



Sierra Leone – Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 18 March 2010

Information as to what recent wars Sierra Leone has been involved in and when they ended.

In a section titled “History” the *United Kingdom Foreign & Commonwealth Office* country profile for Sierra Leone states:

“The SLPP ruled until 1967 when the electoral victory of the opposition APC was cut short by the country's first military coup. But the military eventually handed over to the APC and its leader Siaka Stevens in 1968. He turned the country into a one -party state in 1978. He finally retired in 1985, handing over to his deputy, General Momoh. Under popular pressure, one party rule was ended in 1991, and a new constitution providing for a return to multi-party politics was approved in August of that year. Elections were scheduled for 1992. But, by this stage, Sierra Leone's institutions had collapsed, mismanagement and corruption had ruined the economy and rising youth unemployment was a serious problem. Taking advantage of the collapse, a rebel movement, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) emerged, with backing from a warlord, Charles Taylor, in neighbouring Liberia, and in 1991 led a rebellion against the APC government. The government was unable to cope with the insurrection, and was overthrown in a junior Officers coup in April 1992. Its leader, Capt Strasser, was however unable to defeat the RUF. Indeed, the military were more often than not complicit with the rebels in violence and looting.” (United Kingdom Foreign & Commonwealth Office (25 February 2009) *Country Profiles: Sub-Saharan Africa – Sierra Leone*)

This profile summarises the events of the period 1996 to 2002 as follows:

“Strasser was deposed in January 1996 by his fellow junta leaders. His replacement, Major Maada Bio, under international pressure, agreed to organise elections in February 1996. The RUF refused to take part and continued the conflict. The elections were won by Tejan Kabbah and the SLPP. The new government signed a peace agreement with the RUF in Abidjan 1996 but it failed to stop the rebellion. Kabbah's government was subsequently overthrown in a further coup in 1997 and took refuge in neighbouring Guinea. The military junta, headed by Major Johnny Paul Koroma, invited the RUF to join government. But the junta was complicit in looting and violence, often in association with the RUF, and was unable to consolidate its position. It was eventually overthrown and The Kabbah government was re-instated in 1998 with the help of troops from ECOWAS. The destructive force of the rebellion reached Freetown for the first time when the RUF, combined with renegade elements of the army, invaded the capital in January 1999, committing appalling acts of violence against the civilian population in the process. They were repulsed by the Nigerian troops of ECOMOG, but at great human cost. A second peace agreement, the Lome Accord of 1999, to be supervised by a UN peacekeeping force, brought the

RUF officially into government. But this collapsed in 2000 when the RUF attacked UN peacekeepers upcountry and threatened to invade Freetown again. Some UN peacekeepers were killed and others detained by the rebels. Security was restored with the intervention of British troops in May 2000 and RUF ministers, including its leader Foday Sankoh, were arrested. The signing of the Abuja peace agreement in November 2000, together with the deployment of UNAMSIL across the country, allowed the gradual restoration of government authority throughout the territory. The war was officially declared over in February 2002.” (ibid)

In a section titled “The Civil War” a *Human Rights Watch* report states:

“From September 2000 through April 2001, RUF rebels and Liberian government forces acting together attacked refugee camps and villages accommodating several hundred thousand Sierra Leonean and Liberian refugees just across the border with Guinea. Following the attacks, Guinean security forces and the local population retaliated against the refugees, frequently looting, raping, and unlawfully detaining them. Guinean forces also responded to these RUF raids by killing and wounding dozens of Sierra Leoneans in indiscriminate helicopter and artillery attacks in the rebel-held areas in the north of Sierra Leone. Guinean troops conducted several ground attacks during which several civilians were gunned down and girls and women were raped. In November 2000, the government and RUF signed a cease-fire, which committed both parties to restarting the disarmament process, the reestablishment of government authority in former rebel-held areas, and the release of all child combatants and abductees. On March 30, 2001, the U.N. Security Council authorized the further expansion of UNAMSIL to 17,500 military personnel, including 260 military observers. These forces, contributed by Bangladesh, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, Ukraine, and Zambia, were deployed into RUF strongholds, including the diamond-rich Kono district.³⁰ The DDR program recommenced in May 2001, and by the end of 2001 over three thousand child soldiers, abductees, and separated children had been released by the RUF and the CDF.” (Human Rights Watch (16 January 2003) “*We’ll Kill You If You Cry*” – *Sexual Violence in the Sierra Leone Conflict*, p.14)

This report comments on the end of the war as follows:

“During this period, serious human rights abuses continued to be committed, though on a reduced scale. Fighting between the RUF and the CDF broke out in the east of the country in June through August 2001, leaving tens of civilians dead. RUF forces committed scores of serious abuses including rape, murder, and abduction. The victims of these abuses included Sierra Leoneans returning from refugee camps in Guinea; Guinean civilians who were attacked during the cross-border raids by the RUF from September 2000 through April 2001; and Liberians fleeing renewed fighting in Lofa county of Liberia from April 2001. While the RUF released or demobilized more than 1,500 male child combatants, they were reluctant to release Sierra Leonean and Guinean female abductees, most of whom are believed to have been sexually abused. The human rights situation continued to improve in 2002, with the disarmament and demobilization phases declared completed. By January 2002, 47,710 combatants had been disarmed and demobilized. On January 18, 2002, the armed conflict was officially declared to be over in a public ceremony attended by many dignitaries. In addition, the state of

emergency was lifted for the first time in four years on February 28, 2002.”
(ibid, pp.14-15)

