



[Print Friendly Version]

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

[Home](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [FOIA](#) | [Privacy Notice](#) | [Archive](#) | [Search](#)
[About the State Department](#) | [Press & Public Affairs](#) | [Travel & Living Abroad](#)
[Countries & Regions](#) | [International Topics & Issues](#) | [History, Education & Culture](#)
[Business Center](#) | [Other Services](#) | [Employment](#)

Sierra Leone

Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - 2001
 Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor
 March 4, 2002



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

In 1999 the U.N. Security Council approved a peacekeeping operation, the U.N. Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), and has approved strength increases several times since its establishment. ECOMOG completely withdrew its forces from the country in April 2000. In 2000 there were several armed clashes between government forces and rebel forces, including the RUF. In 2000 tensions rose between the Government and the RUF, and in a series of separate incidents in a 10-day period between late April and early May, more than 700 U.N. peacekeepers were taken hostage by RUF rebels; however, no U.N. peacekeepers were taken hostage during the year. RUF leader Foday Sankoh, arrested in 2000 after demonstrators were killed outside of his residence, remained in government custody at year's end. In 2000 the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) program called for in the Lome Accord, which includes provisions to protect the human rights of ex-combatants, came to a de facto halt, and many combatants rearmed. In November 2000, the Government and the RUF signed the Abuja Agreement, which included provisions for a cease-fire, disarmament, and deployment of UNAMSIL peacekeepers in parts of the country under RUF control. In May a subsequent agreement reached in Abuja with ECOWAS mediation allowed for the resumption of the DDR program called for in the Lome Accord. Both agreements have been respected. Since the resumption of the DDR process in May, more than 40,000 former combatants had disarmed by year's end. Officially the entire country was under government or U.N. control at year's end; however, rebels and other ex-combatants exerted de facto control in some areas due to the absence of police and other government services. The officially independent judiciary functioned only in part of the country but demonstrated substantial independence in practice.

Among the Government's security forces, the police officially had primary responsibility for internal order; however, due to the continuing insurgency, the Sierra Leone Army (SLA), the Civil Defense Forces (CDF), and UNAMSIL shared de facto responsibility with the police in security matters. The CDF were traditional hunting societies loyal to paramount chiefs—traditional leaders with administrative and judicial powers—which assembled into independent militias under a national structure. The AFRC, which staged the 1997 military coup, no longer exists. In 2000 SLA units were reorganized and began undergoing a training program with the assistance of foreign governments; the program was ongoing at year's end. Government forces committed serious human rights abuses. Rebel forces also committed serious human rights abuses; however, the incidences of abuses were significantly less than during the previous year.

Sierra Leone is an extremely poor country with a market-based economy; per capita earnings for the population of approximately 4.5 million are less than \$150 (300,000 Leones) per year. Per capita earnings have declined approximately two-thirds since 1970. Only an estimated 20 percent of adults are literate. Although the country is rich in natural resources and minerals (particularly diamonds, gold, rutile, and bauxite) and has large areas of fertile land suitable for farming, the 10-year insurgency has brought mineral extraction and agricultural production almost to a standstill, except for illicit diamond mining. There is little manufacturing, and there are few exports; approximately 70 percent of the Government's budget comes from foreign assistance. Years of fighting, corruption, and mismanagement have resulted in a crumbling infrastructure.

The Government's human rights record was poor in several areas; while there continued to be significant improvements in some areas, serious problems remained. There were reports that CDF forces, operating in support of the Government, committed extrajudicial killings reportedly summarily executing suspected rebels and their collaborators and carried out indiscriminate attacks on villages believed to house RUF members and supporters, resulting in several civilian deaths. There were credible reports that CDF forces operating on

behalf of the Government beat and otherwise abused persons and the Government has not acted to curb these abuses or punish those responsible. Reports of abuses by the CDF, which had increased significantly in 2000, declined during the year. Prison and police lockup facilities conditions generally are harsh; at best they are Spartan, and at worst life threatening. There were numerous deaths in custody. The country remained under a State of Emergency imposed in 1998. Under the Constitution, many civil liberties are suspended under the state of emergency. Government forces on occasion continued to arrest and detain persons arbitrarily. Some prisoners were held incommunicado. Prolonged pretrial detention and long delays in trials, due to the State of Emergency and the inability of the judicial system to function in some parts of the country and during some parts of the year, remained problems. Freedom of the press improved during the year, and security forces did not arrest, beat, or use libel laws against journalists; however, government security forces on a few occasions harassed some journalists. At times the Government limited freedom of assembly in practice. Violence, discrimination against women, and prostitution remained problems. Abuse of children is a problem; however, numerous children who fought with the CDF and RUF were released during the year. CDF units continued to induct child soldiers; however, there were fewer cases than in previous years. Female genital mutilation (FGM) remained widespread. Residents of non-African descent face institutionalized political restrictions. Forced labor continued to be a problem in rural areas. Child labor persists.

During the year, there were fewer reports of serious abuses by RUF rebels, who in the past had committed numerous violent acts, including killings, abductions, deliberate mutilations, and rape. Prior to the resumption of the DDR process in May, rebel forces raided refugee sites and extorted and stole food. The RUF forces continued the longstanding practice of using previously abducted villagers (including women and children) as forced laborers, child soldiers, and sex slaves. While more than 2,600 abducted children were released by the RUF, most of those let go were male. International aid groups believe that girls who were abducted by the RUF may remain as sex slaves. Rebel atrocities caused the internal displacement of hundreds of thousands of civilians over the past several years; however, such displacement was reduced significantly during the year. At year's end, approximately 200,000 persons remained outside the country on their own or in refugee camps, primarily in Guinea and Liberia.

