the AFRC regime. These executions were carried out after a hearing in the High Court, but were widely criticised by human rights organisations. A number of civilians were also sentenced to death, but these sentences were later commuted. [20][21][22]

Internal security

5.17 RUF was formed as an armed rebel group in 1991 led by Foday Sankoh. Fighting between the Government and the RUF continued over the next few years. Following the replacement of President Strasser by President Bio the RUF and Government delegations met in February 1996, but RUF's demands could not be accepted. RUF therefore abandoned a cease-fire and launched a series of attacks in various parts of the country killing large numbers of civilians. However, after the elections took place a further cease-fire was imposed in March 1996 whilst negotiations continued between the rebels and the civilian Government. Although agreement was reached on some issues, RUF resumed concerted attacks on villages in the centre of the country, killing more civilians. [1]

5.18 On 7 July 1999 President Kabbah and Foday Sankoh signed a peace agreement, the Lomé Accord. Under the Lomé agreement the RUF would be transformed into a political party and would join a broad-based Government of national unity. The party was to receive 4 ministerial and 4 deputy ministerial posts. Foday Sankoh was granted absolute and free pardon that also applied to all combatants for acts carried out prior to the accord. This pardon also applies to those currently outside the country. [4][32][41] However, following an upsurge in violence in May 2000, Foday Sankoh was detained. [1]

5.19 The agreement provides for the disarmament and demobilisation of all ex-combatants and the facilitation of delivery of humanitarian assistance. The agreement also provides for the establishment of a quasi-judicial national Human Rights Commission. Human Rights education to be promoted throughout the various sectors of society, including schools, media, the police and the military and religious community. Following the signing of the Lomé accord the Government ordered the Civil Defence Forces (CDF) comprising traditional hunters to disband. [32][41]

5.20 In January 2003 an attack on Wellington army barracks in Freetown alerted the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) that Johnny Paul Koroma was planning to disrupt the work of the Special Court by staging a coup. Acting on information from those detained at the raid on Wellington barracks, the SLP raided properties belonging to him, and detained 100 people. Of these 16 have been charged with treason and related offences. Johnny Paul Koroma was briefly detained, but managed to escape from his home. The circumstances of his escape are unclear. The SLP are conducting an investigation into the circumstances surrounding his escape. [54] Johnny Paul Koroma, who remains at large, is now being sought in connection with this suspected coup attempt, and to answer charges outstanding against him before the Special Court. [9][10]

Border security and relations with neighbouring countries

5.21 In 2001, in response to incursions by the RUF into Guinea, Guinea launched cross-border attacks on rebel positions in Sierra Leone. Guinean soldiers and artillery have been used in these attacks, and there have been reports that civilians were injured. The Sierra Leone Government did not condemn these attacks, but took the view that they were a response to provocation by RUF. [47][48]

5.22 In this fighting, civilians were killed and injured, and tens of thousands of Sierra Leone refugees and Guineans displaced. Sierra Leone showed restraint regarding these incursions, which were aimed at RUF held areas in the North and East, and part of a wider conflict between Liberia and Guinea on their common border. [47][48] Guinea still holds areas of Sierra Leone, on their common border. [13][14] The border area with Guinea has been reported as being calm, and it is understood that there has been an improvement in conditions there. [15]

5.23 Unrest in Liberia has led to heightened tension on the common border in early 2003. Units of the Sierra Leone Army have been deployed to the region to deter any incursions by rebel forces from that country. The United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), a military and civilian force working to bring stability to the country, has assisted in this deployment. [16][77] Since July 2003 there has been an upsurge of violence in Liberia, which resulted in the Liberian President Charles Taylor leaving office in August 2003. [31][75][77]

Prisons and Prison condition

5.24 Prison conditions improved during 2002. International human rights monitors who visited Pademba Road maximum-security prison reported that conditions there were good, with adequate access to food,

medical care, recreation, and vocational skills training. In July 2002 human rights monitors reported that prisons in Bo and Moyamba were generally good; however, a prison in Kenema suffered from overcrowding, and access to medical facilities was limited. In October a rebuilt detention facility opened in Kono District. Many of the problems that remained in prisons were a result of the poor state of the judicial system. A large backlog of cases led to problems with overcrowding. The Pademba Road prison, which was designed for 325 prisoners, routinely housed hundreds more. There were no reports that prisoners were held incommunicado, although it was government policy to forbid family visits to prisoners at Pademba Prison except in exceptional circumstances and on a case-by-case basis. According to international monitors, the mortality rate in Pademba Prison was within acceptable actuarial norms. Male and female prisoners were housed separately. Adults and juveniles were incarcerated together. Conditions in the holding cells in police offices were extremely poor. Pre-trial detainees were held with convicted prisoners. [2]

5.25 There were no reports that prison guards mistreated former RUF members during 2002. However, there was no further investigation into the March 2001 killings of RUF prisoners at Pademba Prison. [2]

5.26 International monitors, including UNAMSIL and the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC), had unrestricted access to visit Pademba Prison and other detention facilities. The ICRC and UNAMSIL doctors were able to visit, and monitor the health of, former RUF leader Foday Sankoh. However, some local human rights group claimed that they could not get unrestricted access to the prisons. [2]

Armed Forces

5.27 Following the overthrow of the AFRC regime security in the country was provided largely by the Economic Organisation of West African States (ECOWAS) Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) troops acting on behalf of the legitimate Government. In January 2000 ECOMOG began to withdraw its troops. [40]

5.28 The police have primary responsibility for internal order, but the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) and UNAMSIL shared responsibility with the police in security matters. The RSLAF were deployed to all vital locations and secured the country's borders with guidance and leadership from the British-led International Military Advisory and Training Team (IMATT). The SLP were present in all provincial and district capitals. [2]

5.29 During 2002, more than 55,000 ex-combatants were registered with the National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (NCDDR). Approximately 31,000 of these ex-combatants were engaged in reintegration program activities, ranging from formal education and vocational skills training to small-scale trade, agriculture, and community development. NCDDR projected that 7,000 more ex-combatants would enter reintegration programs every 6 months, until all registered combatants had entered the programs. [2]

5.30 The RSLAF has, with the assistance of the IMATT and UNAMSIL, is becoming a more professional military body, and is deployed throughout the country to promote internal security. In response to the violence in Liberia, RSLAF units have been deployed on the Liberian border to prevent incursions from there. [16][58][75] Notwithstanding the improvement in the ability of the RSLAF to perform its duties, abuses of human rights have been reported, but these appear to be isolated incidents of indiscipline, and not supported by the Sierra Leone authorities. [2]

Military Service

5.31 There is no conscription in Sierra Leone. However, both rebel, and groups backing the Government, forcibly recruited people into their ranks during the civil war. Large numbers of children were also forcibly recruited during the civil war. As these groups have disarmed, this has now ceased. [2][17]

