

The views and opinions stated in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of the organizers of the workshop. This paper is not, and does not purport to be, fully exhaustive with regard to conditions in the country surveyed, or conclusive as to the merits of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

## Sierra Leone

### Preliminary remarks:

Due to an extremely fluid situation since the signing of the Abuja ceasefire agreement on 10 November 2000, some of the information given during the seminar is now outdated. The following remarks are based on the presentation - supported at the time with video footage and slides - given at the workshop on 14 November 2000. Unfortunately, the resource person for Sierra Leone, due to personal as well as professional reasons, was unable to provide a revision of these notes or a current assessment of the situation in time for the release of this final report. Therefore, the notes on the presentation are updated with a brief situation overview as of May 2001 drawing on three UN reports reflecting recent developments. The full text of these reports can be accessed through the links given below.

- UN Security Council: S/2001/228 Ninth report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone, 14 March 2001  
[Internet <<http://www.un.org/Docs/sc/reports/2001/228e.pdf>>]
- UN Security Council: S/2001/513 Report of the Secretary-General on the issue of refugees and internally displaced persons pursuant to resolution 1346 (2001), 23 May 2001  
[Internet <<http://www.un.org/Docs/sc/reports/2001/513e.pdf>>]
- UN-OCHA Sierra Leone Humanitarian Situation Report 09 May - 29 May 2001  
[Internet<<http://www.reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf/vID/4A58557840970841C1256A5C0050441B?OpenDocument>>]

In addition, you find the UNHCR CDR RefWorld and Internet Bibliography as of November 2000 and an extended bibliography covering events between November 2000 and May 2001 which should be consulted in addition to the seminar report.

### Presentation by Mr. Philip Bona<sup>1</sup> 14 November 2000

#### 1. Background

##### Ethnicity and language

There are about 12 ethnic families in Sierra Leone. The Mende who incorporate the ethnicities of Krim, Val Gallinois and Gola, live in the southern districts of Moyamba, Bo, Kenema and Kailahun. In the region encompassing Port Loko Kambia, Makeni and Magburaka live the Temne which is also the language predominantly used in the North. The Susu, Loko and Limba are scattered in the Northwest. The Fullah are an exceptional case. One finds them all across West Africa. They are nomadic herdsmen who live in the very North of Sierra Leone and frequently cross the border to Guinea. Many of them are migrating to Central Europe.

The Krio are descendants from British slaves. For a long time they have dominated the administration and the schools. Krio as a language - which being used by traders became the lingua franca - has been adopted by almost all ethnic groups. About 95%

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<sup>1</sup> The UNHCR resource person for Sierra Leone had to cancel her participation in the seminar on very short notice. For this reason the section on groups at risk could not be dealt with in detail.

of the population can be said to speak Krio whose use is spread all over West Africa. There are exceptional cases who would not speak Krio but they are very unlikely to find their way to Europe.

Persons claiming to come from the North should at least understand a few words of Temne; persons saying they come from the South should know a little bit of Mende.

But you need an insider, somebody who is from the country in order to know the differences between accents - Krio e.g. is spoken in other West African countries as well. They also will not confuse the asylum seeker by wrong pronunciation.

## Religion

30% of the population are Muslims, around 15% are Christian, the rest of the population adheres to traditional beliefs. The Fullahs are committed Muslims and want to retain their culture and education. They have Koran schools and Islamic colleges. The diploma received from these schools allows you access to university. The elite usually is Christian as they converted under the British influence, but Kabbah e.g. is Muslim. So far, religion has not been a significant factor in the conflict. Religious leaders have rather tried to negotiate between the warring parties. There are also a lot of cross-marriages between Christians and Muslims. New "charismatic churches" were introduced by pastors from Ghana and Nigeria and could gain a lot of support among the poor people.

## Economy

The socio-economic structure has totally collapsed although the country is rich in natural resources. Diamond, gold and bauxite can be found in the Eastern and South Eastern provinces. The economic backbone of the country - the mining industry - is under complete control of the RUF, although there are rumours that Kamajors take also part in the mining. In 1930 diamonds were discovered. The diamond fields in Kono are the second largest field in the world. The mining efforts of diamonds and iron in the North have led to enormous environmental degradation.

