

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

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FREEDOM HOUSE

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Freedom in the World - Sierra Leone (2006)

Polity: No polity available

Political Rights: 4

Civil Liberties: 3

Status: Partly Free

Population:
5,500,000

GNI/Capita: \$150

Life Expectancy:
40

Religious Groups:
Muslim (60 percent), indigenous beliefs (30 percent), Christian (10 percent)

Ethnic Groups:
Temne (30 percent), Mende (30 percent), other tribes (30 percent), Creole (10 percent)

Capital: Freetown

Overview

The war crimes tribunal for Sierra Leone continued its work in 2005, as international pressure mounted for the country's most-wanted fugitive, former Liberian president Charles Taylor, to stand trial. The UN peacekeeping force was set to depart Sierra Leone at the end of 2005, and mechanisms were being put in place to help assure a smooth transition leading to elections in 2007.

Founded by Britain in 1787 as a haven for liberated slaves, Sierra Leone became independent in 1961. The Revolutionary United Front (RUF) launched a guerrilla campaign from neighboring Liberia in 1991 to end 23 years of increasingly corrupt one-party rule by President Joseph Momoh. Power fell to Captain Valentine Strasser in 1992, when he and other junior officers attempted to confront Momoh about poor pay and working conditions at the front; Momoh fled the country. The Strasser regime hired South African soldiers from the security company Executive Outcomes to help win back key diamond-rich areas. In January 1996, Brigadier Julius Maada-Bio quietly deposed Strasser. Elections proceeded despite military and rebel intimidation, and voters elected Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, a former UN diplomat, as president.

In 1997, Major Johnny Paul Koroma toppled the Kabbah government, established the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), and invited the RUF to join the junta. Nigerian-led West African troops, backed by logistical and intelligence support from the British company Sandline, restored Kabbah to power in February 1998, but the country continued to be wracked by war. A peace agreement in July 1999 led to the beginning of disarmament, but the process stopped in May 2000 with a return to hostilities and the taking of about 500 peacekeepers as hostages. British troops flew in to help, and disarmament resumed in May 2001.

Additional Info:

[Freedom in the World 2005](#)

[Freedom of the Press 2005](#)

[Nations in Transit 2004](#)

[Countries at the Crossroads 2005](#)

In the May 2002 presidential poll, in which eight candidates competed, Kabbah was reelected with 70 percent of the vote, compared with 22 percent for Ernest Koroma of the All People's Congress (APC). The RUF candidate, Alimamy Pallo Bangura, lagged with barely 2 percent of the vote. Kabbah's Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) dominated parliamentary elections the same month, winning 83 of 112 available seats; only two other parties won seats.

The UN-backed Special Court for Sierra Leone began holding trials in 2004 of those deemed primarily responsible for war crimes and human rights abuses committed during the civil war. Thirteen people have been indicted. In November 2005, New York-based Human Rights Watch asserted that the court had broken new ground with practices to promote fair trials, protect witnesses, and make justice accessible to Sierra Leoneans. However, the group said, Charles Taylor's ongoing exile in Nigeria threatened to undercut the court's ability to fulfill its mandate. Taylor, the

former president of Liberia, was accused of backing the RUF with weapons in exchange for diamonds. Nigeria claims that handing over Taylor would go against the terms of the deal under which Taylor agreed to step down in August 2003.

Although Liberia is currently at peace, insecurity in neighboring Guinea and Cote d'Ivoire is perilous for the entire region. The last troops of the once 17,300-strong UN Mission in Sierra Leone, the world's largest peacekeeping mission, were scheduled to leave by the end of 2005. A UN assistance team is to step in after the peacekeepers leave and will help conduct elections in 2007.

To help maintain stability, the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, modeled on South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, has recommended that the government reform the judicial system, intensify efforts to eradicate corruption, and fight discrimination against women. Three years after the end of the war, many Sierra Leoneans are discouraged, complaining of corruption, poor infrastructure, and a lack of jobs. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights said in October 2005 that the critical issues of marginalization and exclusion that were the underlying causes of the civil war had not been addressed.

The Brussels-based International Crisis Group (ICG) said in December 2004 that Sierra Leone and Liberia risked sliding back into conflict if the international community did not stay committed-for the next 15 to 25

years-to a fresh approach to restore security and civil liberties. According to the report, government institutions in Sierra Leone were focused on finding new sources of donor revenue, rather than developing autonomy and self-sufficiency. The ICG also said that voices from civil society who could make real change tended to be marginalized, while the economy was left vulnerable to criminal elements.