Medical Services

5.32 As a result of the civil conflict the health care infrastructure has broken-down. NGOs and humanitarian groups provide care, but this is insufficient to meet all demands, especially among groups like Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Life expectancy is approximately 35 years. Sierra Leone's child and maternal mortality rates of 182 per 1,000 live births and 1,800 per 100,000 live births respectively are among the highest in the world. [4][49]

5.33 Clinics and hospitals were destroyed through out the period of civil conflict, and there is a lack of resources to permit rebuilding. There have also been strikes by medical staff because of the poor working conditions and pay. [2][59]

5.34 AIDS and HIV are an increasing problem in Sierra Leone, and there are reports that the infection rate is around 7% amongst adult in Freetown, and 4% in the rest of the country. [4] While the Government is aware of this growing problem, it has yet to formulate an effective strategy to address this, because of the damage done to the countries medical infrastructure. However, some funding has been put aside to monitor AIDS/HIV, and help the Government to develop an AIDS/HIV policy. [50][51][52]

5.35 The World Bank has made funds available to assist in the improvement of health care, but this has yet to make a significant difference to conditions within the country. [51][52][53]

People with disabilities

5.36 Public facility access and discrimination against persons with disabilities are not considered to be public policy concerns. No laws mandate accessibility to buildings or provide for other assistance for persons with disabilities. Although a few private agencies and organisations attempted to train persons with disabilities in useful work, there was no Government policy or program directed particularly at persons with disabilities. There does not appear to be outright discrimination against persons with disabilities in housing or education; however, given the high rate of general unemployment, work opportunities for persons with disabilities are few. [2]

5.37 UNAMSIL began systematic investigations of amputees, tracking and monitoring individual amputation cases and compiling statistics. United Nations officials and humanitarian organisations estimated that hundreds, if not thousands of persons, including children, had one or both limbs amputated over the decade-long conflict. There were no incidents of amputations reported during 2002. 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 organisations. Such programs involve reconstructive surgery, prostheses, and vocational training to help them acquire new work skills. Although the Lomé Accord also called for the creation of a special fund to implement a program for rehabilitation of war victims but it has yet to be established. Attention to amputees increased the access of other persons with disabilities to health care and treatment. [2]

Educational System

5.38 The Government is committed to improving children's education and welfare, but lacks the means to provide basic education and health services for them. The law requires school attendance through primary school. [2]

5.39 However, schools throughout the country were looted and destroyed during the years of civil conflict most have yet to be rebuilt. A large number of children received little or no formal education. Largely formal and informal fees financed schools, but many families could not afford to pay them. The average educational level for girls was markedly below that of boys, and only 6% of women were literate. At the university level, male students predominated. [2][85]

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6. HUMAN RIGHTS

6a. HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES

Overview

6.1 President Kabbah's Government generally respects human rights, and has attempted to abide by the safeguards within the constitution. Where these rights have been curtailed, it has usually been because of security considerations or because of a lack of funds or trained personnel to ensure that they are respected.

However, the Government appears to be responsive to representations made to it, and has attempted to address the issue of human rights, and abuses when these have been reported to it. [2]

6.2 In the past, both groups backing the Government and rebel groups have failed to respect human rights. The CDF, a militia that supported the Government, were involved in human rights abuses during the civil conflict, but there have been no recent reports of systematic CDF involvement in such crimes. The Sierra Leone Government was also hampered in addressing human rights abuses, by its inability to extend its rule to all parts of the country. However, with the improved the security situation, there are grounds to believe that there may now be a sustained improvement in the human rights situation. [2][4][6]

Freedom of Speech and the Media

6.3 The Constitution provides for freedom of speech and of the press; but the Government at times has limited these rights. During 2002, there were no bans on any newspapers, and no radio station was shut down for failure to pay fees. Unlike in the previous year, security forces did not harass journalists. The written press and radio generally reported on security matters, corruption, and political affairs without interference. [2]

6.4 More than 50 newspapers were published in Freetown during 2002, covering a wide spectrum of interests and editorial opinion. 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 criticised the Government and its officials, as well as the rebel forces. [2]

6.5 The Independent Media Commission (IMC) regulated independent media outlets. Although it was an independent body, some media observers alleged that the Government influenced it. In March 2002, the IMC ordered the editor of the African Champion newspaper to stop publication and cease editorial functions for 2 months in response to two articles printed on 6 and 11 February 2002, which accused President Kabbah's son of using a Consul's diplomatic status to escape import duties. The IMC said the editor, Mohammed Koroma, had to cease publication until an investigation was complete. Koroma ignored the demand on the grounds that the IMC did not have the legal right to demand his suspension. The IMC charged Mohamed Koroma to the High Court; by the end of 2002 his case had yet to be heard. [2][95a]

6.6 Due to low levels of literacy and the 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. [2]

6.7 In February 2002 the IMC instituted a \$2,000 (4 million Leones) annual license fee for single channel radio stations. Radio journalists and media monitors claimed that this fee was prohibitively expensive, and if enforced would limit severely the number of independent radio stations. The IMC threatened to close any radio station that did not pay the fee, but in 2002 no stations were closed. [2] However, the West Africa Democracy Radio (WADR) was refused a licence in 2002. This station would have had the ability to broadcast beyond the borders off Sierra Leone, and the reason given for the ban, was because of security concerns. There are reports that Liberia's President Taylor was concerned that WADR would advocate an increase in democracy within the region. [95a]

6.8 The parastatal Sierratel Company exercised a monopoly over Internet access in the country. The lack of competition and the poor condition of telephone lines often made Internet connectivity problematic. [2]

Journalists

6.9 In November 2002, Paul Kamara, editor of the For Di People newspaper, was sentenced to 6 months in prison for defaming a local judge. The court sent a letter to the President recommending the banning of the paper for 6 months, however, the ban has not been implemented. International press rights groups have called for the repeal of the criminal libel law under which Mr. Kamara was charged. [2] In March 2003 he was freed, but has expressed his intention to appeal against the sentence. Mr. Kamara has stated that the judgement against him was illegal. [95b][96]

6.10 There was no action taken against police forces that detained and interrogated the editor of the Democrat newspaper in February 2001. There was no further development on the rumours of "killing squads" that allegedly targeted a list of seven journalists in September 2001. [2]

Freedom of Religion

6.11 The Constitution provides for freedom of religion and the Sierra Leonean Government respects this right

in practice. There are no requirements for the recognising, registering, or regulating of religious groups. The Government permits religious instruction in public schools. Students are allowed to choose whether they attend either Muslim or Christian oriented classes. [3]

6.12 There are amicable relations between the various religious communities, and interfaith marriage is common. The Inter-Religious Council (IRC), composed of Christian and Muslim leaders, plays a vital role in civil society and actively participates in efforts to further the peace process. The IRC criticises the use of force and an atrocity committed by the rebels, endorses reconciliation and peace talks, and facilitates rehabilitation of the victims affected by the war, including former child soldiers. [3]

6.13 Prior to the peace process, rebel forces have attacked both churches and mosques and targeted Christian and Muslim religious leaders, but such crimes have not recently been reported. Rebel forces also targeted members of religious orders, and those identified with religious groups, on the assumption that they would be paid a ransom for their return. [3]