In the first part of the year, Guinean forces crossed into the country in pursuit of RUF forces who had entered Guinea and carried out attacks there; some civilians were killed or injured during these actions. The RUF's cross-border actions forced the return of some Sierra Leonean refugees from Guinea to Sierra

Leone, where they became internally displaced because it was still not safe for them to return to their original homes.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

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

a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

Unlike in the previous year, there were no reports that SLA forces committed extrajudicial killings; however, there were reports that forces operating in support of the Government committed extrajudicial killings. There were reports in the first half of the year that CDF forces summarily executed suspected rebels and rebel collaborators; however, because of the insecurity in parts of the country, it was difficult to gather detailed information on abuses or to corroborate reports. The number of reports of such killings decreased during the year and was significantly lower than in previous years. Eyewitnesses to CDF attacks on villages suspected of harboring RUF members and supporters alleged that CDF members killed indiscriminately, which resulted in civilian fatalities.

On June 17, CDF members attacked the village of Yiraia in Kono district, home of a prominent RUF member. Witnesses said the CDF members, armed with automatic weapons and machetes, set fire to several homes believed to house RUF sympathizers, killing an elderly man and at least two children, including a 5-year-old girl. The local CDF commander in Kono admitted to Human Rights Watch that his forces had carried out the attack in retaliation for previous RUF attacks against his men. In late June and early July, the RUF carried out retaliatory attacks against villages thought to be sympathetic to the CDF. At least three civilians were killed and others were injured (see Section 1.c.). There were no reports of any action taken against those responsible for the incidents.

There were numerous deaths in custody and prison during the year (see Section 1.c.).

Unlike in the previous year, there were no reports that government helicopter gunships fired on suspected RUF positions located in urban areas.

No action is known to have been taken against the members of the security forces responsible for the following killings in 2000: The July killing of civilians in Bunumbu during a helicopter gunship attack; the reported execution in July of an RUF fighter who allegedly was trying to surrender; and the May and June killings of 27 persons in the towns of Makeni, Magburaka, and Kambia.

No action reportedly was taken against the members of ECOMOG responsible for the following killings in 2000: The April killing of an ex-SLA soldier; and the January stabbing death of a civilian in a market.

During the year, several sites were found in the Port Loko district, which appeared to be mass graves. Local residents claimed that the victims were civilians executed by ex-AFRC/RUF members in 1999. International

human rights groups were working to preserve the sites for further investigation at year's end. Unlike in the previous year, there were no reports that the RUF and ex-SLA rebels summarily executed a substantial number of civilians in rebel-held areas throughout the country. However, RUF rebels were responsible for killings during the year. In July RUF fighters killed 22 persons in an attack on the village of Henekuma in the northern part of the country. On August 20, RUF members attacked the village of Seria, in Koinadugu district, allegedly in retaliation for recent CDF attacks in the area; two civilians were killed and five were injured severely after they were attacked with machetes.

Unlike in the previous year, there were no reports that victims of rebel kidnap attempts were killed (see Section 1.b.). However, there were reports that RUF members killed ex-combatants who had fled the group, although the number of such reports declined significantly during the year. On January 27, Campaign for Good Governance, a local NGO, reported that the RUF commander in Tongo had ordered the death of four former RUF members. A former RUF commander was killed, allegedly under orders from RUF interim chairman Issa Sesay.

Over the course of the decade-long conflict, mutilations by rebels caused hundreds if not thousands of deaths. There were several reports of mutilations by the rebels during the year (see Section 1.c.).

No action reportedly was taken against the RUF rebels responsible for the following killings in 2000: The August killing of 9 civilians in the village of Folloh; the June killings in the attack on Port Loko; the May killings of Kurt Schork and Miguel Gil Moreno, 2 journalists; the April and May killings of U.N. peacekeepers; the May killings of 20 demonstrators in front of Foday Sankoh's residence in Freetown. Although the Special Court for Sierra Leone was expected to examine these incidents, no further action was taken by year's end (see Section 4).

Between January and April, while pursuing RUF forces back into the country, the Guinean army bombed or shelled several villages in the northern part of the country. The Kambia district was affected most severely by the fighting; local villagers who fled the area claimed that the Guineans often bombed indiscriminately and destroyed villages, killing or injuring many civilians. There were reports that Guinean forces villages in Kambia district fired rockets and artillery indiscriminately into civilian neighborhoods, marketplaces, and restaurants. Due to the security situation in the area, outside observers were not able to verify these claims.

On January 26, a Guinean helicopter gunship attacked the town of Kamakwie, reportedly killing 12 civilians. On February 15, Guinean artillery fire allegedly killed four civilians from one extended family in Sabuya. In a separate incident, a 3-year-old girl reportedly was killed in a Guinean artillery attack on the village in Rokel. On May 18, according to a UNAMSIL commander, a small child was killed in a Guinean artillery attack in the town of Rokupr.

