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SIERRA LEONE

Sierra Leone is a constitutional republic with a directly elected president and a unicameral legislature; however, this democratically elected Government did not control the whole country effectively at any time during the year. In March the Government, led by President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah, who had been elected in 1996, was returned to power after 9 months in exile. The President's party, the Sierra Leone People's Party, has had a majority in the Parliament since 1996. The Government's return followed the February ouster of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) and Revolutionary United Front (RUF), which had overthrown the Kabbah Government in 1997 and assumed power. The RUF had conducted an insurgency against successive governments; the AFRC originated in a 1997 coup by elements of the Government's armed forces. The AFRC and RUF junta forces were defeated and driven out of Freetown by forces of the Economic Organization of West African States (ECOWAS) Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), led by the armed forces of Nigeria. In February and March there was fierce fighting throughout the country as ECOMOG and members of the Civil Defense Forces (CDF) continued to fight remnants of the AFRC and RUF, particularly in the larger cities outside the capital. However, government and ECOMOG forces failed to gain control of the whole country, and the civil conflict continued throughout the year. In December AFRC AND RUF rebels infiltrated Freetown and, at year's end, controlled areas close to the capital. The officially independent judiciary functioned only in part of the country and only during part of the year, but demonstrated substantial independence in practice when it did function.

Among the Government's security forces, the police officially had primary responsibility for internal order. However, due to the continuing insurgency, the newly constituted army, the CDF and ECOMOG shared de facto responsibility with the police in security matters. Government forces, particularly poorly trained CDF units that included child soldiers, committed numerous serious human rights abuses, and ECOMOG forces also committed some abuses.

Sierra Leone is an extremely poor country, with a market-based economy and a per capita income of less than \$100 per year. It is estimated that only one-fifth of adults are literate. Although it is rich in natural resources and minerals (particularly diamonds, gold, rutile, and bauxite), and has large areas of fertile land suitable for farming, the junta period and the continuing insurgency have brought normal extraction and agricultural production almost to a standstill. There is little manufacturing, and there are few exports; approximately 70 per cent of the Government's budget comes from external assistance. Years of corruption and mismanagement have resulted in a crumbling infrastructure; many schools, hospitals, government buildings, roads, and bridges have been damaged or destroyed in the fighting and through neglect.

The Government's human rights record was characterized by serious problems. Some members of the security forces, including the Civil Defense Forces, committed extrajudicial killings, and tortured and beat suspected rebels and rebel collaborators. Prison and jail conditions remained harsh and some-

mes life-threatening. Government forces sometimes interfered with humanitarian relief efforts. The Government arrested and detained persons under emergency decrees approved by Parliament that authorized indefinite detention without trial. Pretrial detention often was prolonged. The Government restricted freedom of speech and of the press, and harassed, arrested and detained journalists for their coverage of security-related issues. Government forces limited movement within the country due to the civil conflict. Violence and discrimination against women, and prostitution remained problems. CDF units inducted child soldiers and female genital mutilation continued to be a widespread practice. Discrimination against ethnic minorities persisted. There was some forced labor in rural areas. Child labor persists. ECOMOG forces operating in support of the Government occasionally beat and detained noncombatants. In the period directly following the removal of the junta from power, there was a significant number of vigilante-style extrajudicial killings by citizens, upon being restored power, the Government, with ECOMOG support, acted forcefully to end these killings.

Throughout the year, AFRC and RUF rebels committed numerous egregious abuses, including brutal killings, severe mutilations, and deliberate dismemberments, in a widespread campaign of terror against the civilian population known as "Operation No Living Thing." While still in power in January and February, junta forces continued their previous pattern of abuse, which included assaults and other acts of intimidation against political opponents, nongovernmental and other civic and humanitarian organizations, and citizens. During the fighting for Freetown in February, their retreat to the interior in March, and their advance on the capital in December, junta forces were responsible for killings, kidnappings, mutilation, rape, and destruction of property. One particularly vicious practice was cutting off the ears, noses, hands, arms, and legs of noncombatants who were unwilling to cooperate with or provide for the insurgents. The victims ranged from small children to elderly women; in some cases, one limb was cut off, in others two limbs, typically two hands or arms. Rebel forces also detained, decapitated, burned alive, and inflicted bullet and machete wounds on civilians; many died from their wounds before they could obtain any form of treatment. The rebel forces abducted missionaries and aid workers, ambushed humanitarian relief convoys and raided refugee sites. The junta force continued the long-standing practice of abducting villagers and using them as forced laborers, as sex slaves, and as human shields during skirmishes with Government and ECOMOG forces. Boys were forced to become child soldiers. Rebel forces used rape as a terror tactic against women. Rebel atrocities prompted the internal displacement of hundreds of thousands of civilians. As many as half a million persons fled to neighboring countries to escape the civil conflict, and remain outside the country on their own or in refugee camps, primarily in Guinea and Liberia.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