*Picture of iron mine.*

Coffee (mainly grown in Bo and Kenema) and cocoa (mainly grown in Kailahun) are being exported - but these revenues do not go to Freetown. There are two different ways in which rice is cultivated. Swamp rice fields are harvested twice a year. More widespread are upland rice fields whose farmers move each year to a different area. It is a very labour-intensive way of cultivation; harvests are once a year.

*Picture of swamp and upland rice fields.*

Responding to a question from the audience about whether any farming is done in Freetown itself the expert stated that the land around the capital Freetown is not productive enough to grow anything. It is a salty area, consisting mostly of mangroves. Fishing is mainly done by the ethnic group of Shabu who live along the coastlines. As already mentioned, the Fullah are a cattle-rearing people.

*Picture of King Jimmy market*

*Picture of tree in the centre of Freetown*

*Picture of school*

Sierra Leone has kept the British education system - students wear uniforms which neutralize social differences.

## **History**

Sierra Leone gained independence from the British colonial regime on 27 April 1961. In 1967 the ruling Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) lost the elections against the northern All-People's Congress (APC). The APC could install itself as the civilian government after a series of military coups and an army mutiny in 1968. From 1968 until 1992 the All-People's Congress ruled. In 1978 Siaka Stevens established the APC as the only legal party. He was succeeded by the army officer Joseph Saidu Momoh in 1985 who was overthrown by soldiers in 1992.

Their commander Valentine Strasser ruled until 1996 when he was replaced by then Chief of Defence Maada Bio. In the same year, the Mende-dominated SLPP under Kabbah won the elections against the APC. At the same time, war had been going on. The Mende traditionally opposed the Congress Party so Sankoh could count on their support although he himself is from the North and set up his base in Kenema. The RUF also helped Liberian Charles Taylor in his fight against Samuel Doe and thus continues to be supported by him. Claiming that the SLPP government failed to implement a peace agreement with the RUF, soldiers under Johnny Paul Koroma overthrew Kabbah in 1997 and set up a military junta government. Kabbah had to flee to Guinea. Koroma used his efforts to unite the RUF and the army as an argument to persuade the international community that he wanted to bring peace. His government was not accepted by the ECOMOG who put up a blockade and pushed Koroma out of the government in February 1998. He hid in the bush with his AFRC forces and the RUF.

Kabbah was reinstated by ECOMOG in 1998: the leader of the RUF, Foday Sankoh, was imprisoned and sentenced to death. In January 1999 the RUF conducted a brutal attack against Freetown. More than 3.000 civilians were killed and many more maimed. Almost the entire Eastern part of the town was destroyed. People are still traumatized by this experience and it does not take much to reignite their fears that the RUF might again try to take over Freetown. With the RUF controlling territory until shortly before Lungi airport, it would be only a question of time to get into Freetown if they decide to do so. The government army on its own is not able to defend the city.

*Picture:* Ministry of Defence had been burned down by the RUF in the January 1999 attack.

In spring 1999 Sankoh was liberated because Kabbah realized he needed him for the peace effort. The Lomé peace accord was signed on 7 July 1999. It contained provisions for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) of former combatants, in particular child soldiers, the setting up of truth commissions following the example of South Africa. The peace accord did not work out mostly because the DDR programs failed. Of the estimated 35.000 fighters, about 12.000 surrendered their arms (especially in the mining areas). Rebels and soldiers who joined the DDR camps were soon frustrated because they did not receive the support they had been promised. They started to harass civilians in order to get money or they went back to the bush. RUF continued to go to the camps and recruited IDPs.

After the signing of the Lomé peace accord there was a short decline in open fighting. Human rights organizations and the UN, however, reported continued harassment and human rights violations committed by the rebels and the Civil Defence Forces (CDF) in

their respective areas of control. Besides indiscriminate attacks on villages in order to maintain control and extort money and food from the villagers, RUF seemed to target deserters from its forces as well as people who refused to carry out their orders.