Religious groups

6.14 Reliable data on the exact numbers of those who practice major religions are not available. However, most sources estimate that the population is 60% Muslim, 30% Christian and 10% practitioners of traditional indigenous religions. Historically, most Muslims have been concentrated in the northern areas of the country, and Christians were located in the south. However, the civil war resulted in movement by major segments of the population. According to sources, many syncretistic practices exist, with up to 20% of the population practising a mixture of Muslim and traditional indigenous practices or Christian and traditional indigenous practices. [3]

Freedom of Assembly & Association

6.15 The Constitution provides for freedom of assembly, and this is generally respected in practice. The Government did not deny requests to use public areas for meetings or demonstrations, many of which took place throughout 2002. [2]

6.16 Several large demonstrations took place during 2002, including demonstrations involving thousands of persons before the May 2002 elections. Although some demonstrations were marred by violence, most were relatively peaceful. UNAMSIL forces occasionally supported the government's security forces in dealing with demonstrations. On 18 July 2002, two persons were killed in demonstrations relating to the death of a well-known Fullah moneychanger in Freetown. A large crowd took the body of the moneychanger from the morgue and paraded it in the streets. UNAMSIL troops were deployed to key areas in central Freetown for security reasons. According to UNAMSIL, when the crowd became aggressive, UNAMSIL troops employed a combination of persuasion, crowd dispersal tactics, and firing of warning shots in the air. A consortium of domestic human rights NGOs investigated the incident and determined through alleged eyewitness accounts that UNAMSIL troops directly fired into the crowd, killing two civilians. A UNAMSIL investigation into the incident found no conclusive evidence as to how the individuals were killed. [2]

6.17 The Constitution provides for freedom of association, and the Government respected this right in practice. There were numerous civic, philanthropic, and social organisations, and the registration system was routine and apparently non-political. No known restrictions were applied to the formation or organisation of the 16 opposition political parties and 60 registered civic action non-governmental organisations. A number of domestic and international human rights groups operated without restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. Government officials were generally co-operative and responsive to their views. Representatives of various local and international NGO, foreign diplomats, the ICRC, and UN human rights officers are able to monitor trials and to visit prisons and custodial facilities. [2]

6.18 In 2001, 21 political parties were registered; and during 2002, 16 political parties were registered. Some parties were integrated into other parties, such as the Grand Alliance Party. RUF alleged that the Government prevented the establishment of an RUF political party as called for in the Lomé Accord. However, RUF registered as a political party, changing its name to the Revolutionary United Front Party (RUF), and fielded presidential and parliamentary candidates during the 2002 elections. [2]

Employment Rights

6.19 The Constitution provides for the right of association, and in practice workers had the right to join independent trade unions of their choice. Approximately 60% of the workers in urban areas, including Government workers, are unionised, but attempts to organise agricultural workers and mineworkers have met with little success. By custom all labour unions join the Sierra Leone Labour 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 membership numbers have declined as a percentage of all workers because of the virtual collapse of the small manufacturing sector. [2]

6.20 The Trade Union Act provides that any five persons may form a trade union by application 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. [2]

6.21 The law does not prohibit anti-union discrimination against workers or employer interference in the establishment of unions. An employee fired for union activities could file a complaint with a labour tribunal and seek reinstatement. Complaints of discrimination against trade unions have been made to tribunals. Unions were free to form federations and to affiliate internationally. The SLLC was a member of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU). [2]

6.22 The 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 had an equal number of employer and worker representatives. Most enterprises were covered by collective bargaining agreements on wages and working conditions. The SLLC provided assistance to unions in preparations for negotiations; in the case of a deadlock, the government could intervene. The Industrial Court for Settlement of Industrial Disputes began hearing cases in 2000; although most cases involving industrial issues continued to go through the normal court system, the Industrial Court heard more than 50 cases during 2002. [2]

6.23 Workers had the right to strike, although the Government could require 21 days' notice. There were several significant strikes in the public sector during 2002. Most notably teachers and doctors went on strike over wages and unpaid salaries in the form of work stoppages and sick-outs. Teachers, doctors, and nurses went on strike during 2002. Teachers in January, and nurses and doctors struck in February and March. According to the president of Sierra Leone Nurses' association, the Government eventually accepted 80% of the nurses' demands. Workers from Sierratel, a telecommunications parastatal, went on strike over refunds of pension benefits. No law prohibits retaliation against strikers, even for a lawful strike; however, the Government did not take adverse action against the employees and paid some of them back wages. [2]

People Trafficking

6.24 The law does not prohibit trafficking in persons, and there were reports that persons were trafficked from and within the country. Child prostitution was a problem, but with the end of the civil conflict and the demobilisation of child soldiers, trafficking in persons has reduced considerably. The Government acknowledged unconfirmed reports of limited trafficking within and from the country; however, it lacked resources to address the problem adequately. There were no figures available on the extent of the trafficking problem. [2]

6.25 During 2002, the Government compelled the RUF to disarm, demobilise, and release its child soldiers; however, there were concerns that a significant number of children remained with their captors. It was likely that small groups of previously captured women and girls continued to be forced to act as sex slaves. [2]

6.26 There have been no recent reports of rebels abducting persons to work as servants or labourers in the diamond fields; but there were reports that former RUF commanders continued to use children to mine diamonds. The Government had not yet asserted full control over the diamond fields. [2]

Freedom of Movement

6.27 The Constitution provides for these rights, and the Government generally respected them in practice; however, there were frequent reports that SLP officers manned roadblocks and stopped motorists to extort money from travellers. However there were no reports of any unofficial roadblocks. [2]

6.28 The Liberian border was officially closed at times during 2002, but this was due to the civil conflict in Liberia; and the authorities permitted refugees, returnees, and other persons to move between the two countries regularly. There were some unconfirmed reports of bribery or coercion at border crossing points, although United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that the Government did not hinder or return those seeking asylum. [2] In light of an upsurge of violence in Liberia in early 2003, the Liberian border was closed in February 2003. This was a response to security concerns, and the border was

re-opened in August 2003. [94]

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

6.29 The situation of internal displacement is now reported to be officially over, but there are between 10,000 to 20,000 'unofficial' IDPs, who are mostly in urban areas. The large influx of IDPs and the lack of resources caused tension between local residents and IDPs; however, there were no reported incidents of violence during 2002. There were numerous reports that refugees and IDPs returned to find their homes occupied. [2] [24]

6.30 Approximately 135,000 refugees were repatriated during 2002. An estimated 70,000 persons remained in refugee camps in Guinea and Liberia; smaller numbers remained in Côte d'Ivoire, the Gambia, Ghana, and other countries and were likely to integrate locally in those countries. [2]

6.31 The UN conducted an investigation into reports in 2001 of widespread sexual abuse of refugees in the Mano River Union, including Sierra Leone. The UN investigation found no evidence to support earlier claims of widespread abuse, but did confirm the report of the rape of a 14-year old returnee in June 2002. Other international aid workers reported that several cases of abuse and exploitation of refugees by aid workers took place throughout 2002. [2]