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

a. Political and Other Extrajudicial Killing

There were persistent reports that some elements of the CDF refused to take prisoners and, after torture or other acts of physical abuse and interrogation, often killed captured insurgents and AFRC and RUF sympathizers. In November a senior CDF spokesman confirmed that the CDF had executed seven individuals who had been searching illegally for diamonds in the Tongo fields in the eastern part of the country, an area long contested by both the CDF's Kamajoh militia and the RUF.

In the immediate aftermath of the overthrow of the rebel junta in February, there were dozens of reports of torture and vigilante-style executions in Freetown, Bo, Kenema, and other cities. Some of these abuses were committed by citizens in reprisal against junta members and their alleged supporters. Victims were stabbed, beaten, and in some cases burned to death; there is no evidence that any of those responsible for the deaths were ever formally charged or prosecuted. AFRC and RUF forces also committed such abuses as they were driven out of their strongholds.

Many of the hundreds, if not thousands, of civilians killed by AFRC AND RUF insurgent forces in the conflict were executed deliberately for political motives. In March RUF leader Sam Bockarie summarily executed 10 prominent residents of Kenema, including former cabinet minister Bockari S. Massaquoi and paramount chief Momoh Tarawlie, for opposing the rebels. Also in March, RUF forces executed 32 youths in Koidu for supporting Kamajoh CDF forces that previously had taken the town. In September rebel forces shot 50 individuals execution-style in Kamalu, and on October 4, RUF forces shot and killed contract employees of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), who were traveling in clearly-marked trucks, in an ambush near Joru. On December 15, rebel forces killed a number of noncombatants in the village of Masiaka on the approach to Freetown.

Government security forces relaking areas discovered mass graves of those killed by rebel forces in Bo (over 100 bodies) and on Bonthe island (more than 550 bodies); the latter had been considered a Kamajoh CDF stronghold, and the killings apparently were reprisals against islanders for supporting the Kamajohs.

There were also several reports of indiscriminate, mass killings as villagers tried to escape from contested towns; for example, 50 persons reportedly were killed while fleeing fighting in Kabala in March, 22 in Malima, and 80 in Ngolahun. In May U.N. Special Representative for Children in Armed Conflict Olara Otunmo described the continuing conflict as the "deliberate targeting of civilians," and described that strategy as "part of the objective of conflict fare, not just indiscipline on the part of fighters."

b. Disappearance

AFRC and RUF forces continued the RUF's long-standing practice of kidnapping youngsters and women and compelling them to work for the troops and, at times, act as "shields" in battles with government and ECOMOG forces. Women were also forced to act as sexual slaves. A conference sponsored by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) noted that the RUF had captured children as young as 4 and 5 years of age. Seven girls between the ages of 7 and 15 were abducted in March from the Ben Hirsch childcare center in Kenema. During the rebels' retreat, the insurgents kidnapped five medical missionaries and two French medical aid workers in the Lunsar area and held them captive for 2 weeks. In November RUF forces kidnapped an Italian priest, father Mario Guerra, from his mission in Kamalu in the Northern District; he still was held at year's end.

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

The Constitution prohibits torture; however, some of the security forces, in particular the CDF, routinely tortured suspected insurgents upon capture to gather information.

AFRC and RUF forces continued to use rape as a terror tactic against women. In February during their retreat from Freetown, rebel forces raped female patients at the Lunsar Eye Hospital. In March rebel forces gang-raped several teenage girls in Koidu after retaking the town from Kamajoh control. In May several women who had fled to Guinea reported that they were sexually assaulted by junta forces before they were able to escape. ECOMOG forces operating in support of the government occasionally beat and detained noncombatants. Rebel forces also were responsible for many cases of deliberate mutilation, including the chopping off of hands, arms, ears and legs; attempted decapitations; and severe cuts with machetes. The victims have ranged from babies

10 months old to elderly men and women. Humanitarian organizations estimated that at least 2,000 individuals had one or both limbs amputated, and that for every one of these wounded who eventually succeeded in securing medical aid, at least three or four died en route from their wounds, shock, and the hazards of the journey. Some victims who secured treatment in Freetown indicated that at times the junta members forced civilians to take part in macabre lotteries, in which the victim picked a piece of paper which indicated the sentence—from the loss of one limb to scalping or death. In other cases, rebel forces cut off the arms of men who refused to rape relatives.