CDF target persons suspected to be rebels or to support the rebels, whom they arrest, ill-treat and sometimes summarily execute. They also use checkpoints to extort money from travellers.<sup>2</sup>

In May 2000 the latent civil war turned into fullfledged conflict again. RUF surrounded UNAMSIL soldiers in Magburaka and Makeni as well as Kailahun. Another UN bataillon went into uncleared territory and was surrounded and kidnapped by the so-called West-Side Boys, a new group consisting of former RUF and AFRC soldiers operating mostly in the Occra Hills and around Port Loko where they set up checkpoints to extort money from traders.

## **Armed forces**

### Sierra Leone Army

#### *Picture:*

New Sierra Leone Army soldiers have been recruited. They were trained in Nigeria. They now have a dark-blue uniform with three arrows and wear a beret.

The recruitment of new soldiers has not been effective enough and the SLA suffered a high number of casualties in the Makeni area in May 2000.

### AFRC

After the Lomé accord the AFRC joined the Sierra Leone Army. But the AFRC has not been fully satisfied with the Lomé accord - they received only two cabinet posts of minor importance whereas the RUF got the economically significant ministries. The current position of Johnny Paul Koroma is thus very unclear. Part of the AFRC is still loyal to Koroma so they might decide to quit the peace accord. Other parts of the AFRC - together with disgruntled former members of the SLA and RUF members - have formed the West Side Boys.

### RUF

The origins of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) go back to the 1980s. Under the rule of Stevens the opposition was silenced and internal security units moved swiftly against anyone who voiced criticism of the regime. Those students who managed to escape went to Ghana where they picked up Ghadafi's "Green Book" and travelled to Libya where they acquired more of Ghadafi's philosophy. These activists had their base in Liberia from where they mounted an attack in 1990.

The RUF has a strong hold on the Northern provinces and tries to get to the West and the South from there, fighting the CDF.

Although the conflict runs rather along the lines of rich and poor it is possible that it will take on an ethnic dimension. Both Sankoh and Koroma are from the North. Sankoh had started out in the South because he could rely on Mende support to fight against the northern-based Congress party but he moved back to the North once the Kamajors started to rally against the RUF. In the RUF-held areas there is also opposition. ECOMOG and SLA regularly conduct air raids against RUF targets; human rights

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<sup>2</sup> Human Rights Watch: Memo on Recent Violations of the Lomé Peace Accord, 23 January 2000

organizations have criticized them for hitting targets indiscriminately, thereby killing large numbers of civilians. The RUF does not put too much effort into administering their territory. Their main concern is the mining area - this is actually the problem: they already have what they want.

#### Civil Defence Forces (CDF)

The Civil Defence Forces are another major player in the civil war. They have their origin in traditional hunter and secret societies. In the South they called themselves the Kamajors,<sup>3</sup> in the North and the North-East they called themselves Tamboro. Their common fight against the RUF and the AFRC brought them closer together in spite of their regional and ethnic differences.

Historically the secret societies are a setting in which young men were trained to defend their community. But they also function as educational centres (including sexual education). The societies for men are called Poro, the ones for women are called Buno. They are responsible for initiation rituals by which boys and girls become accepted as full men or women.

They have thus a religious function, a judicial function (land disputes are settled by secret societies), an educational and a military function. They also decide when to declare war. Due to these multiple functions the secret societies and the Civil Defence Forces such as the Kamajors that are based on them have a very strong base in the centre of the country.

The stronghold of the Kamajor militia is in Bo. In December 1999 they put up checkpoints between Bo and Kenema. They were manned by well-armed young boys who started to harass travellers since they are not getting enough recompensation for their work. Sometimes they go beyond the power allocated to them - disobeying or even misunderstanding an order by the Kamajors can have fatal consequences. The Kamajors keep contact with their Chiefs who have been displaced to Freetown. Kamajor members would go to Freetown to receive orders from them. Members of the Kamajor militia have also been made responsible for security threats due to infighting in Freetown itself. They were ordered to leave their base in Brookfields Hotel at the end of June after which the security situation was said to improve. By nature of their pro-government stance they are against the RUF rebels. Their attitude makes it very difficult for people from the North to come to the South. Temne will have problems with the CDF in the areas under their control.