6.32 The law does not provide for granting of asylum or refugee status in accordance with the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. However, in practice the Government co-operated with the UNHCR and other organisations on repatriation matters and continued to provide first asylum to an increasing number of Liberians who had fled the conflict in their home country. UNHCR reported that more than 50,000 Liberian refugees entered the country in 2002. Some camps such as Jendema Camp at times were not able to provide adequate food or shelter for the influx of refugees, which caused border areas to become unstable. However, conditions in all camps were described as adequate by the end of 2002. [2]

6. HUMAN RIGHTS

6a. HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES

Overview

6.1 President Kabbah's Government generally respects human rights, and has attempted to abide by the safeguards within the constitution. Where these rights have been curtailed, it has usually been because of security considerations or because of a lack of funds or trained personnel to ensure that they are respected. However, the Government appears to be responsive to representations made to it, and has attempted to address the issue of human rights, and abuses when these have been reported to it. [2]

6.2 In the past, both groups backing the Government and rebel groups have failed to respect human rights. The CDF, a militia that supported the Government, were involved in human rights abuses during the civil conflict, but there have been no recent reports of systematic CDF involvement in such crimes. The Sierra Leone Government was also hampered in addressing human rights abuses, by its inability to extend its rule to all parts of the country. However, with the improved security situation, there are grounds to believe that there may now be a sustained improvement in the human rights situation. [2][4][6]

Freedom of Speech and the Media

6.3 The Constitution provides for freedom of speech and of the press; but the Government at times has limited these rights. During 2002, there were no bans on any newspapers, and no radio station was shut down for failure to pay fees. Unlike in the previous year, security forces did not harass journalists. The written press and radio generally reported on security matters, corruption, and political affairs without interference. [2]

6.4 More than 50 newspapers were published in Freetown during 2002, covering a wide spectrum of interests and editorial opinion. 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 criticised the Government and its officials, as well as the rebel forces. [2]

6.5 The Independent Media Commission (IMC) regulated independent media outlets. Although it was an independent body, some media observers alleged that the Government influenced it. In March 2002, the IMC ordered the editor of the African Champion newspaper to stop publication and cease editorial functions for 2 months in response to two articles printed on 6 and 11 February 2002, which accused President Kabbah's son of using a Consul's diplomatic status to escape import duties. The IMC said the editor, Mohammed Koroma, had to cease publication until an investigation was complete. Koroma ignored the demand on the grounds that the IMC did not have the legal right to demand his suspension. The IMC charged Mohamed Koroma to the High Court; by the end of 2002 his case had yet to be heard. [2]

6.6 Due to low levels of literacy and the 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. [2]

6.7 In February 2002 the IMC instituted a \$2,000 (4 million Leones) annual license fee for single channel radio stations. Radio journalists and media monitors claimed that this fee was prohibitively expensive, and if enforced would limit severely the number of independent radio stations. The IMC threatened to close any radio station that did not pay the fee, but in 2002 no stations were closed. [2]

6.8 The parastatal Sierratel Company exercised a monopoly over Internet access in the country. The lack of competition and the poor condition of telephone lines often made Internet connectivity problematic. [2]

Journalists

6.9 In November 2002, Paul Kamara, editor of the For Di People newspaper, was sentenced to 6 months in prison for defaming a local judge. The court sent a letter to the President recommending the banning of the paper for 6 months, however, the ban has not been implemented. International press rights groups have called for the repeal of the criminal libel law under which Kamara was charged. [2]

6.10 There was no action taken against police forces that detained and interrogated the editor of the Democrat newspaper in February 2001. There was no further development on the rumours of "killing squads" that allegedly targeted a list of seven journalists in September 2001. [2]

Freedom of Religion

6.11 The Constitution provides for freedom of religion and the Sierra Leonean Government respects this right in practice. There are requirements for the recognising, registering, or regulating of religious groups. The Government permits religious instruction in public schools. Students are allowed to choose whether they attend either Muslim or Christian oriented classes. [3]

6.12 There are amicable relations between the various religious communities, and interfaith marriage is common. The Inter-Religious Council (IRC), composed of Christian and Muslim leaders, plays a vital role in civil society and actively participates in efforts to further the peace process. The IRC criticises the use of force and an atrocity committed by the rebels, endorses reconciliation and peace talks, and facilitates rehabilitation of the victims affected by the war, including former child soldiers. [3]

6.13 Prior to the peace process, rebel forces have attacked both churches and mosques and targeted Christian and Muslim religious leaders, but such crimes have not recently been reported. Rebel forces also targeted members of religious orders, and those identified with religious groups, on the assumption that they would be paid a ransom for their return. [3]

Religious groups

6.14 Reliable data on the exact numbers of those who practice major religions are not available. However, most sources estimate that the population is 60% Muslim, 30% Christian and 10% practitioners of traditional indigenous religions. Historically, most Muslims have been concentrated in the northern areas of the country, and Christians were located in the south. However, the civil war resulted in movement by major segments of the population. According to sources, many syncretistic practices exist, with up to 20% of the population practising a mixture of Muslim and traditional indigenous practices or Christian and traditional indigenous practices. [3]

Freedom of Assembly & Association

6.15 The Constitution provides for freedom of assembly, and this is generally respected in practice. The Government did not deny requests to use public areas for meetings or demonstrations, many of which took place throughout 2002. [2]

6.16 Several large demonstrations took place during 2002, including demonstrations involving thousands of persons before the May 2002 elections. Although some demonstrations were marred by violence, most were relatively peaceful. At times UNAMSIL forces backed up government security forces in dealing with demonstrations. On 18 July 2002, two persons were killed in demonstrations relating to the death of a well-known Fullah moneychanger in Freetown. A large crowd took the body of the moneychanger from the morgue and paraded it in the streets. UNAMSIL troops were deployed to key areas in central Freetown for security reasons. According to UNAMSIL, when the crowd became aggressive, UNAMSIL troops employed a combination of persuasion, crowd dispersal tactics, and firing of warning shots in the air. A consortium of domestic human rights NGOs investigated the incident and determined through alleged eyewitness accounts that UNAMSIL troops directly fired into the crowd, killing two civilians. A UNAMSIL investigation into the incident found no conclusive evidence as to how the individuals were killed. [2]

6.17 The Constitution provides for freedom of association, and the Government respected this right in practice. There were numerous civic, philanthropic, and social organisations, and the registration system was routine and apparently non-political. No known restrictions were applied to the formation or organisation of the 16 opposition political parties and 60 registered civic action non-governmental organisations. A number of domestic and international human rights groups operated without restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. Government officials were generally co-operative and responsive to their views. Representatives of various local and international NGO, foreign diplomats, the ICRC, and UN human rights officers are able to monitor trials and to visit prisons and custodial facilities. [2]