On May 17, Guinean troops shelled a group of RUF rebels at a disarmament site, which killed at least one civilian. Guinean and Sierra Leonean officials determined that the attack was an accident, and the commanding officer was removed immediately from his post. Following the incident, Guinean armed forces ceased cross border operations against the RUF.

b. Disappearance

The RUF continued to detain persons illegally and exert control over the civilian population in certain areas of the country. RUF forces also continued the longstanding practice of kidnaping children, women, and men and compelling them to work as slaves; however, the number of such reports decreased during the year (see Sections 5, 6.c., and 6.f.). Women also were forced to act as sexual slaves. Although many were released during the year, the RUF continued to hold some persons, including women and children, at year's end. The U.N. estimates that rebel forces abducted approximately 20,000 persons throughout the country during the 1991-1999 period. More than 10,000 victims have been released and have gone through a formal reintegration process; most of those released were children. Many others have escaped, but the U.N. believes that some of those abducted remain prisoners despite the Lome Accord's directive that all captives and prisoners of war be released.

According to UNICEF, as of October, approximately 1,500 children reported as missing during the war had yet to be located. Armed groups released more than 3,800 child soldiers and camp followers during the year. Human rights groups and the U.N. have expressed concern that, while girls represent approximately 50 percent of those abducted, they make up only an estimated 6 percent of those released. These groups fear that many girls continue to be held as "sex slaves" (see Section 5).

In May a group of 23 Guineans, who claimed to have been captured during RUF raids into Guinea between December 2000 and March, escaped from RUF rebels. UNHCR facilitated their return to Guinea and urged the RUF to release any other Guinean civilians that might have been captured in the RUF's cross-border incursions.

There were no developments in the following disappearances in 2000: The August kidnaping of 15 persons by the RUF during an attack on the village of Folloh; the July abduction by an ex-SLA splinter group called the West Side Boys of 18 persons during an attack on a bus; the July disappearance, following an attack by the West Side Boys, of 1 foreign worker; the February abduction by the RUF of 11 passengers from a bus near Masiaka.

In previous years, the West Side Boys kidnaped children, women, and men and compelled them to work as slave labor; however, in late 2000, the group disbanded.

Unlike in the previous year, there were no reports that Guinean troops abducted persons from Sierra Leone after attacks by RUF and Guinean dissidents.

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

The Constitution prohibits such practices, and unlike in previous years, there were no reports that SLA troops occasionally tortured, beat, and otherwise abused noncombatants suspected of being rebels during the year. However, there were credible reports that CDF forces operating on behalf of the Government beat and otherwise abused persons and the Government has not acted to curb these abuses or punish those responsible. According to human rights observers, the conduct of the SLA continued to improve following reorganization and increased training. Reports of abuses by the CDF, which had increased significantly in 2000, declined during the year.

Unlike in the previous year, there were no reports that government helicopter gunships fired on suspected RUF positions in urban areas.

There were reports that SLA and CDF forces manned roadblocks and bridges and routinely extorted large sums of money from travelers (see Section 2.d.). Drivers often were subjected to abuse, including beatings, when they were unable to pay. For example, an SLA soldier allegedly beat a driver on a road from Kabala to the Guinean border when he refused to pay the guard approximately \$5 (10,000 Leones). NGO's reported that the soldier was disciplined; however, no information was available on how the soldier was disciplined. The number of roadblocks decreased during the year as UNAMSIL forces were deployed farther afield.

Unlike in the previous year, there were no reports that police and UNAMSIL forces harassed and beat journalists during the year (see Section 2.a.).

Unlike in the previous year, there were no reported rapes committed by CDF forces. In 2000 there was an increase in the number of rapes committed by CDF forces, which in past years reportedly had not engaged in rape. For example, in July 2000, some CDF members raped three women whom they accused of transporting goods to rebel-held areas.

There was no reported action taken against the CDF members responsible for beating, raping, or otherwise abusing the persons in the following cases from 2000: The October beating of a journalist; the August beating of 2 truck drivers because they could not produce the requested bribe; the July raping of 3 women who were accused of transporting goods to rebel-held areas; and the May and June injuring of 50 persons during gunshot attacks on the towns of Makeni, Magburaka, and Kambia.

Unlike in the previous year, there were no reports that UNAMSIL soldiers committed human rights abuses against suspected rebels during the year. UNAMSIL ordered an investigation into abuses allegedly committed in 2000; however, there were no reports that action was taken against those responsible by year's end.

No action reportedly was taken against the ECOMOG personnel who injured a person during an argument over a stolen vehicle in April 2000.

No action was taken against the persons who reportedly injured at least one civilian during a confrontation between peacekeepers and RUF rebels at Lungi Lo in May 2000. An investigation conducted by the British Government indicated that the RUF rebels were responsible for the injuries.

RUF rebels also committed abuses against civilians during the year; however, the number of RUF abuses of civilians declined significantly during the year (see Sections 1.f. and 1.g.). There were credible reports that the RUF extorted money from civilians, including at roadblocks (see Section 2.d.). RUF rebels also threatened with abuse persons who could not provide requested services, supplies, or money. Farmers in the village of Mansumbiri were threatened with beatings if they could not provide \$5 (10,000 Leones) and two cups of rice each week to the RUF.