#### Forced recruitment

With regard to the RUF many people are forcibly recruited but there are, of course, also people who join them voluntarily. In August, OCHA mentioned reports from Port Loko and Kambia that the RUF had again started to brand its initials into civilians abducted by them.<sup>4</sup>

Picture of a boy with AFRC sign branded onto his chest

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<sup>3</sup> Patrick K. Muana: The Kamajoi Militia: Civil War, Internal Displacement and the Politics of Counter-Insurgency. In: Africa Development, Vol. 22 Nos 3/4 1997, pp. 77-99; IRB - Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board Response SLE32713.E 10 September 1999; SLE 32530.E 5 August 1999; SLE29357.E 22 May 1998 [Internet <<http://www.irb.ca.gv/>>]

<sup>4</sup> UN-OCHA: Sierra Leone Humanitarian Situation Report 8 - 27 Aug 2000, 28 August 2000 [Internet<<http://www.reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf/437a83f9fa966c40c12564f2004fde87/8371ed79d7dce76185256949007b6198?OpenDocument>>]

Both the AFRC and the RUF use this technique of branding or tattooing in order to mark those they have recruited or tried to recruit. If a person with such a mark is seen in Freetown he will most certainly be killed.

In order to join the CDF you have to undergo a ritual. You have to swear an oath that you will always identify with the CDF. There are families where one brother belongs to the army or the CDF and another brother has joined the rebels or was recruited into their ranks. In some areas, young boys are expected to join the CDF as a matter of honor and if they refuse they will have a very hard time, leaving them no choice than to leave their home area. In October 2000 OCHA reported that the CDF Gbethi had shot two civilians who refused to join them.<sup>5</sup>

#### Labor camps

The expert is not aware of the existence of labor camps. There are prisons, of course, and camps where forcibly recruited children are kept in order to be trained and drugged. Internally displaced persons who were interviewed by Human Rights Watch at the beginning of this year reported they had been forced to remove zinc panels off the roofs of houses in abandoned villages in the Port Loko district and carry them to Freetown highway where the material was sold to ECOMOG and loyal SLA soldiers. A elderly woman for whom the bundle was too heavy was beaten and killed and later shown as an example for what happens when somebody refuses the orders of the rebels.<sup>6</sup>

There have been recent reports about forced recruitment into the mining fields.<sup>7</sup>

It is important to keep in mind that all parties to the conflict have committed atrocities. The ECOMOG have been known for indiscriminate action against the civilian population.

When Kono was bombed - and it still is not clear whether this should be attributed to the army or the rebels, there were voices who said, the destruction was systematically done by the army in order to get access to diamonds. In this case we were dealing with houses built in the fifties with sand that is said to still contain diamonds. Their inhabitants were thrown out and the houses crushed in order to retrieve the diamond particles supposedly to be found in the walls. The CDF have been created in reaction to a deep-sitting frustration and resignation with the government army and the ECOMOG.

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<sup>5</sup> UN-OCHA: Sierra Leone Humanitarian Situation Report 19 Sep - 02 Oct 2000, 3 October 2000  
[Internet] <http://www.reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf/437a83f9fa966c40c12564f2004fde87/0e437ac8aec4c6ffc125696e005080c1?OpenDocument>>

<sup>6</sup> Human Rights Watch: Rebel Abuses Near Sierra Leone Capital, Press Release, 3 March 2000

<sup>7</sup> allAfrica.com/Standard Times: In Kono Rebel Employ Forced Labour For Mining, 27 November 2000  
[Internet < <http://allafrica.com/stories/200011270213.html>> accessed 06/12/00]

## Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) - Internal Flight Alternatives

### Situation in the IDP camps<sup>8</sup>

#### *Picture:*

With each new wave of displacement refugee camps are growing like mushrooms  
With the limited resources people have to make a living, they live in other people's houses.