6.18 In 2001, 21 political parties were registered; and during 2002, 16 political parties were registered. Some parties were integrated into other parties, such as the Grand Alliance Party. RUF alleged that the Government prevented the establishment of an RUF political party as called for in the Lomé Accord. However, RUF registered as a political party, changing its name to the Revolutionary United Front Party (RUF), and fielded presidential and parliamentary candidates during the 2002 elections. [2]

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Internally Displaced Persons (IDP)

6.29 Approximately 247,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) remained at the end of 2002, with 220,000 returning to their place of origin in the same period. Some IDPs were housed in camps, but many lived in Freetown or other urban centres, and many of these are not registered. [2][24] Residents who feared that their homes would not be safe strongly resisted government attempts to close IDP camps. The large influx of IDPs and the lack of resources caused tension between local residents and IDPs; however, there were no reported incidents of violence during 2002. There were numerous reports that refugees and IDPs returned to find their homes occupied. [2]

6.30 Approximately 135,000 refugees repatriated during 2002. An estimated 70,000 persons remained in refugee camps in Guinea and Liberia; smaller numbers remained in Cote d'Ivoire, the Gambia, Ghana, and other countries and were likely to integrate locally in those countries. [2]

6.31 The UN conducted an investigation into reports in 2001 of widespread sexual abuse of refugees in the Mano River Union, including Sierra Leone. The UN investigation found no evidence to support earlier claims of widespread abuse, but did confirm the report of the rape of a 14-year old returnee in June 2002. Other international aid workers reported that several cases of abuse and exploitation of refugees by aid workers took place throughout 2002. [2]

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co-operated with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other organisations on repatriation matters and continued to provide first asylum to an increasing number of Liberians who had fled the conflict in their home country. UNHCR reported that more than 50,000 Liberian refugees entered the country in 2002. Some camps such as Jendema Camp at times were not able to provide adequate food or shelter for the influx of refugees, which caused border areas to become unstable. However, conditions in all camps were described as adequate by the end of 2002. [2]

6B. HUMAN RIGHTS - SPECIFIC GROUPS

Ethnic Groups

6.33 The Constitution provides 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 sizeable Lebanese community and for other persons with non-African fathers. [2] The Lebanese community has traditionally been involved in business, particularly the diamond trade. [88]

6.34 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% of the population. [2]

6.35 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 are common. There did not appear to be a strong correspondence between ethnic or regional and political cleavages. [2]

Women

6.36 Violence against women, especially wife beating, is common. Police are unlikely to intervene in domestic disputes except in cases of severe injury or death. Domestic violence is not recognised as a societal problem. However, rape is recognised as a societal problem 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 it to secure income for themselves and their children. There were reports that former rebel forces continued to force women and girls to act as sex slaves. Medical or psychological services for rape victims were very limited. There have also been reports of the sexual abuse of refugees in refugee camps. [2]

6.37 A Human Rights Watch's report has highlighted the abuses during the civil conflict, and some of the Special Court indictments are against those suspected of involvement in crimes relating to rape and enslavement during this period. However, the report also noted that widespread social problems still remain regarding the conditions for women in Sierra Leone. [7][54]

6.38 The Constitution provides for equal rights for women but 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 that 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. Approximately 40% of women in the country voted, and women made up 13% of the candidates, in the May elections. Sixteen women won seats in the 112-seat Parliament. There were three women in the Cabinet and one in the Supreme Court. [2]

6.39 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. The average educational level for women is markedly below that of men; only 6% are literate. Women are very active in civic and philanthropic organisations and a significant number are employed as civil servants. [2]

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

6.40 Female genital mutilation (FGM) is widely practised among all levels of society, although with varying frequency. The form practised is excision. Some estimates of the percentage of women and girls who undergo the practice range as high as 80-90%. While the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimates the percentage of females who have undergone this procedure to be as high as between 90% local groups believe this figure is overstated. FGM is practised by almost all of Sierra Leone's ethnic groups, and there is no law prohibiting it. There are a number of NGOs working to inform the public about the harmful health effects of FGM and to eradicate it. However, an active mass campaign by secret societies opposes international efforts aimed at ending FGM. [2][60] Such groups see FGM as a rite of passage, and support the practise on cultural grounds, usually FGM is conducted at puberty in mass ceremonies in the bush. However, the displacement that resulted during the civil war has meant that this can be conducted on older girls and women. [2][60][61]

6.41 The best known of these societies would appear to be the Bondo society, but various interchangeable names are used for these groups such as Temne or Sande. Bondo has members from all parts of society, and would appear to have considerable social and political influence. [60][61] The Bondo have shown a willingness to agitate in favour of FGM, and have, on a number of occasions, sought political support. [62]

6.42 The Bondo society appears to be organised at both a local and a national level, and it holds rallies and meetings in support of its aims. The leaders of the groups are usually referred to as Soweis, a term that means initiators, and there are reports that suggest that this position is hereditary. [60][61] As the Bondo is a secret society, reliable information regarding their organisation, leadership and ceremonies is limited. During the ceremony, where FGM is performed, the initiates are sworn to secrecy, and these societies have taken action against those who they believe to have revealed their secrets. [61][64]

6.43 The Sierra Leone authorities have investigated case of FGM that have resulted in death and Bondo members who break the law. On 31 July 2002, police arrested 10 women in Freetown in connection with the death of a 14-year-old girl following an FGM rite. The girl reportedly was found lying on the ground, bleeding from her genital area. All 10 women were suspected members of the Bondo society. [2][63]

6.44 However, there appears to be little political will or inclination to challenge FGM: as it is traditionally practised within Sierra Leone. [64][65] Some politicians, reportedly including President Kabbah, would appear to support the Bondos, or at least be ambivalent in their attitude to it. [62][65]

Children

6.45 The Constitution prohibits forced and bonded labour, including that performed by children. However, this remains a problem, and there were reports of children in rural areas being forced to work. The minimum age for employment is officially 18 years, although children between the ages of 12 and 18 years may be employed in certain non-hazardous occupations, provided they have their parents' consent. In practice this law is not enforced because there is no government entity charged with the task, and parents have required the income that the labour of their children provides. Children routinely assist in family businesses and work as petty vendors. In rural areas, children work seasonally on family subsistence farms. Rebel forces also forced civilians, including children, to work as porters and in diamond fields. [2]

6.46 Over 6,000 child soldiers at a time served alongside adults on both sides during the civil conflict, but in greater numbers on the RUF side. However, in light of the improved security situation, there has been a reduction in the reports of forced recruitment by all groups. [2]

6.47 In a report of August 2000 Amnesty International stated that all groups, including those allied to the Sierra Leone Government, had continued to recruit children into their ranks. Amnesty called upon all groups to end this practice, and encouraged the Sierra Leone Government to stand by its commitments to address this issue. [26] During the upsurge in fighting in 2000, there were credible reports of human rights abuses by RUF, including the abuse of children, and their recruitment into RUF. [79][80] Rebels groups in Sierra Leone have in past kidnapped children to augment their forces and to abduct other children. Girls who were kidnapped were made to act as porters, and sexual abuse was common. [2][89]

