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Sierra Leone

REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE

Head of state and government	Ernest Bai Koroma (replaced Ahmad Tejan Kabbah in November)
Death penalty	retentionist
Population	5.8 million
Life expectancy	41.8 years
Under-5 mortality (m/f)	291/265 per 1,000
Adult literacy	34.8 per cent

The overall security situation was generally stable, with a few instances of violence linked to the elections in the middle of the year. There was some progress in implementing the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Three laws were passed that improve the protection of women's rights.

Background

The second elections since the conflict ended in 2002 were held on 11 August. In a run-off election in September, Ernest Koroma of the All People's Congress (APC) won 54.6 per cent of the final vote. The inauguration took place on 15 November in Freetown. Vice-President Solomon Berewa of the governing Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) winning 45.4 per cent.

The trial of former Liberian President Charles Taylor was delayed but was due to start in early 2008. Two of the three trials before the Special Court were in appeal after convictions and sentencing; the third was ongoing. Three people on trial for treason were released.

During the year the UN Peacebuilding Fund pledged US\$35 million and the UN Peacebuilding Commission made significant progress and agreed on five priorities. The mandate of the peace-building entity the UN Integrated Office in Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL) was renewed for another year.

Sierra Leone remained one of the poorest countries in the world, with extremely low life expectancy and high illiteracy rates.

Special Court for Sierra Leone

In July, three Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) members – Alex Tamba Brima, Brima Bazzy Kamara and Santigie Borbor Kanu – were each found guilty on 11 charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity, including committing acts of terrorism, murder, rape and enslavement and conscripting children under the age of 15 into armed groups. They were each acquitted on three other charges, including sexual slavery and forced marriage. Alex Brima and Santigie Kanu were sentenced to 50 years each, and Brima Kamara to 45 years. The case was on appeal at the end of the year.

In February, Civil Defence Forces (CDF) member Chief Hinga Norman, who had been indicted before the Special Court on eight counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity, died from complications following surgery in Senegal.

In August, CDF members Moinina Fofana and Allieu Kondewa were found guilty of four counts of war crimes, crimes against humanity and serious violations of international humanitarian law. In October, the Special Court Trial Chamber sentenced Moinina Fofana and Allieu Kondewa to six and eight years respectively. The court justified the relatively low sentences on the ground that their murders of civilians, many of whom were women and children hacked to death with machetes, were committed in a "palpably just and defensible cause", to restore democracy.

Postponements of the trial of Charles Taylor in The Hague occurred throughout 2007. The trial was

expected to start again in early 2008. Initial delays were due to the lack of adequate time that the defence had to prepare for the case.

The defence cases for the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) accused – Issa Sesay, Morris Kallon and Augustine Gbao – opened in May 2007 and were expected to last until April 2008.

Release of political opponents

On 1 November, Omrie Golley, former spokesman of the RUF, Mohamed Alpha Bah and David Kai-Tongi were released after being on trial for over a year for treason. The Attorney General had declared that there was no case against them.

Press freedom

In January, the Attorney General sought the extradition of Ahmed Komeh, Bai Bureh Komeh and Aminata Komeh, children of Fatmata Hassan, ruling SLPP Member of Parliament. The three had fled to the UK following the death of Harry Yansaneh, editor of the independent newspaper For Di People, in 2005.

Philip Neville, publisher and editor of privately-owned Standard Times, was twice charged with “seditious libel”, once in February and again in June. The second incident was linked to the publication of an article on government conduct. Bail was set at 200 million leones (US\$68,135) – an amount considered unreasonably high.

Intimidation around elections took place on several occasions. On 29 June, Hon Ansu Kaikai of the ruling SLPP allegedly threatened to shut down Radio Wanjei in Pujehun and have its station manager arrested if he allowed members of the People’s Movement for Democratic Change (PMDC) living outside the country to use the radio to inform its members about the August polls.

Policing and justice system

Public order policing during the election period was largely successful. Violent incidents were few and police were reported to have conducted themselves within international standards on policing and human rights.

There remained a serious lack of trained judges, magistrates, defence lawyers and prosecutors. This resulted in long delays of trials, and extended periods of pre-trial detention – in some cases of up to six years.

Detention facilities in Sierra Leone did not meet international standards. A UN report found that the country’s prisons were vastly overcrowded — Pademba Road Prison, designed to house 350, housed over 1,000 inmates. The report found that prison inmates had been awaiting trial for up to two years, and 90 per cent of the detainees interviewed did not have legal representation.

Women’s rights

In June, parliament passed a child rights bill. However, the bill was passed only after provisions criminalizing female genital mutilation (FGM) were dropped. Approximately 94 per cent of the female population undergo FGM.

Parliament passed bills on domestic violence, intestate succession and the registration of customary marriage and divorce in June. These were seen as a victory in the strengthening of women’s rights in rural areas. Nonetheless, women continued to face widespread discrimination and violence, compounded by a lack of access to justice.

A gender protection task force was established. Led by the non-governmental organization International Rescue Committee, it included representatives of civil society and government.

Transitional justice National Human Rights Commission

The Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL) established in December 2006 set up office and carried out training and an awareness-raising tour of the country.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission

A conference initiated by the HRCSL and attended by representatives of civil society, UN agencies and the government, discussed the implementation of recommendations made by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) on 13 and 14 November. Government participation in the conference signalled a reinvigorated commitment to ensure the TRC recommendations were carried out comprehensively.

Reparations

The National Commission for Social Action was mandated by the Vice President's office to implement the Reparations Programme. The Task Force on Reparations presented a report to the government on setting up the Special Fund for War Victims and the Reparations Programme.

A mass rally calling for reparations was held in Makeni by Amnesty International members. The Vice President publically committed to ensuring justice and full reparations for the tens of thousands of Sierra Leonean women victims of sexual violence.

Death penalty

Despite efforts by civil society to achieve abolition of the death penalty, a key recommendation of the TRC, 18 people, remained under sentence of death. Eleven people including Sierra Leone Army (SLA) and retired SLA members and others, had been charged with treason. During the year one died and two were released, and at the end of the year seven were waiting for judgments on their appeals, and one appealed and the death sentence was reconfirmed. A further 10 were convicted of murder.

Amnesty International visits/report



Amnesty International delegates visited in March, June and November.



[Sierra Leone: Getting reparations rights for survivors of sexual violence \(AFR 51/005/2007\)](#)