*Picture:* IDPs in a former Freetown factory

Donor agencies and UNHCR are trying to do their best to ensure security in the IDP camps. But there is no guarantee that security is in full force. Neither is there a guarantee that humanitarian assistance can get to the southern parts of the country. There are also IDP camps in enclaves in the rebel- controlled territories. Many people cannot leave insecure areas as the capacities of the IDP camps are already overstretched. Humanitarian agencies have almost no access to these camps. There are reports that the RUF comes into these camps to recruit soldiers and workers. In a press release in March 2000, Human Rights Watch denounced that in the Port Loko area abductions of civilians who left the IDP camps to collect food, wood or water occurred sometimes only a kilometre away from ECOMOG or SLA checkpoints. The perpetrators had been identified as ex-members of the SLA and members of the RUF.<sup>9</sup>

In the most recent trouble spot of the region, the border area with Guinea, around 320.000 Sierra Leonean refugees have been forced to leave Guinea since August 2000 and return to Sierra Leone. Most of them went to Freetown where their arrival further exacerbates the dire conditions in the overcrowded IDP camps. UNHCR tries to place them with relatives. Since the killings of two of its staff UNHCR has evacuated the border area and only makes weekly or bi-weekly visits. As nobody is monitoring the situation regularly it is unclear whether the current movement of people across the border have to be attributed to rebels or civilian refugees. Return to Guinea is not a viable option.

### Internal flight alternative

In Magburaka the RUF is very active; for the Temne living in this area it is not safe to flee to the Bo area as this ethnic group is associated with the AFRC by the Mende. The Mende are very selective in their procedure of who they let enter their territory. Especially with the CDF it entirely depends of who is in command. It might be enough to say that somebody is a rebel in order to be imprisoned or killed. There are cases where people had been mistaken for someone else and were killed on the spot - this is something that happened with all armed forces, the army, the ECOMOG, the RUF and the AFRC and with the CDF. It is only in Freetown itself where a person originating from the North might be safe.

### Situation in Freetown

The humanitarian situation in Freetown is a catastrophe. With the latest influx from Guinea the population has risen from pre-war 500.000 to more than one million people. There is neither the manpower nor the resources to deal with such an increase in the population. The people are tired and war-weary; they want to go home but there is no way for them to go home. Intellectuals and people with a university degree are reduced to begging in the street. People are living in deplorable conditions. Many people live in

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<sup>8</sup> Up-to-date information on the situation in various IDP camps can be found in the bi-monthly situation reports by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [Internet <<http://www.reliefweb.int>

<sup>9</sup>Human Rights Watch: Rebel Abuses Near Sierra Leone Capital, Press Release, 3 March 2000

the streets lying down in the gutter (picture). People cannot afford to buy medicine if they get ill. In houses which have been built for 10 - 15 persons, over 50 people are now living. This creates enormous social problems and will lead to conflict. The rate of criminality is very high, street gangs - youth out of the DDR programs, teenagers, traumatized people still under the influence of drugs - are roaming the streets. In a recent demonstration former combatants threatened to return to the bush if the government is not providing them with resources.

Prostitution is also a big problem in Freetown as it sometimes is the only possibility for women to earn a living. The same can be said for Sierra Leonean refugees in Guinea.

Responding to a question from the audience on the risk of another rebel attack on Freetown the expert stated the following: RUF is mainly situated around Makeni and in the mining areas. Freetown does not seem to be of interest to them right now. As mentioned before their closeness to the capital would make it easy to mount an attack if they decided to do so. The Sierra Leone Army (SLA) tries to control the city but lacks the logistics to ensure safety.

## 2. Groups at risk

### Women<sup>10</sup>

Almost every group except for the Krio and the Lebanese perform female genital mutilation. Women tried to start a debate wanting to keep the traditional aspects but dropping the practice of mutilation. The war has put an end to these debates and communities now usually want to speed up the process. Women who try to start a debate are harassed by influential women who want to keep the tradition. You are not a man or a woman if you have not gone through these rituals - you are nothing in the eyes of your community. If you refuse to undergo the mutilation you have no other choice than leave the area, sometimes even the country. Especially within the internally displaced communities in Freetown people need each other, they depend on each other for help. In order to maintain these bonds you have to abide by certain rules. As a young girl you are in a very vulnerable position - you might try to leave for e.g. Guinea, where it is very likely that you can only survive through prostitution. There is an entire industry of human smugglers who then would sell you into prostitution in Europe.