6.48 The Lomé peace accord states that particular attention must be paid to the issue of child soldiers in the existing disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) process. A UNICEF supported programme is being run on the Freetown peninsula for children associated with the fighting forces. [27][89] Following the completion of the DDR process, it is reported that various rebel groups released 7,000 children, and most of these are not being adequately cared for. [82] UNICEF has requested additional money to assist with courses to reintegrate child soldiers, as they state that there is a shortfall in funds to address the need for rehabilitation. [78]

6.49 The National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration listed 6,845 demobilised

child combatants. Girls represented 8% of demobilised child soldiers, and 30% of reunified non-combatant separated children. The UN and human rights monitors estimated that girls represented 50% of those abducted during the war and there were reports that the rebels released disproportionate numbers of boys, these groups fear that many girls continued to be held as sex slaves. [2]

6.50 UNICEF reported in August 2002 that almost 7,000 children, including nearly 5,000 ex-combatants and nearly 2,000 non-combatant separated children, had been reunified with their families. More than 3,500 children of both groups were engaged in formal and informal education programs. Others were in special transitional centres, which were created to help provide for their unique mental and emotional needs prior to reunification with their families. There continued to be reports that some families and communities rejected the returnees because of their perceived involvement in rebel atrocities. Child protection agencies reported that hundreds of boys and girls did not participate in the formal demobilisation process. Locating the families of released child combatants often was difficult, and some did not want to assume responsibility for their children, some of whom were mentally and emotionally incapable of rejoining their families. [2]

6.51 In February 2002, there were reports by NGOs, UNHCR and Save the Children UK, that workers in refugee camps in Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone have been sexually abusing children in their care. Peacekeepers within Sierra Leone have also been accused of such abuses. The UN has acted to investigate these allegations, but no action was taken as a result of these enquiries. [86][87]

Child Care Arrangements

6.52 In light of the large numbers of children separated from their families, the provisions for childcare have been a priority. However, this care appears to be mostly provided by international NGOs, religious or charitable organisations. Government provisions for childcare are limited, but this would appear to be due to a lack of resources, rather than from an unwillingness to address this problem. [82][83][84][85]

6.53 There have also been reports that international aid workers have sexually abused children. These reports were investigated but no action was taken. [86][87]

Homosexuals

6.54 There is limited information on the attitude to homosexuality in Sierra Leone. Under laws that pre-date independence, male homosexuality would appear to be illegal, but there is no information on how the law is applied. [18][19]

Revolutionary United Front (RUF)

6.55 In late April/early May 2000, RUF forces appeared to be preparing to attack Freetown, their attitude to the peacekeepers and close proximity of their forces to the city, were interpreted as a threat. ECOMOG withdrew the majority of its troops on 2 May 2000, as it was believed that the UN peacekeepers could take its place. [1][67] On 8 May 2000, members of RUF fired on demonstrators outside Foday Sankoh's house in Freetown. A number of people were killed, and Foday Sankoh is believed to have sanctioned this action. He attempted to evade arrest, by going into hiding in Freetown, but was detained on 17 May 2000. During this outbreak of violence, RUF took approximately 500 UN peacekeepers hostage, they were soon freed, but a number were killed. [1] British forces have now been withdrawn, except for those involved in training, peace monitoring and advising the Sierra Leone Government and the UN. The United Kingdom Government continues to provide support for the Sierra Leone army and Government, and is considering further requests for assistance, and the appropriate means for its provision. [4][66][68][69] Following a change in RUF's leadership in August 2000, General Issa Sesay took command and replaced Foday Sankoh. [70]

6.56 On 10 November 2000, the Sierra Leone Government and RUF signed the Abuja Agreement, a cease-fire agreement brokered by ECOWAS in Nigeria. The agreement agreed to an end of hostilities, the revival of the derailed peace process and to a process of disarmament. They also agreed that the UN Mission in Sierra Leone would be allowed to deploy freely into rebel-held areas, including the diamond producing regions. The detention of Foday Sankoh was not discussed at this meeting. [4][57]

6.57 Prior to the elections in May 2002, all militia and rebel groups were to disarm. The UN reported that this had been achieved in January 2002, with over 40,000 rebel and Government militia forces being disarmed. Funds have also been provided to reintegrate members of such groups into society. RUF still has influence within the community, and it is likely that all groups have retained weapons caches. [71][76] RUF has re-organised as a political party, and it contested the parliamentary elections, and fielded a presidential candidate. [1][36]

Civil Defence Force (CDF)

6.58 The Civil Defence Forces (CDF), is a coalition of militias that supports the Government and is based on a traditional hunting society. They are also referred to as Kamajors. They were nominally under military discipline, and though independent were responsible to the Government. [1][2][4]

6.59 Prior to the elections in May 2002, all militia and rebel groups were to disarm. The UN reported that this was achieved in January 2002, with over 40,000 rebel and Government forces being disarmed. Funds have been provided to reintegrate members of such groups into society. However, this does not mean that such groups no longer have influence within the community, and it is likely that all groups have retained caches of weapons. [71][76] Sam Hinga Norman, former leader of CDF, is to face charges at the Special Court. This has not been popular, as there is still widespread support for him within the country. [10]

6C. HUMAN RIGHTS - OTHER ISSUES

United Nations (UN)

6.60 On 5 July 2000, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1306 (2000) imposing a ban on the import of rough diamonds from Sierra Leone, it also requested that a system of certification be set up by the Sierra Leone Government. This certification would confirm the provenance of diamonds exports that were approved by the Sierra Leone Government. This resolution also called for monitoring of any reports of violations of this prohibition. Liberia has been accused of supporting RUF by providing supplies, and involvement in RUF's illicit diamond exports, a charge that has been denied. Diamond trader groups have undertaken to abide by this resolution and assist the Sierra Leone Government. [72][73][74] In October 2000, the Sierra Leone Government lifted its ban on the export of diamonds, after taking delivery of specially printed certificates. These certificates are to guarantee that gems have been sold through officially approved channels. [81]

6.61 While progress has been made on the control of the illicit diamond trade, it still remains a problem. In December 2002, the UN re-affirmed its commitment to ending the trade in illicit diamonds from Sierra Leone, and approved a resolution to retain the measures already taken to reduce it. [55]

6.62 In August 2000 the Security Council adopted Resolution 1315 (2000). This recommended that the Sierra Leone Government assist in the creation of an independent Special Court with jurisdiction over cases relating to "notable crimes against humanity, war crimes and other serious violations of humanitarian law, as well as crimes under relevant Sierra Leonean law committed within the territory of Sierra Leone". The court would also have jurisdiction over individuals accused of bearing the greatest responsibility for the crimes listed above. [25]

6.63 The disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) has now been completed with over 47,000 fighters from various groups of rebels been processed. Training for those who have been demobilised is being provided, and some of the ex-fighters are to be reintegrated into the armed forces. [76]