The rebel campaign, known as "Operation No Living Thing," drove thousands of persons from their homes into the countryside, where many have died from untreated wounds, disease, and starvation. Over 250,000 citizens crossed the borders of Guinea and Liberia to escape the conflict; many thousands of others were displaced internally, and fled their homes to hide in wooded areas, or to towns where there are security forces and some degree of protection from rebel forces. In November Amnesty International published a report that detailed rebel abuses and atrocities during the first 10 months of the year.

Prison conditions and those in police lockup facilities 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, housed almost three times that number at year's end. Diet and medical care were inadequate; only a handful of toilets was available for use by the prison population. Although male and female quarters were separate, adults and juveniles were incarcerated together. 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; the holding cells in police offices are even further from compliance with international standards.

The Government allowed the ICRC, U.N. human rights officials, and other observers to visit the prisons, assess conditions, and see inmates.

d. Arbitrary Arrest, Detention or Exile

The Public Emergency Regulations enacted by the Parliament in March at President Kabbah's request provide for indefinite detention without trial. In the immediate aftermath of its restoration, the Government arrested and detained without specific charges persons suspected of collaborations in crimes committed by the deposed junta. Although the Constitution and 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.

Many prisoners were held for months on suspicion of criminal activity before their cases were examined or formal charges were instituted.

ECOMOG forces at times detained noncombatants (see Section I.c.) In January and February, while still in control of the capital, the rebel junta continued its practice of detaining individuals suspected of supporting the Government in exile and criticizing junta policies. The junta arrested three journalists from The Herald Guardian and detained them for several weeks in apparent retaliation for publishing a statement urging children to remain home rather than go to school because of the security situation. Several other persons were released after shorter detentions.

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.

Although there are often lengthy delays between arrest, detention, the imposition of charges, and judicial proceedings, trials are usually free and fair. Traditional justice systems continued to supplement the central government judiciary extensively in cases involving family law, inheritance, and land tenure, especially in rural areas.

After the overthrow of the rebel junta, the Government detained several hundred individuals on suspicion of treason and other charges stemming from their involvement with the junta. Some eventually were released; some remained in detention at year's end; and at least 103 persons were tried in four civilian trials and one court-martial proceeding. The trials and court-martial were open to the public, and were extensively monitored by U.N. personnel, foreign diplomats, and human rights observers from both within and without the country. Observers generally agreed that these high profile proceedings were conducted in an open and fair manner, and that the defendants had adequate opportunities both for counsel and to make their cases. The verdicts ranged from acquittals on all charges to guilty; the sentences given ranged from 5-years imprisonment to execution. However, some observers from international human rights organizations questioned the appropriateness of the treason prosecutions or death sentences in the cases of five journalists and one 75-year-old woman. Twenty-four former army officers convicted on treason charges subsequently were executed.

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.

Throughout the year, there were numerous instances in which rebel forces invaded, looted, and destroyed private property and terrorized civilians. Homes and businesses associated with former government members and supporters of the elected Government were particular targets, but many homes of ordinary were citizens also looted, burned, or destroyed.

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

During the year, there were reports that government security forces or ECOMOG forces hindered the safe passage of relief supplies on two occasions by commandeering vehicles that belonged to relief organizations. The CDF continued to accept, train, and induct children into its ranks.

AFRC and RUF rebel forces routinely committed numerous serious abuses, and sought to coerce, intimidate, and terrorize those who either refused to cooperate with them or supported the Government. They massacred groups of persons fleeing fighting; maimed and cut off the limbs and ears of noncombatants; kidnapped children and women to work for them, and men to carry equipment; raped women as a means of punishment and to inspire fear and cooperation; forced individuals to commit atrocities under penalty of their own mutilation or death; commandeered relief supplies; and vandalized religious institutions, hospitals, and schools.

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, the Government restricted these rights during the year. The Government has attempted to regulate the press through registration, and attempts to control the publication of information on security-related topics.