On April 4, there were unconfirmed reports that RUF members in Seidu in the Kono District tied up and beat a woman accused of hoarding diamonds; the woman died from her injuries. RUF members tied up and beat the woman's stepson, who was accused of stealing diamonds.

RUF forces continued to use rape as a terror tactic against women. There were credible reports of gang rapes and mass rapes of groups of women. RUF members raped returning refugees throughout the year (see Sections 2.d. and 5). Human Rights Watch documented abuses, including rape and abduction, by the

RUF against refugees in the country as well as against Sierra Leonean refugees returning from Guinea (see Section 2.d.).

In contrast to previous years, there were very few reports during the year that RUF members carried out deliberate mutilation, including the chopping off of hands, arms, ears, and legs; attempted and successful decapitations; and severe attack with machetes. However, there was no indication that these practices were discontinued completely. In late June or early July, RUF members reportedly cut off the ear and slashed the Achilles tendons of a CDF supporter in Koinadgu district (see Section 1.a.). U.N. officials and humanitarian

organizations estimated that hundreds if not thousands of persons, including children, had one or both limbs amputated over the decade-long conflict. During the overall course of the conflict, it has been estimated that for every one of those injured who eventually succeeded in securing medical aid, at least three or four died en route from their injuries, shock, the hazards of the journey, or from lack of adequate medical assistance. By year's end, it appeared that the RUF had discontinued the practice of carving the initials "RUF" into the skin of civilians it abducted; however, in late July in the town of Kaima, UNAMSIL photographed a man on whose body the initials RUF had been carved in large letters. The RUF's leadership denounced the person who committed this act. According to human rights groups, the RUF leadership did not do enough to control all its members.

Unlike in the previous year, there were no reports of injuries sustained in RUF-held areas that were attributed to landmines.

There was no reported action taken against the RUF rebels who beat, raped, or otherwise abused the persons in the following cases from 2000: The May injuring of at least 80 demonstrators outside the Freetown residence of Foday Sankoh; the April and May abduction of U.N. peacekeepers; the March abduction and injuring of Aaron Kargbo and Aruna Sherif, both Adventist Development and Relief Agency staff members; and the February beating of 15 RUF combatants who tried to join the disarmament process.

In previous years, the West Side Boys, occasionally tortured, beat, and otherwise abused persons; however, in late 2000, the group disbanded, and there were no reported incidents during the year.

No action was known to have taken place against ex-SLA rebels who threw stones at vehicles and beat a passenger in 2000; allegedly the ex-SLA rebels had become angry because they had not received the payment promised to them for disarming.

There were unconfirmed reports that Guinean troops operating in the country amputated the limbs of suspected RUF members. Some human rights organizations reported that Guinean troops were seen in the Kambia district with two RUF prisoners with recent amputations. Following a Guinean attack, another witness reportedly found 10 bodies in the area around Mambolo, 5 of which had amputated limbs; however, no one claimed to have witnessed Guinean troops conducting amputations.

In October 2000, there were reports that relatives of the Minister of Transport and Communication beat a journalist, Mustapha Bai Attila (see Section 2.a.). No police or judicial action was taken against the individuals.

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

On March 14 at Pademba Prison, police fired warning shots as prisoners rioted to protest against searches for weapons. The gunfire caused panic among civilians outside the prison, who feared a jailbreak was in progress. In the ensuing commotion, several persons were killed. There is no evidence that security forces played any role in these deaths.

The RUF alleged that prison guards beat and tortured members of the RUF. The RUF claimed that 11 RUF members had died at Pademba Road prison since May 2000; however, government officials said only 8 RUF members had died in custody during the period. During the year, many RUF prisoners were held incommunicado at undisclosed locations. However, at year's end, only RUF leader Foday Sankoh remained in a secret location.

The Government generally has permitted prison visits; however, the Government frequently attempted to place conditions on such visits. The Government granted UNAMSIL human rights officials unrestricted access to Pademba Road Prison in June, but only after the Special Representative of the U.N. Secretary General intervened personally in the matter. In January the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) visited Pademba Road prison after obtaining assurances from the Government that there would be no restrictions placed on the visit. Both groups made several visits to various prisons and detention facilities during the year. The National Forum for Human Rights, an umbrella group of local NGO's, reportedly did not visit Pademba Road Prison because the Government placed unreasonable restrictions on the proposed visits. The Government did not allow any international organizations to have access to Foday Sankoh or to monitor the conditions under which he was being held.

d. Arbitrary Arrest, Detention or Exile

Government forces continued at times to arrest and detain persons arbitrarily. Although the Constitution and the law provide for a speedy trial, in practice the lack of judicial officers and facilities often produced long delays in the judicial process. Due to the civil conflict, the judicial system did not function in some parts of the country at any time during the year and functioned in other parts of the country only during part of the year. The law requires warrants for searches and arrests in most cases. There are adequate judicial protections against false charges, and detainees have the right of access to family or counsel. However, these provisions

can be suspended under the State of Emergency, and none of them apply to any person detained under the State of Emergency. The country remained under a state of emergency during the year, which under the Constitution allows for unlimited detention without charge. Some persons were held incommunicado (see Section 1.c.). Many criminal suspects were held for months before their cases were examined or formal charges were filed. There are provisions for bail, and there is a functioning bail system.