6.64 In September 2003, The UN Security Council voted extended the mandate of the UN Mission in Sierra Leone by six months. [56] As of June 2003, the United Nations peacekeeping force was around 12,000. [4][75][77]

Poros Society

6.65 The Poros society is a traditional West African society, its membership is confined to men. The society transcends religious and ethnic divides, and its influence is spread over a number of West African countries. The Poros society mainly supported the Sierra Leonean Government during the civil conflict. However, there is evidence that the RUF also attempted to use it as a means of gaining support. In March 2001, RUF fighters are reported to have forcibly conscripted civilians in Makeni into the Poros society, in order to force them to join the RUF. [2][42][44]

6.66 The organisation of this society may differ from place to place, but they appear to have a number of features in common. These would include, an important role in traditional society, membership being confined to men only, selecting, or influencing the election of, tribal leader, and initiates boys into adulthood in secret ceremonies held in the bush. These ceremonies may involve scarification. The society has considerable local and national influence, it would appear to be able to organise nation wide in Sierra Leone. In some areas the membership would appear to comprise all of the adult male population. Membership of the Poros society is essential in some communities for a man to take part in local affairs. The society prohibits the revelation of its ceremonies to non-members, but there is no information regarding what happens to those that break this rule, or transgress any of the other rules of the society. Poros would also appear to have the

support of some political leaders. In light of the disruption caused by the civil conflict, the resurgence of this group may also be seen as a move to a return to traditional values, and an attempt to assert social control, by traditional tribal leaders, over tribes whose populations have been displaced. [42][43]

6.67 As well as political influence, and being an informal means of enforcing social control, the society also attempts to regulate the way that natural resources are used. There have been claims that the society has abused its position and intimidate non-members, for example by attempting to force people to join the society, or provocative demonstrations. There is little information on what action the authorities would take against members of this society who break the law. [44][45][46]

SIERRA-LEONE COUNTRY REPORT

OCTOBER 2003

COUNTRY INFORMATION & POLICY UNIT

ANNEX A: Chronology of Events

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1962 SLPP retain power in elections.

1964 Sir Milton Margai dies and is succeeded as Prime Minister by his half brother Dr. Albert Margai.

1967 In March the APC led by Dr. Siaka Stevens wins the general election but is prevented from taking power by a military coup.

1968 In April following an army mutiny a civilian government is restored with Dr. Stevens as Prime Minister. A period of political instability followed culminating in an attempted military coup in March 1971 that was put down with the aid of troops from Guinea.

1971 In April Sierra Leone is declared a republic with Dr. Stevens as executive president.

1976 Dr. Stevens re-elected to presidency for a second 5 year term of office in March.

1977 Elections held in May a year early because of political unrest. SLPP secured 15 of the 85 elective seats in the legislature.

1978 The new constitution was approved in June which provided for a one party system. APC thus became the sole legal party. On 14 June Stevens was sworn in for a 7-year presidential term. SLPP MPs joined the APC.

1981 State of emergency declared in August in an attempt to suppress a general strike following a government financial scandal.

1982 General election held in May under the one party constitution amid serious outbreaks of violence.

1982 - 1985 Continuing unrest and demonstrations against food shortages, the rise in prices and failure to pay salaries.

1985 Major General Joseph Saidu Momoh inaugurated as president.

1987 Government foils an attempted coup in January. State of emergency declared in November following a series of strikes by public sector workers. Under new measures corruption was re-defined as a criminal offence and people accused of any crime could be tried in absentia. Severe penalties were introduced for the publication of defamatory articles in newspapers; government censorship was imposed and private mail became subject to inspection.

1989 October Francis Minah, the first vice-president, and 5 others executed for plotting to assassinate Momoh and to overthrow government.

1991 September A new constitution was formally adopted. In late September 6 newly created political associations allied themselves as UNIFOM and demanded that the government give way to an interim administration.

1992 April 29 Government replaced in armed coup led by Captain Valentine Strasser. Momoh fled to Guinea on 30 April and Strasser announced the formation of the NPRC, which suspended the 1978 and 1991 constitutions; dissolved the House of Representatives; suspended all political activity and imposed a state of emergency and curfew.

1992 May 6 Strasser was sworn in as head of state.

1992 July Legislation introduced which imposed severe restrictions on the media and authorised state censorship.

December The government foiled a coup attempt by the Anti Corruption Revolutionary Movement. Nine of those who were accused of involvement in the conspiracy, together with 17 prisoners previously convicted of treason, were executed.

1993 January Several former members of the Momoh government who had been detained since May 1992 were released. Further press restrictions were imposed.

February The commission of enquiry that had been established in May 1992 published report, containing evidence of corruption on the part of former members of the Momoh administration.

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1995 March Musa ordered to retire after Strasser rejected his proposal for the installation of a transitional civilian government.

June The ban on political parties was formally rescinded. 15 parties were subsequently granted registration although the RUF refused to participate in the political process.

1996 January Strasser deposed by military officers led by Bio in a bloodless coup. Bio assumed the office of head of state.

February 26 Presidential and legislative elections took place

March 15 A second round of presidential elections took place.

March 29 Ahmed Tejan Kabbah of the SLPP inaugurated as president.

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November Signing of the peace agreement in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. Known as the Abidjan Accord it provided for the immediate cessation of hostilities and a schedule for disarmament, demobilisation and reconstruction. A Neutral Monitoring Group from the international community was to be responsible for monitoring the implementation of the peace agreement. There were, however, major setbacks and delays in implementation.

1997 May 25 President Kabbah's government overthrown by a group of low ranking army officers who formed the AFRC. Major Johnny Paul Koroma, who was set free from prison on the day of the coup, headed the AFRC. The constitution was suspended, political parties were banned and all demonstrations were prohibited.

June 17 Major Koroma was sworn in as head of state. The RUF joined forces with the AFRC to form the People's Army. Foday Sankoh was named vice-chairman of the AFRC and prominent members of the RUF were appointed to the AFRC's ruling council.

October 23 Conakry Communique signed which, over a 6-month period, would provide inter alia for the re-instatement of Kabbah's civilian government and the disarmament of all combatants and immunity for the leaders of the May coup.

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March - The Special Court has begun pre-trial hearings, and has indicted seven men in connection with human rights abuses. Those accused are both ex-rebels and Government supporters. The state of emergency laws, that had limited some of the Constitutions provisions, was lifted on 1 March 2002.

May - Sam Bockarie, a prominent former leader of RUF, was killed during fighting in Liberia, and a body alleged to be his was returned to Freetown

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ANNEX B: POLITICAL ORGANISATIONS

All People's Congress (APC)

The governing party from 1968. It was the sole legal party from 1978 until 1991 and merged with the DPP in March 1992. It was reconstituted in 1995 and was led by Edward Turay. The APC came second in the May 2002 an election received 22.352%, and has 27 seats of the seats in parliament. The APC leader Ernest Bai Koroma was its presidential candidate.

Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC)

A military organisation headed by Major Johnny Paul Koroma. Removed President Kabbah's government in a coup on 25 May 1997. Joined forces with the RUF to form the People's Army. The AFRC has now been dissolved.