### Child soldiers

All armed forces - RUF, CDF, AFRC and the government army - abuse children, pushing them to the forefront, using them for harsh labor. Girls are regularly raped and sexually abused. The rebels give children drugs - mostly marijuana and crack. Many of the atrocities - especially the mutilations and amputations - are committed by children under the influence of drugs when the children do not realize what they are doing.<sup>11</sup>

*Video of execution by child soldiers*

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<sup>10</sup> See Human Rights Watch: Sexual Violence within the Sierra Leone Conflict, 26 February 2001; Amnesty International Report on human rights violations perpetrated against women and girls in Sierra Leone, July 2000

<sup>11</sup> See e.g. Amnesty International: Sierra Leone. Childhood - a Casualty of Conflict, 31 August 2000; Human Rights Watch: Sierra Leone Rebels Forcefully Recruit Child Soldiers, 30 May 2000



### Return of perpetrators of human rights violations

There is a general amnesty for everyone in Sierra Leone. Yet, Sierra Leone is such a small country that it is very easy to run into somebody who wants to take revenge. Many people talk about taking the law into their own hands - people have received threats of being poisoned. With youth, one has to keep in mind that many of them were forcibly recruited and kept under the influence of the drugs. This group of teenagers can try to survive but there are no functioning programs to help them. If they have perpetrated atrocities they will be at risk, or they will go back to the bush and join the existing rebel groups or create a new armed force.

### Freedom of expression - Journalists:

Journalists are very likely to be harassed by all parties to the conflict (ECOMOG, CDF, government). They have little room to criticize the government. It is very difficult for them to practice their profession. In June 2000 a 383% increase in taxes was imposed on newspapers. Many of them had to close their businesses. This is an open strategy to reduce the number of journalists and favour those who support the government by financing them. In 1999, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) reported the world-wide highest number of journalists being killed in Sierra Leone.

Generally freedom of expression is limited. You can be cynical of the government or crack some jokes in public but you are not supposed to say things that can be understood as undermining the government's efforts of fighting the rebels. There are unverified reports of persons who have been harassed because of open criticism of the government.

### **3. Possibilities of entry and exit**

Leaving the country via Lungi airport: A ferry will take you to Lungi airport where the check-in is done by Nigerian ECOMOG forces who would be very harsh with somebody they suspect to be a (former) AFRC supporter or member. A machine takes you from Lungi to Hastings which is to become the civilian airport. From there small machines fly to Conakry or Monrovia. The controls at Conakry airport are very difficult to pass. Even people with documents have to bribe the officers who regularly overstep their powers. Especially if you come back from Europe they think you have money and will try to get a share of it. From Conakry international flights go to Europe.

Another possibility to leave Sierra Leone is to take a boat from Freetown to Conakry. This takes you about 6 hours. It is a lot less expensive and the controls are not as strict as if you go through the airport.

### **4. Verification of documents**

Due to the absence of the UNHCR expert questions relating to documents could not be addressed during the workshop.

### **5. Determination of nationality**

Passport: this is the only document that confirms that you have Sierra Leone nationality

Language: Almost everybody speaks at least a few words in Temne, Mende or Krio. Most people should at least be able to say and understand very simple things, such as greetings kushé (good day in Krio) - but one has to keep in kind that there are different ways of pronunciation. The Limba who live at the edges of towns on the North make

their living from tapping wine. Educated Limba might say they are Temne because they do not want to be associated with their ethnic group which is perceived as low-class.

People who come to Europe are usually educated, they should be able to answer general questions about the geography and history of the country. The Fullah are one exception - they do not know the big cities and have very little knowledge of geography.

## Annex: Situation updates as of 29 May 2001

With regard to the situation for returnees from Guinea and Liberia<sup>12</sup> and internally displaced persons, the Secretary-General stated in his latest report dating 23 May 2001:

23. For the time being, I believe that the conditions for the immediate return of all refugees to Sierra Leone do not exist. A large part of Sierra Leone remains under the control of RUF and largely beyond the reach of humanitarian assistance and government services. The Governments in the region, UNHCR and other United Nations agencies must therefore continue their efforts to ensure the protection, safety and well-being made at Abuja on 2 May 2001 of refugees and internally displaced persons on their territory.

