

SIERRA LEONE: Public statement

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SIERRA LEONE

Public statement



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PUBLIC STATEMENT

SIERRA LEONE

The period of rule of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), joined by the armed opposition Revolutionary United Front (RUF), following the military coup in May 1997 was characterized by gross human rights abuses, including torture and killing of unarmed civilians. The abuses have continued and worsened as the AFRC and RUF have retreated from Freetown towards the east of the country after being forced from power by West African troops, known as ECOMOG in mid-February.

In a report published in October 1997 -- *Sierra Leone: A disastrous set-back for human rights* -- Amnesty International documented some of the many cases of arbitrary arrest and detention, torture and ill-treatment and deliberate killings by the AFRC and RUF. Amnesty International repeatedly called for an end to these abuses. Since October, and, in particular since the AFRC and RUF were removed from power, the catalogue of abuses has become horrific.

The AFRC and RUF have killed, tortured and raped as they have retreated through Bo, Kenema, Lunsar and Makeni and other towns and surrounding villages. In April, as ECOMOG forces advanced towards Koidu, in Kono District, in the east, the AFRC and RUF deliberately killed and mutilated unarmed civilians. More than a hundred victims with their arms, feet or ears cut off, or suffering from bullet or machete wounds, have been brought to Connaught Hospital in Freetown. It is a critical time in Sierra Leone for rebuilding the country and laying the foundations for a secure and peaceful future. Effective institutions and mechanisms for protecting and respecting human rights -- such as an efficient and independent judiciary, a well trained and disciplined police force and an independent human rights commission -- must be established.

It is also essential to ensure that there is accountability for the atrocities which have been committed in Sierra Leone, both since Sierra Leone's internal armed conflict began in 1991 and also while the AFRC and RUF were in power. There should be proper investigations into these abuses and those responsible brought to justice. Reconciliation and peace in Sierra Leone cannot be achieved if the right of victims and their families to truth and justice are ignored.

Since the AFRC was removed from power in February more than 1,500 people suspected of supporting or collaborating with the AFRC have been detained; 59 of them had been charged with treason, some also with other offences including murder, by the end of April. Those charged should be given a fair trial, in accordance with international standards, and without recourse to the death penalty. Anyone among the many hundreds of people who remain held who is not to be charged should be released.

Source: Amnesty International, International Secretariat, 1 Easton Street, WC1X 8DJ, London United Kingdom



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SIERRA LEONE
**Amnesty International receives shocking information
about mounting atrocities in Sierra Leone**

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SIERRA LEONE

Amnesty International receives shocking information about mounting atrocities in Sierra Leone

Amnesty International has just received horrifying information that hundreds of unarmed civilians in Sierra Leone are being brutally killed and mutilated by forces of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) and the armed opposition Revolutionary United Front (RUF) -- which were forced from power by West African troops in mid-February.

"Victims have reported women and children being rounded up, locked into a house which was then set alight. Women have been raped and have suffered other forms of sexual assault. Men who refused to rape members of their own family were reported to have had their arms hacked off," Amnesty International said today.

In the last few days another 13 victims from Kono District in the east of the country have been admitted to Connaught Hospital in the centre of the capital, Freetown. The victims include a 60-year-old woman whose arm had been deliberately amputated, and three men who had both arms cut off and others who had one arm cut off.

These victims joined more than a hundred civilians -- housewives, traders, farmers, miners -- already being treated for crude amputations, bullet and machete wounds in Connaught Hospital by a Médecins Sans Frontières surgical team. They have arrived since early April as retreating AFRC and RUF forces in Kono District have killed, tortured and raped. Some people have also had ears cut off. It had taken some of the victims days, if not weeks, to reach medical assistance. One man who had both arms cut off walked from village to village until he was able to find a vehicle to bring him to Freetown. Many others -- possibly hundreds -- have fled into the bush.

"There is an urgent need to protect civilians from these atrocities," the organization said. "The international community should urgently establish a human rights presence in Sierra Leone which would be able to independently monitor human rights violations and make its findings and recommendations public."

All steps should be taken to minimise the risk to civilians and to speedily evacuate to safety victims of mutilation and other forms of torture.

Villages between Njaiama-Sewafe and Koidu have been repeatedly attacked by armed men. More recently villages around Alkalita and Yifin in Koinadugu District have been attacked.

Source: *Amnesty International, International Secretariat, 1 Easton Street, WC1X 8DJ, London, United Kingdom*