The CDF, which does not have arrest and detention authorities, in particular was criticized for having arrested and detained prisoners. The RUF claimed that the Government employed the CDF to staff several prisons outside of Freetown where RUF members were being held. In the towns of Bo and Kenema, members of the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) complained to human rights groups that the CDF undermined their authority. For example, on September 10 in Kabala, CDF members illegally detained numerous persons suspected of involvement in criminal activity.

In February the police detained and interrogated the editor of the Democrat newspaper (see Section 2.a.).

At year's end, 546 persons were detained in Pademba Road Prison, including 28 women; there were no reports that children were detained at Pademba Road Prison. A total of 114 persons remained in detention without charge at year's end under emergency powers declared by the Government; 39 RUF members and the majority of the remainder were detained for their involvement with or support of other armed groups, such as the AFRC and West Side Boys. During the year, the Government released 137 RUF members and others held without charge, including senior RUF members Mike Lamin and Eldred Collins. Reportedly detainees at Pademba Road Prison have been held incommunicado, have not been informed of their legal status, and have not had access to legal advice. During a 2000 visit to Pademba prison, UNAMSIL human rights officials found 30 juveniles, 13 of whom were suspected RUF child combatants, incarcerated with adults. There were no reports that the Government detained minors at Pademba Road Prison without charge during the year.

The Government does not use forced exile.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

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

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

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

The right of appeal from a court-martial to the Court of Appeal was deleted from the Armed Forces Act of 1961 by the Royal Sierra Leone Military Forces Act of 1971; however, in July 2000, the 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 down by a court-martial to the Court of Appeal.

There were no reports of political prisoners.

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

The Constitution and law prohibit such practices, and government authorities generally respected these prohibitions in practice. The country remained under a state of emergency during the year, which under the Constitution allows for searches without warrants.

Throughout the year, there were instances in which rebel forces invaded, looted, and destroyed private property and terrorized civilians, although the number of occurrences was significantly fewer than in previous years (see Sections 1.a. and 1.c.).

In the previous years, the kidnaping and forced conscription of children by rebel forces were serious problems; however, the number of reported cases decreased significantly during the year (see Sections 1.b., 5, 6.c., and 6.f.). For years rebels kidnaped young boys and girls to augment their forces and at times forced them to abduct other children. Frequently commanders also had boys act as bodyguards. The RUF utilized "Small Boy Units" (SBU's) and "Small Girl Units" (SGU's), which served in combat. During the year, more than 2,600 children were released by the RUF and CDF; at least 600 children were returned to their families. More than 1,500 others are in special transitional centers, which are designed to help provide for their unique mental and emotional needs prior to reunification with their families.

There were unconfirmed reports in March that RUF fighters forcibly conscripted civilians in Makeni into the Poro Society, one of several secret societies in the country tied to native beliefs and rituals; the civilians reportedly were forced to join the RUF.

There were reports that Guinean troops destroyed private property and burned homes in the north of the country; however, due the extent of earlier destruction in these areas, it was impossible to verify whether the reports described were new incidents or prior damage being blamed on the Guineans (see Sections 1.a., 1.g., and 2.d.).

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

Since the inception in 2000 of efforts to retrain and reorganize the SLA, there were no reports that government troops committed human rights abuses against RUF collaborators and suspected rebels. However, there were reports that CDF forces committed human rights abuses against RUF collaborators and suspected rebels (see Sections 1.a. and 1.c.).

The CDF continued to accept, train, and induct children into its ranks despite having pledged in June 1999 to stop the practice; however, the recruitment and enrollment of children decreased significantly during the year, and many of those being held forcibly were released (see Sections 1.f. and 5).

Unlike in the previous year, there were no reports that government helicopter gunships fired on suspected RUF positions located in urban areas.

Unlike in the previous year, there were no reports that government forces or members of the CDF, raped women as punishment for suspected assistance to the rebels (see Section 1.c.).

RUF rebel forces committed numerous serious abuses, and sought to coerce, intimidate, and terrorize those who either refused to cooperate with them or supported the Government (see Sections 1.a. and 1.c.). While these abuses persisted during the year, the number of such incidents continued to decrease during the year. In large parts of the country outside the effective control of the Government, the RUF continued to use kidnaped children and women as workers and men as porters; raped women as a means of punishment and to inspire fear and force cooperation. The RUF continued to induct forcibly children into their ranks, although they did so less frequently than in previous years (see Sections 1.c., 1.f., and 5). There were two documented incidents of mutilation by the RUF during the year; however, both incidents were criticized by the RUF leadership. Unlike in previous years, there were no reports that the RUF harassed peacekeepers; seized peacekeepers' weapons; or forced individuals to commit atrocities under penalty of their own, mutilation or death. There were reports of injuries from unexploded ordnances laid by RUF rebels (see Section 1.c.).

In previous years, an ex-SLA splinter group called the West Side Boys committed numerous serious abuses, including killings, abductions, deliberate mutilations, and rape. However, in late 2000, the group disbanded, and no incidents were reported during the year.

Relief organizations expanded their areas of operations during the year as the security situation improved. Unlike in previous years, there were no reports that rebels obstructed access for these groups. However, following a December clash in Koidu between disarmed CDF and RUF members and local citizens

disputing access to diamond mining, some NGO's temporarily left the area until tensions declined.

Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The Constitution provides for freedom of speech and of the press; however, government security forces harassed some journalists on a few occasions during the year. Unlike in the previous year, security forces did not arrest, beat, or use libel laws against journalists. The written press and radio reported freely on security matters, corruption, and political affairs generally without interference.

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

In February police interrogated the editor of the Democrat newspaper and searched his office after he published an article about the President's security detail. The editor was detained and interrogated for 4 hours. In September a list of seven journalists allegedly targeted by "killing squads" was circulated in Freetown. The handwritten list said of the seven: "All must die before elections. All are enemies of the State." There was no further action or subsequent threats during the year. The Government and SLPP denied any involvement and publicly criticized the targeting as an attempt to intimidate journalists.

There were no developments in the February 2000 arrest of Ayodele Lukobi Johnson, the managing editor of Rolyc newspaper, and reporter Ayodele Walters. The authorities charged them with "sedition, libel, and publishing false news" after they published a negative article about President Kabbah. There were unconfirmed reports that the journalists were released in 2000.

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

The parastatal Sierratel communications company 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.

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

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The Constitution provides for freedom of assembly; however, at times the Government limited this right in practice. Unlike in the previous year, the Government did not ban RUF meetings or rallies.

In March the Government banned a GRAO demonstration in Freetown, for which permission initially had been granted. According to the Government, the demonstration was banned due to the Pademba Road riot (see Section 1.c.) and heightened the level of security in the city. In September the Government denied the GRAO permission to hold a march to protest the Government's decision to extend its term in office, as allowed under the constitution (see Section 3); however, later in the month, the Government allowed the GRAO to hold a rally instead of the march.

During the year, no action was taken against the RUF members who opened fire on demonstrators in 2000, killing at least 20 persons and injuring at least 80 others.

The Constitution provides for freedom of association, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. There were numerous civic, philanthropic, and social organizations, and the registration system was routine and nonpolitical. No known restrictions were applied to the formation or organization of the 21 opposition political parties and 60 registered civic action NGO's (see Section 4). However, the RUF alleged that the Government prevented the establishment of an RUF political party as called for in the Lome Accord. For example, the RUF claimed that members of the Government interfered in attempts to acquire office space in each of the country's regions, a requirement to registration as a political party.

c. Freedom of Religion

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

Unlike in the previous year, there were no reports that rebels abducted church workers or priests during the year. In the past, rebels have targeted Roman Catholic priests and nuns, largely on the assumption that the Church would pay ransom for their return. Some religious leaders were targeted by rebels for their peacekeeping activities as members of civil society, not because of their religion.

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

The Constitution provides for these rights, and the Government generally respected them in practice; however, according to occasional reports, government and CDF troops manning roadblocks attempted to extort food or money from travelers (see Section 1.c.). CDF roadblocks reportedly were located in many parts of the country; however, the number of roadblocks decreased as UNAMSIL forces were deployed farther afield (see Section 1.c.). In December the Government lifted a requirement that citizens get a police clearance up to 72 hours before international travel. Prior to December, such clearances were issued nonrestrictively; the Government did not attempt to limit citizens' departure or return for political or discriminatory reasons.

RUF rebels also manned roadblocks to extort money and goods from travelers (see Section 1.c.). In April one driver reportedly spent approximately \$35 (70,000 Leones) getting through a series of RUF roadblocks between Mile 91 and Makeni, a distance of approximately 45 miles. In previous years, an ex-SLA splinter group called the West Side Boys also manned roadblocks; however, in late 2000, the group disbanded, and there were no reported incidents during the year.

More than an estimated 750,000 citizens remained displaced internally or had fled the country to escape the continuing insurgency. At the beginning of the year, thousands of citizens returned to the country from Guinea, following attacks and ill treatment by RUF and Guinean forces that began in late 2000. The RUF's cross-border actions forced the return of refugees in Guinea, who then became displaced internally because it still was not safe for them to return to their original homes. Some of these IDP's were housed in camps, but many lived in Freetown. The large influx of IDP's and the lack of resources caused tension between local residents and IDP's; however, there were no reported incidents of violence between IDP's and local residents. Government attempts to close IDP camps have met with strong resistance from residents who fear that their homes will not be safe. While many refugees returned during the year, nearly 200,000 persons remained in refugee camps in Guinea and Liberia; others remained in The Gambia, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, and other African nations, while still others were in countries outside of Africa.

Unlike in the previous year, there were no government attacks on possible RUF positions within urban areas

that contributed to the exodus of the population from RUF-held areas. According to Human Rights Watch, in April RUF rebels raped, abducted, and killed refugees returning to the country from camps in Guinea, despite an RUF promise to provide "safe passage." RUF members gang-raped numerous women at rebel checkpoints in Koinadugu and Kailahun districts, according to human rights workers (see Sections 1.c. and 5). Human Rights Watch documented abuses against refugees between December 2000 and mid-March in the Koinadugu, Kailahun, and Kono districts in the east (see Section 1.c.).

Unlike in the previous year, there were no reports that the RUF attempted to terrorize persons to prevent them from leaving their homes.

Between March and November, Liberia officially closed its border with Sierra Leone; however, refugees and other persons used unofficial border crossing points to move between the two countries regularly.

The law does not provide for granting of asylum or refugee status in accordance with the 1951 U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. The Government cooperated with the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other organizations on repatriation matters and continued to provide first asylum to more than 5,000 Liberians who had fled conflict in their home country in previous years. There were no reports of the forced return of persons to a country where they feared persecution.