There are over 50 newspapers published in Freetown alone, covering a wide spectrum of interests. Their number fluctuated weekly; many contained sensational, undocumented stories and repeated items carried by other newspapers. Newspapers openly and commonly criticized the Government and its officials, as well as the rebel forces.

Due to low levels of literacy and the relatively high cost of newspapers and television, radio remained the most important medium of public information. There were several government and private radio and television stations; both featured domestic news coverage and political commentary. The government-controlled Sierratel communications company provided Internet access in Freetown, although the condition of its land lines often made Internet reception problematic.

The Junta arrested three journalists and detained them for several weeks (see Section 1.d.).

The Government generally respected academic freedom. All institutions of higher learning were wholly or partly closed during the year; most had been looted, burned, or used as quarters by rebels.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The Constitution provides for freedom of assembly, and the Government respected this right in practice. The Government was not known to deny requests to use public areas for meetings or demonstrations, many of which took place throughout the year. The Constitution provides for freedom of association and the government respected this right in practice. There were numerous civic, philanthropic and social organizations, and the registration system was routine and apparently nonpolitical. There

were more than a dozen opposition parties, and there were no known restrictions on their formation or organization.

c. Freedom of Religion

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

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, numerous ECOMOG and government roadblocks throughout the country due to the security situation hindered free movement. Citizens were required to get a police clearance within the 72 hours before international travel, but such clearances were issued nonrestrictively; the Government did not attempt to limit citizens' departure or return for political or discriminatory reasons. There were reports of attempts by troops manning roadblocks to extort food or money from travelers.

At year's end, more than one million citizens, more than one-quarter of the population, either were displaced internally or had fled the country to escape the continuing insurgency. More than 500,000 persons were in refugee camps in Guinea and Liberia; others had fled to The Gambia, Cote d'Ivoire, and other destinations in Africa, and still others were in countries outside Africa. Although thousands returned from abroad after the restoration of the Kabbah Government, most remained outside the country because of continuing security concerns.

There is no formal process for granting political asylum. The Government cooperated with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and other organizations on repatriation matters, and continued to provide first asylum to over 5,000 Liberians who had fled to Sierra Leone because of conflict in their home country in earlier years of the decade. There were no reports of the forced return of persons to countries 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 multi-party elections held in the country in 30 years. In March the democratically elected Kabbah Government, which had assumed power in 1996 and which was deposed by the combined AFRC and RUF forces in May 1997, was restored to power. Several political parties were represented in the unicameral legislature. Local government was controlled by locally elected councils and a traditional chieftaincy system. Preparations for local elections were in progress at year's end.

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

A number of domestic and international human rights groups operated without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. Government officials were generally cooperative and responsive to their views. Representatives of various local and international

nongovernmental organizations (NGO's), foreign diplomats, the ICRC, and U.N. human rights officers were able to monitor freely and fully the major treason trials, and visit prisons and custodial facilities.

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, except for the long-time prohibition against citizenship for persons with a non-African father. This provision effectively blocks citizenship for much of the sizable Lebanese community, and for other persons with non-African fathers.

Women

Violence against women, especially wife beating, is common. Police are unlikely to intervene in domestic disputes except in cases involving severe injury or death. Domestic violence is not recognized as a societal problem. However, rape is recognized 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. Rebel forces used rape as a terror tactic (see Sections 1.c. and 1.g.).

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 on 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 organizations and NGO's, and were instrumental in pressuring the previous government to allow free and fair multiparty elections in 1996.

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 percent are literate. At the university level, men predominate.

Children

Although the Government is committed to improving children's education and welfare, it lacks the means to provide basic education and health services for them. Schools, clinics, and hospitals throughout the country have been looted and destroyed during the 8-year RUF insurgency, and most have not been replaced. Although in November, the Government began a program to pay the fees for 3 years of schooling for all children, lack of schools and teachers still place even this much education out of the hands of many. Schools are financed largely by formal and informal fees that many families cannot afford.

The recruitment for military service by the CDF and the kidnaping and forced conscription of children into rebel forces were a serious problem; an estimated 5,000 youthful soldiers served along-

side adults during the civil conflict. While the CDF forces accept children as volunteers, most children who join the insurgent ranks do so under duress. For years rebels have kidnapped young boys and girls to serve them and augment their forces. In some cases they have forced these children to commit atrocities involving family members. There are now several programs to deal with former child combatants, including those who have escaped from rebel forces. However, even children who escape and wish to leave the ranks sometimes are rejected by their families and communities for their perceived involvement in rebel activities.