A *BBC News* timeline document, in a paragraph headed “War and coups”, lists the principal events of the period 1991 to January 1999, stating:

“1991 - Start of civil war. Former army corporal Foday Sankoh and his Revolutionary United Front (RUF) begin campaign against President Momoh, capturing towns on border with Liberia.

1991 September - New constitution providing for a multiparty system adopted.

1992 - President Joseph Momoh ousted in military coup led by Captain Valentine Strasser, apparently frustrated by failure to deal with rebels. Under international pressure, Strasser announces plans for the first multi-party elections since 1967.

1996 January - Strasser ousted in military coup led by his defence minister, Brigadier Julius Maada Bio.

1996 - Ahmad Tejan Kabbah elected president in February, signs peace accord with Sankoh's rebels in November.

1997 - Peace deal unravels. President Kabbah deposed by army in May. Major Johnny Paul Koroma, in prison awaiting the outcome of a treason trial, leads the military junta - the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC). Koroma suspends the constitution, bans demonstrations and abolishes political parties.

Kabbah flees to Guinea to mobilise international support.

1997 July - The Commonwealth suspends Sierra Leone.

1997 October - The UN Security Council imposes sanctions against Sierra Leone, barring the supply of arms and petroleum products. A British company, Sandline, nonetheless supplies "logistical support", including rifles, to Kabbah allies.

1998 February - Nigerian-led West African intervention force Ecomog storms Freetown and drives rebels out.

1998 March - Kabbah makes a triumphant return to Freetown amid scenes of public rejoicing.

1999 January - Rebels backing Revolutionary United Front leader Foday Sankoh seize parts of Freetown from Ecomog. After weeks of bitter fighting they are driven out, leaving behind 5,000 dead and a devastated city.” (BBC News (28 January 2010) *Timeline: Sierra Leone*)

In a paragraph headed “UN intervenes” this document lists the following events:

“1999 May - A ceasefire is greeted with cautious optimism in Freetown amid hopes that eight years of civil war may soon be over.

1999 July - Six weeks of talks in the Togolese capital, Lome, result in a peace agreement, under which the rebels receive posts in government and assurances they will not be prosecuted for war crimes.

1999 November/December - UN troops arrive to police the peace agreement - but one rebel leader, Sam Bokari, says they are not welcome. Meanwhile, Ecomog troops are attacked outside Freetown.

2000 April/May - UN forces come under attack in the east of the country, but far worse is in store when first 50, then several hundred UN troops are abducted.

2000 May - Rebels close in on Freetown; 800 British paratroopers sent to Freetown to evacuate British citizens and to help secure the airport for UN peacekeepers; rebel leader Foday Sankoh captured.

2000 August - Eleven British soldiers taken hostage by a renegade militia group called the West Side Boys." (ibid)

A paragraph headed "Disarming rebels" refers to the final stages of the war as follows:

"2000 September - British forces mount operation to rescue remaining UK hostages.

2001 January - Government postpones presidential and parliamentary elections - set for February and March - because of continuing insecurity.

2001 March - UN troops for the first time begin to deploy peacefully in rebel-held territory.

2001 May - Disarmament of rebels begins, and British-trained Sierra Leone army starts deploying in rebel-held areas.

2002 January - War declared over. UN mission says disarmament of 45,000 fighters is complete. Government, UN agree to set up war crimes court." (ibid)

A January 2002 article from the Sierra Leonean newspaper *Standard Times* states:

"Last Friday January 18 was an epoch making day in the history of this nation as thousands of people from all walks of life including the President of the Republic of Ghana H.E. John Agyekum Kufuor and other distinguished personalities representing their various governments and Heads of State in the West African sub region and the new Executive Secretary of ECOWAS Dr Mohamed Ibn Chambers, witnessed the symbolic ceremony of burning arms and ammunition at the Lungi Garrison, Kaffu Bullom chiefdom. The event symbolised the end of nearly eleven years of one of the worst show of brutality and bloodshed in Africa." (Standard Times (23 January 2002) *Sierra Leone: The War is Over, Kabbah Declares*)

The end of the war is also referred to in an article from *The Independent* which states:

“Sierra Leone’s government and rebel leaders declared a decade-long civil war had ended yesterday when they watched thousands of weapons burn on a ceremonial bonfire. ‘The war is over,’ said President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah, who also announced the end of the wartime curfew. ‘Go and enjoy yourselves.’” (The Independent (19 January 2002) *Decade of Civil War in Sierra Leone is Over, Says President*)

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This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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