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

The Constitution provides for the right of citizens to change their government, and the 1996 elections won by Ahmed Tejan Kabbah and his Sierra Leone People's Party were the first free and fair multiparty elections in the country in 30 years. Several political parties were represented in the unicameral legislature and in the cabinet. Locally elected councils and a traditional chieftancy system control local government. Preparations for local elections, which were to have taken place in 1999, were again postponed because of continued fighting. The July 1999 Lome Accords included the RUF in a power-sharing arrangement in the Government, and in July 1999, the Parliament ratified a bill allowing the RUF to transform itself into a political party. Foday Sankoh, the RUF leader, was offered and accepted the chairmanship of the Commission for the Management of Strategic Resources, National Reconstruction, and Development with the status of vice president. In November 1999, the Revolutionary United Front Party (RUF) received a provisional registration certificate from the interim National Election Commission. In May 2000, the RUF reneged on its agreements under the Lome Accord, returned to insurgency, and ceased to participate in the political process. Following the resumption of the DDR process in May, the RUF resumed efforts to form a political party; however, its members have not been invited back into the positions given the RUF in the Lome Accords.

In March and September, the Government invoked its constitutional authority to extend the life of parliament and the term of office of the President for 6 months, citing the continuing "state of war" in the country. Opposition political parties unsuccessfully attempted to prevent the extension. Elections were scheduled for May 14, 2002, which will require an additional extension of the president's term of office.

Opposition parties, including the political wing of the RUF, argued for an interim government following the postponement of elections and their inability to draw up single member constituencies as required by the Constitution; the Government rejected the proposal. In November a consultative conference of political parties and civil society groups endorsed the use of multi-member districts for parliamentary elections. In December Parliament voted 52-8 to pass amendments to the Constitution allowing for this modification to the electoral system; the amendments also extend President Kabbah's term of office through the end of July 2002.

The percentage of women in government and politics does not correspond to their percentage of the population. There are relatively few women in senior government positions: only 2 of the 18 cabinet positions were filled by women, and of the 80 members of the unicameral legislature, only 9 were female.

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

A number of domestic and international human rights groups generally operate without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. Government officials were generally cooperative and responsive to their views; however, due to insecurity caused by the rebel insurgency, the activities of human rights monitors were limited to government-held areas. Representatives of various international NGO's, foreign diplomats, the ICRC, and U.N. human rights officers were able to monitor trials and to visit prisons and custodial facilities during most of the year; however, the Government several times attempted to restrict such visits. At least one local human rights group claimed that it could not get unrestricted access to the prisons (see Section 1.c.).

UNAMSIL opened regional human rights offices in the provincial capitals of Bo and Makeni.

In June 2000, the Government asked the U.N. to help set up a Special Court to try those who "bear the greatest responsibility for the commission of crimes against humanity, war crimes, and serious violations of international humanitarian law, as well as crimes under relevant Sierra Leonean law within the territory of Sierra Leone since November 30, 1996."

In February 2000, Parliament approved the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Bill, which would create a TRC to provide a forum for publicly airing the grievances of victims and the confessions of

perpetrators from the civil war; however, the Commission had not been established by year's end.

The U.N. and numerous NGO's, both domestic and international, initiated programs to educate and sensitize the population about the TRC and the Special Court; the Government supported these efforts.

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

The Constitution prohibits discrimination against women and provides for protection against discrimination on the basis of race and ethnicity; however, residents of non-African descent, particularly the Lebanese community, face institutionalized political restrictions, namely the acquisition of citizenship.

Women

Domestic violence against women, especially wife beating, is common. The police are unlikely to intervene in domestic disputes except in cases involving severe injury or death. In rural areas, polygamy is a common practice among men, but women suspected of marital infidelity often are subject to physical abuse. Frequently women are beaten until they divulge the names of their partners. Because husbands may claim monetary indemnities from their wives' partners, the beatings may continue until the woman names several men even if there was no other relationship. There also were reports that women suspected of infidelity were required to undergo animistic rituals to prove their innocence. Domestic violence is not recognized as a societal problem; however, rape is recognized as a societal problem and is punishable by up to 14 years' imprisonment. Cases of rape are underreported widely, and rarely are charges brought, especially in rural areas. Rebel forces used rape as a terror tactic (see Sections 1.c., 1.g., and 2.d.) and forced women and girls to act as sexual slaves (see Sections 1.b., 6.c., and 6.f.). Medical or psychological services for women who were raped after they were abducted are almost nonexistent.

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

Prostitution is widespread. Many women, especially those displaced from their homes and with few resources, resort to prostitution as a means to support themselves and their children.

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

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.

Children

Although the Government is committed to improving children's education and welfare, it lacks the means to provide them with basic education and health services. The Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender, and Children's Affairs has primary responsibility for children's issues. The law requires school attendance through primary school; however, schools, clinics, and hospitals throughout the country were looted and destroyed during the 10-year insurgency, and most have not been rebuilt. A large number of children receive little or no formal education. Schools are financed largely by formal and informal fees, but many families cannot afford to pay them. The average educational level for girls is markedly below that of boys, and only 6 percent of women are literate. At the university level, male students predominate.

FGM is performed commonly on girls (see Section 5, Women).

