

NATIONS UNIES
HAUT COMMISSARIAT
POUR LES REFUGIES



UNITED NATIONS
HIGH COMMISSIONER
FOR REFUGEES

Ynglingagatan 14, 6th Floor
113 47 Stockholm Sweden

Journal har kopi

64

FACSMILE MESSAGE

To: Flygtingenaevnet att: Helene Olesen	Destination Fax No: 00 (45) 33 92 96 00
From: Annika Lindén Deputy Regional Representative 	Return Fax No: (46 8) 457 4887 Tel: (46 8) 457 4880
Date: 9 August 2001	No. Of Pages Including This Page: Two(2)

File Code: ROBNC/0412/01

Other Code:

Subject: Information concerning Sierra Leone

It has come to our attention that some asylum seekers from Sierra Leone have been denied protection in Denmark and that in a few cases rejected asylum seekers may have been deported. For your information in this context we can mention a specific case of Mr ~~S. [REDACTED]~~. We have been in contact with his lawyer Mr Christensen with whom we have shared information on UNHCR's position on return of rejected asylum seekers to Sierra Leone.

We would also like to provide you with the same information to be considered in similar cases of asylum seekers from Sierra Leone, which has been received from our Headquarters in Geneva, dated 14 of June, following queries from some Governments on possible repatriation:

(1) It is true that UNHCR has recently "facilitated" the voluntary repatriation of Sierra Leonean refugees from Guinea, but this should not be confused with "promotion" of voluntary repatriation, since conditions in Sierra Leone are not yet conducive for such an exercise; indeed, in some instances such "voluntary repatriation" looked more like humanitarian evacuation due to force majeure, i.e. military activities in refugee-hosting areas had made it all but impossible for the refugees to continue to remain in safety in their country of asylum;

(2) It is also true that the RUF appears to have accepted to disarm its militias on the basis of the 1999 Lome Peace Agreement and recent political negotiations with the Government of Sierra Leone. However, twice before the RUF made this undertaking, only to break it soon thereafter, and in any event it will take some time for this new position to filter down to the rank and file due to the rather disorganized state of the rebel movement. While disarmament has started taking place in parts of the country,

it has yet to materialize in the heartland of the RUF in the Eastern Region. On issues such as disarmament, the release of child combatants and freedom of movement of civilians, the position of the RUF high command is not always shared by local commanders. The official position of the RUF is therefore not necessarily implemented on the ground in the way intended (UNHCR BO Sierra Leone experienced this at first hand during a mission to Kainahun district this week). It would therefore be premature at this stage to take as a given that the RUF will disarm and allow the ECOWAS peacekeeping force to take control of the territory it holds, particularly the gold and diamond mining areas in the Eastern Region;

(3) Large parts of the country continue to be controlled by the RUF. Human rights abuses continue to be perpetrated by the RUF and, to a lesser extent, also by pro-government irregular militias (Kamajors and others). The vast majority of returning refugees are becoming internally displaced persons upon return, as they are unable to return to their areas of origin. IDP camps are overstretched, as are UNHCR temporary settlements for returnees who are unable to return home. The total IDP population (both registered and unregistered) is estimated at over one million (i.e. about a quarter of the population).

(4) In light of the above, and taking into account lessons learned in the past in such a volatile environment, UNHCR believes that it is too early to conclude that the situation in Sierra Leone has consolidated to the point of warranting the return of rejected asylum seekers. Accordingly, the Office takes the position that States should continue to refrain from returning rejected asylum seekers from Sierra Leone to their country of origin at this stage.

We hope that this information will be helpful to you.