Sierra Leone has vast diamond resources, but smuggling and war have turned it into one of the world's poorest countries. A ban on rough-diamond imports from Sierra Leone does not include diamonds that carry proven certificates of origin from the government. The country's rutile mines-once the biggest industry in the country-reopened in 2005. Rutile, a black metal, is used to make titanium dioxide, which is essential to the aerospace industry. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) in January 2005 announced that Sierra Leone had shown significant economic recovery since the end of the civil war, especially in the sectors of agriculture, mining, manufacturing, and services.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties

Citizens of Sierra Leone can change their government democratically. Presidential and legislative elections in February and March 1996 were imperfect, but were considered legitimate. Despite some logistical problems, the May 2002 presidential and parliamentary elections were considered the country's fairest since independence. President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah and his SLPP enjoyed the advantage of incumbency and state resources for both elections. Sierra Leone has a 124-seat unicameral parliament of which 112 seats are chosen by popular vote and 12 seats are filled by paramount chiefs chosen in separate elections. Parliamentary elections are held every five years. The president is elected by popular vote every five years and serves as both chief of state and head of government.

Dozens of political parties have been formed, but many revolve around a specific personality and have little following. The major political parties include the SLPP, the APC, and the Peace and Liberation Party.

Corruption is a major problem. However, an anticorruption commission established by parliament in 2000 has already brought several cases to court. In February, the Ottawa-based Partnership Africa Canada said that Sierra Leone had improved transparency in its diamond trade, and that remaining problems had less to do with willful corruption and mismanagement than with challenges of governance and procedure. Sierra Leone was ranked 126 out of 159 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2005 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Freedom of speech and of the press is guaranteed, but the government at times restricts these rights. Criminal libel laws are used occasionally to jail journalists. There are several government and private radio and television stations, and newspapers openly criticize the government and armed factions. Dozens of newspapers are printed in Freetown, but most are of poor quality and often carry sensational or undocumented stories. Internet access is not impeded.

International press freedom groups harshly criticized the government in 2004 following the imprisonment of a well-known Sierra Leonean journalist. Paul Kamara, editor and publisher of the independent newspaper For Di People, was sentenced in October to two years in prison because of articles that linked Kabbah to fraudulent activities in 1967. The court found Kamara guilty on two counts of "seditious libel" under the 1965 Public Order Act. In October 2005, the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists said that it was "outraged" that Kamara remained in jail a year after being convicted. That same month, Kabbah reportedly sent a letter to the Independent Media Commission, which oversees Sierra Leone's news media, in which he called for the seditious libel law to be amended. A judicial inquest in August found that an attack in May of that year on editor Harry Yansaneh, who took over for Kamara at For Di People, contributed to his death from kidney failure two months later. A magistrate ordered the arrest of member of parliament Fatmata Hassan, three of her children, and two other men in connection with Yansaneh's death. Before the attack, Hassan was seeking to evict For Di People and five other independent newspapers from the offices they had rented from Hassan's family for many years.

Freedom of religion is guaranteed and respected in practice. Academic freedom is guaranteed.

The rights of freedom of assembly and association are guaranteed, and these rights are generally respected in practice. Several national and international nongovernmental organizations and civic groups, including human rights groups, operate openly and freely. Workers have the right to join independent trade unions of their choice. Up to 60 percent of workers in urban areas, including government employees, are unionized. There is a legal framework for collective bargaining, and workers have the right to strike. However, a report by the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions in February said there were serious violations of core labor standards in Sierra Leone. According to the report, several thousand children worked in diamond mining, as prostitutes, and as domestic servants. The confederation also said that women were discriminated against in the formal economy.

The judiciary has demonstrated independence, and a number of trials have been free and fair. Rural courts extensively supplement the central government judiciary in cases involving family law, inheritance, and land tenure. However, corruption and a lack of resources are impediments to the judiciary. Arbitrary arrest without charge is common, and there are often lengthy pretrial detentions in harsh conditions. Prison

conditions are harsh and sometimes life threatening.

Eight international judges were appointed to sit on the UN-backed Special Court for Sierra Leone. The court made history as the first international war crimes tribunal to sit UN-appointed judges alongside local judges at a court in the country where the atrocities took place. Its goal was to deliver justice less expensive and faster than tribunals for Rwanda and Bosnia. Funding has been a key source of frustration and potential impediment for the court to complete its work, Human Rights Watch said in November 2005.

Ethnic loyalty is an important factor in the government, armed forces, and business. Complaints of ethnic discrimination are common.

Sierra Leone once had one of Africa's worst human rights records. Abduction, maiming, rape, forced conscription, and extrajudicial killing were commonplace. Although security has improved considerably, lack of equipment for security forces and poor infrastructure could hinder longer-term efforts to keep a lid on unrest in Sierra Leone, especially if demobilized combatants lack opportunities for employment.

Despite constitutionally guaranteed equal rights, women face extensive legal and de facto discrimination, as well as limited access to education and formal (business) sector jobs. Married women have fewer property rights than men, especially in rural areas, where customary law prevails. Abuse of women, including rape, sexual assault, and sexual slavery, were rampant during the war. No laws prohibit female genital mutilation, which is widespread. Parliament passed legislation in 2004 providing penalties for human trafficking.