Up to an estimated 5,000 child soldiers at a time served alongside adults on both sides during the civil conflict, but in greater numbers on the RUF side; some observers place the number at almost double that figure. The recruitment of children for military service by the CDF remained a problem, and there is credible evidence that the CDF forces continued to accept children as volunteer soldiers, but at lower numbers than in previous years (see Section 1.g.).

The kidnaping and forced conscription of children into rebel forces continued during the year; however, there were fewer cases than in previous years (see Sections 1.b., 1.f., 6.c., and 6.f.). For years rebels kidnaped young boys and girls to augment their forces and to abduct other children. Girls are forced to perform as sexual slaves (see Sections 6.c. and 6.f.). In some cases, rebel forces forced these children to commit

atrocities involving family members. However, even children who escape and wish to leave the ranks sometimes are rejected by their families and communities because of their perceived involvement in rebel activities. 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. There were reports that the rebels released disproportionate numbers of boys, leading many to conclude that many girls continued to be held as sex slaves (see Section 1.b.).

Persons with Disabilities

Public facility access and discrimination against persons with disabilities are not considered public policy concerns. No laws mandate accessibility to buildings or provide for other assistance for persons with disabilities. Although a few private agencies and organizations 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.

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

National/Ethnic/Racial Minorities

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

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

Residents of non-African descent face institutionalized political restrictions. The Constitution restricts the acquisition of citizenship at birth to persons of patrilineal Negro-African descent. Legal requirements for naturalization, such as continuous residence in the country for 15 years or the past 12 months and 15 of the previous 20 years, effectively deny citizenship to many long-term residents, notably the Lebanese community.

Section 6 Worker Rights

a. The Right of Association

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

The Trade Union Act provides that any five persons may form a trade union by applying to the registrar of trade unions, who has statutory powers under the act to approve the creation of trade unions. The registrar may reject applications for several reasons, including an insufficient number of members, proposed representation in an industry already served by an existing union, or incomplete documentation. If the registrar rejects an application, the decision may be appealed in the ordinary courts, but applicants seldom take such action.

Workers have the right to strike, although the Government can require 21 days' notice. There were several significant strikes in the public sector during the year. Most notably teachers and doctors struck over wages and unpaid salaries in the form of work stoppages and sick-outs. No laws prohibit 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. An employee fired for union activities may file a complaint with a labor tribunal and seek reinstatement. Complaints of discrimination against trade unions are made to a tribunal.

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

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

The 1971 Regulation of Wages and Industrial Relations Act provides the legal framework for collective bargaining. Collective bargaining must take place in trade group negotiating councils, each of which has an equal number of employer and worker representatives. Most enterprises are covered by collective bargaining agreements on wages and working conditions. The SLLC provides assistance to unions in preparations for negotiations; in case of a deadlock the government may intervene. The Industrial Court for Settlement of Industrial Disputes, required by Section 44 of the 1971 Act, was created and began hearing cases in 2000; however, most cases involving industrial issues continued to go through the normal courts system, and the Industrial Court did not hear any cases during the year. The law does not prohibit antiunion discrimination against workers or employer interference in the establishment of unions; however, there were no reports of such cases during the year.

There are no export processing zones.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

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

Despite releasing many children during the year, the RUF rebels continued to use previously impressed young boys and girls as involuntary servants. Many became fighters with the rebel forces. Women and girls also were forced to act as sexual slaves (see Sections 1.b., 5, and 6.f.).

Rebel forces also forced civilians, including children, to labor as porters and as workers in diamond fields under their control despite the signing of the peace accord in 1999 and a July agreement to halt diamond mining until a formal peace accord was signed.

d. Status of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

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

Because the adult unemployment rate remains high, few children are involved in the industrial sector. Foreign employers have hired children to work as domestics overseas at extremely low wages and in poor conditions. The Department of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation is responsible for reviewing overseas work applications to see that no one under the age of 14 is employed for this purpose; however, the reviews were not effective.

In February the Government ratified ILO Convention 182 on the worst forms of child labor.

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

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

A 1997 law set the minimum wage at approximately \$10.50 (21,000 Leones) per month; it has not been adjusted since then. The minimum wage is not sufficient to provide a decent standard of living for a worker and family. Most workers support an extended family, often including relatives who have been displaced by the insurgency in the countryside, and it is common to pool incomes and to supplement wages with subsistence farming.

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

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

The law protects both foreign and domestic workers; however, there are fewer protections for illegal foreign workers.

f. Trafficking in Persons

No law prohibits trafficking in persons, and there were reports that rebel forces abducted young boys and girls and forced them to work as servants (see Sections 5 and 6.c.). Women and girls also were forced to act as sexual slaves (see Sections 1.b., 5, and 6.c.). Rebel forces also forced civilians, including children, to work as porters and in diamond fields (see Section 6.c.). The Government is attempting to combat these practices by compelling the RUF to disarm and demobilize and by its emphasis on the release of child soldiers.

Traffickers sent many victims to the rebel-held diamond fields in eastern Sierra Leone to work as forced laborers (see Section 6.c.).

There were no figures available on the extent of the trafficking problem. There were no confirmed reports of persons trafficked outside of the country.

This site is managed by the Bureau of Public Affairs, U.S. Department of State. External links to other Internet sites should not be construed as an endorsement of the views contained therein.