Female genital mutilation (FGM), which is condemned by international health experts as damaging to both physical and psychological health, is widely practiced among all levels of society, although with varying frequency. The form practiced is excision. Some estimates of the percentage of women and girls who undergo the practice range as high as 80 to 90 percent. While UNICEF estimates the percentage of females who have undergone this procedure to be as high as 90 percent, local groups believe this figure is overstated. There is no law prohibiting FGM. There are a number of NGOs that are working to inform the public about the harmful health effects of FGM and to eradicate it; however, an active mass campaign by secret societies countered the

well-publicized international efforts against FGM.

Occasional instances of ritual murders of boys and girls, as well as adults, associated with illegal secret societies, have been reported in the past. There were no reported cases this year.

People with Disabilities

Questions of public facility access and discrimination against the disabled have not become public policy issues. No laws mandate accessibility to buildings or provide for other assistance for the disabled. Although a few private agencies and organizations attempted to train the disabled in useful work, there was no government policy or program directed particularly at the disabled. There does not appear to be outright discrimination against the disabled in housing or education. Given the high rate of general unemployment, however, work opportunities for the disabled appear to be few.

Some of the many individuals who were maimed in the fighting, or had their limbs amputated by rebel forces, are receiving some 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.

National/Ethnic/Racial Minorities

The country's population is ethnically diverse, and consists of members of at least 13 ethnic groups. These groups generally all speak distinct primary languages and are concentrated regionally outside urban areas. However, all ethnic groups use Krio as a second language, there was little ethnic segregation 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 percent of the population.

Ethnic loyalty remained an important factor in government, the military, 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 during the year. There was no identifiable ethnic or regional base of voluntary popular support for the rebels, who controlled territory by terror and coercion rather than by popular consent.

Residents of non-African descent face institutionalized political restrictions. The Constitution restricts citizenship to persons of patrilineal Negro-African descent. This constitutional restriction effectively denies 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, under the restored Government, workers had the right to join independent trade unions of their choice. About 60 percent of the workers in urban areas, including government workers, are unionized, but there has been little success in organizing agricultural and mine workers. All labor unions by custom join the Sierra Leone Labor Congress (SLLC), but such membership is voluntary.

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 serviced by an existing union, or incomplete documentation. If the Registrar rejects an application, his decision may be appealed in the ordinary courts, but applicants seldom take such action.

There is a right to strike, although the Government can require 21 days' notice. Union members may be fired for participating in even a lawful strike. There were no reported strikes during the year.

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 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.

No law prohibits retribution against strikers. 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. Individual trade unions investigate alleged violations of work conditions to try to ensure that employers take the necessary steps to correct abuses.

There are no export processing zones.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The Constitution prohibits forced and bonded labor, including that by children. However, under the Chiefdom's Council Act, compulsory labor may be imposed by individual chiefs, who 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. The last Saturday in each month is declared a National Cleanup Day; in Freetown traffic is proscribed before 10:00 a.m. so that everyone may clean their immediate area. There have been reports of security forces publicly humiliating citizens to ensure compliance; however, social and community values and pressures largely unrelated to the State were chiefly responsible for widespread compliance. There were no legal or formal governmental consequences of noncompliance.

The AFRC and particularly RUF rebels forcibly impressed young boys and girls into their ranks and forced them into involuntary servitude, and to perform as sexual slaves. Many later become fighters with the rebel forces

(see Section 5).

d. Status of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The minimum age for employment is officially 18 years, but in practice there is no enforcement of this law 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. Children have been hired by foreign employers 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.

School attendance through primary school is required by law. However, there is a shortage of schools and teachers, due both to inadequate government funding of public education, and to widespread destruction of educational facilities by rebel forces. Consequently, a large number of children receive little or no formal education. Many consequently enter the workforce with few skills and with limited, if any, literacy. The Constitution prohibits forced and bonded labor, including that by children; however, there was some compulsory labor possibly including labor by children in rural areas (see Section 6.c.).

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

There is no minimum wage. Purchasing power continues to decline through inflation. Most workers support an extended family, often including relatives who have been displaced by the insurgency in the countryside, and it is common both to pool incomes and to supplement wages with subsistence farming.

The Government's suggested work standard is 38 hours per week, 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.

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