Civil Defence Force (CDF)

A local defence force organised to resist RUF. The most significant grouping in the CDF is known as Kamajors (traditional hunters). They are allied to the Sierra Leonean government, but are highly independent and not fully under government control.

ECOWAS Ceasefire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG)

Nigerian led West African peacekeeping force whose main base is in Liberia. ECOMOG withdrew in May 2000, and its departure may have encouraged RUF to challenge the UN force in Sierra Leone.

Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)

An intergovernmental organisation of 16 West African states with headquarters in Nigeria whose aim is to promote economic development and regional co-operation.

National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC)

Established by Captain Valentine Strasser who seized power in a military coup in April 1992. It comprised 18 military officers and 4 civilians. The NPRC suspended the 1978 and 1991 Constitutions, dissolved the House of Representatives and imposed a state of emergency and curfew. All political activity was suspended and in July 1992 it was designated the supreme council of state. It also imposed severe restrictions on the media and authorised state censorship. In January 1996 Maada Bio, who officially relinquished power to Kabbah's civilian government on 29 March 1996, replaced Strasser.

People's Democratic Party (PDP)

Led by Osman Kamara. Supported the SLPP in the May 2002 elections.

Peace and Liberation Party, alternative name People's Liberation Party, (PLP)

Founded in 2002, and led by John Paul Koroma, who was also the PLP's presidential candidate in the May 2002 elections. He came third, with 3% of the votes cast. The party has 2 seats in the present Sierra Leone Parliament.

Revolutionary United Front (RUF)

Joined forces with National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) and commenced insurgency in 1991. Remained in conflict with the government despite cease-fires. RUF 's Leader Foday Sankoh was replaced in August 2000 by Gen. Issa Sesay as interim leader. He is also the leader of the Revolutionary United Front Party (RUF), which is RUF's political party. RUF was registered as a political party in November 1999, and fielded both a presidential candidate and parliamentary candidates in the May 2002 elections. Their presidential candidate, RUF's General Secretary Pallo Bangura, received 1.73% of the votes cast. In the parliamentary elections, the RUF received approximately 1% of the vote cast, and holds no seats in Parliament.

Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP)

Led initially by Dr. (later Sir) Milton Margai. It remained the governing party until 1967 and was then the official opposition party from 1968 to 1978. It emerged as the largest party in Parliament following elections in February 1996. Led by President Kabbah. The SLPP obtained 83 seats in the May 2002 election. President Kabbah was re-elected with 70.06% of the votes cast.

United National People's Party (UNPP)

Led by John Karefa-Smart. Obtained 17 seats in February 1996 elections.

United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone, (UNAMSIL)

An international peace keeping force deployed to Sierra Leone, and mandated by the UN Security Council.

ANNEX C: PROMINENT PEOPLE**CAPTAIN JULIUS MAADA BIO**

Replaced Musa as deputy chairman of NPRC and chief secretary of state in July 1993. Led the coup that deposed Strasser in January 1996.

SAM BOCKARIE

Known as "Mosquito", was an RUF battle group commander from 1992 to April 1997, when he became the battlefield commander, subordinate only to Foday Sankoh. Within the joint-forces of AFRC/RUF, he was Chief of Defence Staff. In December 1999, opposed to the peace process, he fled to Liberia where he allegedly fought alongside Charles Taylor. In late 2002, Bockarie was identified by witnesses as being active in the western part of Côte d'Ivoire, where Liberians were involved in fighting alongside local rebel groups; possibly with the support of the Liberian Government. There were also widespread human rights abuses in rebel held areas in Côte d'Ivoire. The Liberian Government announced his death on 5 May 2003, and a body alleged to be his was returned to Sierra Leone in June 2003.

AHMED TEJAN KABBAH

Leader of the SLPP and elected president in March 1996. Overthrown by a military coup on 25 May 1997. Re-instated March 1998. He was re-elected President in May 2002.

JOHNNY PAUL KOROMA

Chair of the Commission for the Consolidation of Peace, established under the Lomé Peace Agreement. He was the Leader of the AFRC, the military junta that deposed the civilian government of President Kabbah.

ALBERT MARGAI

Milton Margai's half-brother. Minister of Finance until he became Prime Minister in 1964 upon his half brother's death.

MILTON MARGAI

Leader of the SLPP he became Chief Minister in 1953 and Prime Minister in 1958. Under his leadership Sierra Leone became an independent state within the Commonwealth on 27 April 1961.

JOSEPH SAIDU MOMOH

A cabinet minister in the APC and commander of the armed forces. He became leader of the party and president on 28 November 1985. Overthrown in a military coup on 29 April 1992. Fled to Guinea on 30 April 1992. He returned to Sierra Leone in 1997, and was granted a pardon under the Lomé Peace Accord. He died on 2 August 2003.

CAPTAIN SOLOMON MUSA

Acting head of state during Strasser's temporary absence in September 1992. He was appointed chief secretary of state in December 1992 and was widely blamed for the repressive measures undertaken by the government. He was replaced in July 1993 and initially took refuge in the Nigerian High Commission in Freetown before ultimately seeking refuge in the UK. Served as Prime Minister under the military junta from 1997-1998. Killed in fighting at Panguma on 29 December 1998.

SAM HINGA NORMAN

Co-ordinator of the CDF, the main indigenous force, that supported the government during the period of civil conflict. He served as deputy minister of defence in the first Kabbah government from 1996 until May 2002. Following the 14 May 2002 elections, he was made Minister of Internal Affairs in the second Kabbah government. He has been removed from his post, and is currently under arrest, awaiting trial by the Special Court. George Banda Thomas has replaced him in his post, and is acting Minister of Internal Affairs.

FODAY SANKOH

Leader of the RUF, but is at present in detention. He has been replaced by Gen. Issa Sesay as interim leader. In July 2003 he died of natural causes while in custody awaiting trial.

GEN. ISSA SESAY

Interim leader of RUF since August 2000, and is also leader of the RUFP. He is currently under arrest, awaiting trial by the Special Court.

SIKA STEVENS

Former leader of the APC who won the general elections of March 1967 but was prevented from taking power until April 1968. Dr. Stevens became executive President when Sierra Leone became a republic in April 1971. He remained president until 1985.

VALENTINE E.M. STRASSER

The leader of the coup which seized power on 29 April 1992. Established the NPRC. As head of state and chairman of the NPRC Strasser suspended all political activity; suspended the 1978 and 1991 constitutions; dissolved the House of Representatives and imposed a state of emergency. In July 1992 Strasser's regime introduced severe restrictions on the media and authorised state censorship. Strasser was deposed in a bloodless coup in January 1996. He has since returned to Sierra Leone from the United Kingdom.

SIERRA-LEONE COUNTRY REPORT**OCTOBER 2003****COUNTRY INFORMATION & POLICY UNIT****ANNEX D: REFERENCES TO SOURCE MATERIAL**Part IPart II**ANNEX D: REFERENCES TO SOURCE MATERIAL**

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