



**Convention on the
Rights of the Child**

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COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

**CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER
ARTICLE 8 (1) OF THE OPTIONAL PROTOCOL TO THE CONVENTION ON
THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD ON THE INVOLVEMENT OF CHILDREN IN
ARMED CONFLICT**

Initial reports of States parties due in 2008

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* In accordance with the information transmitted to States parties regarding the processing of their reports, the present document was not edited before being sent to the United Nations translation services.

Introduction

1. The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) on the involvement of children in armed conflicts was adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution A/RES/54/263 of 25 May 2000, and entered into force on 12 February 2002.
2. The Government of Sierra Leone signed and ratified the Protocol on 8 September 2000 and 15 May 2002, respectively. In consequence, the country declared that the minimum age of recruitment into its armed forces shall thenceforth be eighteen (18) years. Prior to this, section 16 (2) of the Sierra Leone Military Forces Act (1961) permitted recruitment of persons above “the apparent age of 17 and half years” or of persons below that age and for whom written consent would have had to be given by their parents/guardians.
3. In its “Briefing Note on the Status of Disarmament and Demobilization of Child Ex-combatants in all phases” (April 25, 2002), and reflected in its Encyclopaedia 2004, the National Committee for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (NCDDR) stated that at the end of the final phase of disarmament in January 2002, the date that was declared by the President of the Republic of Sierra Leone as the final end of the war in Sierra Leone, the country had successfully demobilized a total of 6,845 children who were associated with the fighting forces, excluding non-combatant children who were separated from their families/guardians. Of the 6,845 children who were associated with the fighting forces, 92.3 per cent were boys.
4. Ever since 2002, mass sensitization and education campaigns were undertaken by the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children’s Affairs (MSWGCA), the Child Protection Network (CPN) partners, the police and the Army, and other civil society organizations, on the need to ensure that no person below the age of eighteen (18) years should be recruited into any fighting or security force in Sierra Leone.
5. This report is prepared against the backdrop that the State Party, Sierra Leone, had abolished the recruitment of persons under the age of 18 years, particularly as the country gained peace and tranquillity, which has not given cause for the recruitment of under 18s. More so, with the massive sensitization and education undertaken by child protection stakeholders, even including the military, the recruitment of under 18s in the fighting forces is not foreseen. The process of preparing this report entailed discussions with officers of the Recruitment and Training Division of the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces, Non-Governmental Organizations (such as Children Associated with the War) the Sierra Leone Police and the Clerk of Parliament.

Recruitment policy of the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF)

6. Following Sierra Leone’s ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict in May 2002, nationwide sensitization and education on the prevention of recruitment and involvement of under 18s in the armed forces, resulted, among other things, into the revision of the RSLAF Recruitment Policy in 2004. This policy established the minimum age of enlistment into the Army at 18 years.

7. Section I, paragraph 76 of the Revised Version of the Extant Terms of Service for All Ranks in the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (16 February, 2006), has established the age range for enlistment into the Army at between 18 and 25 years.

8. In the determination of the age of a person desiring recruitment into the armed forces, the person's Birth Certificate will be the main instrument. Cases where formal certificates of birth are not available, Affidavits of Birth are required or authentication by traditional authorities is demanded by recruiting officers.

Article 1

9. As of 2002, when the war ended in Sierra Leone the Army was disbanded and a new one was formed with the help of the International Community, chiefly the United Kingdom. After the ratification of the Optional Protocol by the country's Parliament in May of the same year, no person under 18 years has been recruited in the armed forces.

Article 2

10. The Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces Recruitment Policy (2004) and Recruitment Act (2006) strictly prohibits "Voluntary" and "Compulsory" enlistment of all persons below 18 years.

Article 3

Paragraph 1

11. Voluntary recruitment into the armed forces of Sierra Leone of persons below 18 years is prohibited.

Paragraphs 2 and 4

12. Even before the country's ratification of the Optional Protocol in May 2002, there was nationwide concern about the high number of children who were involved in the ten-year armed conflict in Sierra Leone. During the process of disarming, demobilizing and reintegrating ex-combatants, the issue of child ex-combatants was given top-most priority. Whereas in the case of adult ex-combatants, the main criterion for receiving a disarmament package was the surrender of a gun, children did not have to do so.

13. Numerous sensitization and education campaigns on the prevention of children's participation in armed conflict (voluntary or compulsory) were launched, nationwide, by various governmental and non-governmental stakeholders, with support from UNICEF, and the UN Assistance Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL).

14. At Parliamentary level, there was unanimous consent on the ratification of the optional protocol.

Paragraph 3

15. With regard to voluntary recruitment into the RSLAF, advertisements are usually placed in the print and electronic media, with the following criteria of eligibility:

- (i) Must be Sierra Leonean national;
- (ii) Must have attained the age of 18 years, and not older than 25 years. Proof of age should be a Birth Certificate or sworn Affidavit or authentication by chiefs of the community of birth;
- (iii) Must have completed at least three years of Secondary School education for the lower ranks and higher education for cadets.

16. In addition to the use of the print and electronic media, community sensitisation on the recruitment process is carried out in all districts and chiefdoms, and local authorities, particularly chiefs, are encouraged to ensure that recruitment is done in a transparent manner. During the process of recruitment itself, an RSLAF team visits all the regions of the county where enlistment is done on the basis of established criteria of eligibility.

17. Eligible recruits will go through rigorous medical examination, which will usually conclude the recruitment process. Thereafter training will commence.

Paragraph 4

18. There are no schools operated by or under the control of the armed forces in Sierra Leone. However, the RSLAF and the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) have their respective training institutions at Benguema and Hastings, both in the outskirts of the capital city, Freetown. Disaggregated information on these institutions run by the RSLF and SLP are treated with considerable confidentiality. Suffice it to state that with support from the British Government's International Military Advisory and Training Team (IMATT) and Department for International Development (DFID), the Government of Sierra Leone has considerably improved the conditions of service, training and logistics facilities of the Army and Police respectively.

19. It should be noted that no person under the age of 18 years is admitted into these institutions.

Article 4

20. Sierra Leone does not have any armed group operating on/from its territory.

Article 5

21. As reflected in the "Country Report on Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child" (2005), the Government of Sierra Leone increased the minimum age of recruitment into its Armed Forces from seventeen and half (17½) years, as provided by the Military Forces Act (1961) to eighteen years. This was done when the State party ratified the Optional Protocol in May 2002.

22. Furthermore, the Children's Policy (2006) and the Child Rights Act (2007) unconditionally protect children from armed conflict, and the Act criminalizes the recruitment or enlistment of any child for the purposes of engaging him/her in armed conflict within Sierra Leone.

Article 6

Paragraphs 1 and 2

23. The recruiting policies of both the SLRAF and SLP have been revised, raising the minimum age of recruitment to 18 years, following the State Party's ratification of the Optional Protocol.

24. The Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs is the lead Government agency responsible for the implementation of the Optional Protocol, including coordination with regional and local authorities, as well as with civil society.

25. The training manuals of the RSLAF and SLP contain information on the Optional Protocol, and training personnel of both forces are usually invited to UNICEF-sponsored workshops and seminars on child protection in Sierra Leone, including elsewhere in Africa and the rest of the world. It should be noted that the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs, with support from UNICEF and the collaboration of the Child Protection Network have advocated for the inclusion of Child Rights in the training curriculum of the RSLAF and SLP. In addition, MSWGCA and UNICEF, including the former UN Assistance Mission to Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) and its successor UN Integrated Office in Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL) have provided training on Child Rights to the Army and Police.

Paragraph 3

Article 1

26. As aforementioned, there is no member of the Armed Forces of Sierra Leone below the age of 18 years.

Article 2

27. With reference to the response to Article 5 above, the minimum age of recruitment into the armed forces has, since 2002, been increased to 18 years.

28. With regard to the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of child ex-combatants, 6,845 children that were associated with the fighting forces, out of a total of 72,490 combatants, were disarmed and demobilized from the various factions. The Government of Sierra Leone set the age of majority at 18 years for the purposes of the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) programme. It was noted that of the total number of 6,845 children associated with the fighting forces that went through the DDR programme, 8 per cent of them were girls.

29. In response to the reintegration needs of the children, the State Party established the National Commission for War Affected Children (WaCWAC) by Act of Parliament in

January 2001. The Commission was officially inaugurated in January 2002. The main purpose of the Commission was to provide the requisite environment for psychosocial recovery, and capacity building of war affected and other disadvantaged children, for expeditious reintegration into their families and communities.

30. The line Ministry, NaCWAC and other child protection agencies, with support from UNICEF, established interim care centres, nationwide, as a stepping stone in the children's reintegration process. Specialized care was provided for children who were victims of sexual abuse and sex-related diseases.

31. The Child Rights Act (2007) has ensured that every aspect of child protection is placed within the laws of Sierra Leone, and the Act is in conformity with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional protocols, and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

32. In the proceedings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Sierra Leone, children's issues were treated with utmost confidentiality and a special Thematic Hearing was held for them. The UN-sponsored Special Court for Sierra Leone excluded the appearance of persons below 18 years who took part in armed combat, as they themselves were considered to be "victims" of the conflict.

Article 7

33. Sierra Leone has not requested any technical or financial assistance per se, for the implementation of the optional protocol. It should be noted however that during the process of sensitizing and educating the public and the armed forces on the prevention of the recruitment of persons less than 18 years into armed conflict, particularly after the ratification of the optional protocol, considerable support was received from UNICEF, UNAMSIL, IMATT, DFID and some international Child Protection Agencies such as The International Rescue Committee (IRC), World Vision and Action Aid.

34. The State Party is not in a position to provide financial assistance to any other State Party in the pursuance of the Optional Protocol. However, it can share information with other Parties with regard to the Protocol.