24. While recent developments in Sierra Leone may give rise to cautious optimism, the fighting in northern Liberia is intensifying and could lead to a serious political and humanitarian crisis which has already led to new and increased flows of refugees and internally displaced persons. (Source: UN Security Council: S/2001/513 Report of the Secretary-General on the issue of refugees and internally displaced persons pursuant to resolution 1346 (2001) 23 May 2001)

In its latest assessment of the humanitarian situation, covering the period between 9 May and 29 May 2001, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN-OCHA) provides the following information on the security situation, status of the disarmament process and the release of child soldiers:

### *Security Situation*

„The overall security situation around the country remained calm throughout the period. However, clashes continued between the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and elements of the CDF in the eastern part of the country despite the ceasefire. The fighting, which began in late April, has led to the internal displacement of several thousand civilians in the eastern town of Koidu. Diplomatic efforts are ongoing to put an end to the hostilities, which come at a time when the leadership of both parties have agreed to re-commit to the peace process.

[...]

On May 23rd, a team comprising OCHA, UNHCR and the UN FSO [Field Security Officer], undertook a security assessment mission to the newly accessed town of Koidu in Kono District. The team traveled by road from Freetown via the Lunsar/Makeni/Magburaka/Masingbi axis. They encountered six RUF checkpoints with only one of them armed. They report the roads to be in generally good condition and free of harassment by the RUF. Koidu town, which was packed with people, was practically in shambles - from what appeared to be neglect, diamond digging and ravages of war.

While they could not confirm the presence of large numbers of returnees and refugees from Guinea and Liberia reported by the RUF, the team found some of the recently displaced populations from the latest fighting between the RUF and the CDF in the area. According to UNAMSIL and the IDPs interviewed, an estimated 3,000 IDPs from surrounding villages have taken refuge in the town, sleeping in two (unroofed) school buildings. The coping strategies of the IDPs are limited and the host population is not in the position to offer significant support. Many of them are said to be scavenging for fruits and nuts in the bushes. It is believed that once the fighting stops, the IDPs will most likely return to their villages. If the fighting continues however, and more people are displaced, the humanitarian situation is likely to worsen, as the security situation is not yet conducive for large-scale humanitarian operations. Humanitarian agencies will continue to monitor the situation.“

(Source: UN-OCHA Sierra Leone Humanitarian Situation Report 09 May - 29 May 2001 [Internet <<http://www.reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf/vID/4A58557840970841C1256A5C0050441B?OpenDocument>> accessed 30 May 2001]

<sup>12</sup> Human Rights Watch has collected testimonies by returning refugees on human rights violations committed by the RUF. See Human Rights Watch: No "Safe Passage" Through Rebel-Held Sierra Leone, 3 April 2001 [Internet <<http://www.hrw.org/press/2001/04/refugee-0403.htm>>]

### *Disarmament*

„In line with the agreement reached in Abuja at the Review of the Abuja Peace Agreement [...] more than 3,000 combatants (CDF: 2,260; RUF: 1,088) disarmed in Port Loko and Kambia Districts in the Northern Province. The latest development followed a 15th May meeting in Freetown between the RUF, the CDF, Government officials and UNAMSIL, which agreed on modalities for the disarmament and demobilization programme, including the withdrawal of the RUF from Kambia district. The meeting, which was a follow-up to Abuja II, also agreed to consider the establishment of new Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) camps in the towns of Lunsar, Makeni, Kamakwie, Masingbi, Koidu, Kailahun, Alikalia, Pujehun and Bonthe. Disarmament camps already exist in Port Loko, Bo, Moyamba, Kenema and Daru.

The disarmament exercise, covering the period 18th to 28th May for Kambia and Port Loko districts, has been deemed successful despite ongoing difficulties in finding adequate facilities for the encampment of the ex-combatants. The Port Loko camp has already exceeded its current capacity. Many of the ex-combatants are being discharged after a short stay at the camp in order to make room for new arrivals. UNAMSIL estimates that many more combatants are anxious to enter the DDR programme.

Meanwhile, in a move to secure the country's border with Guinea and prevent further cross-border attacks which have already led to loss of civilian lives and internal displacement of Kambia residents, the Sierra Leone Army (SLA) began deploying in Mange and Kambia on 29th May following the official withdrawal of the RUF. Their aim is to rapidly secure the area and make it conducive for the re-establishment of civil authority and humanitarian activities. The 6th SLA battalion is spread between Rokupr and Kambia. The Battalion Headquarters remains in Port Loko with a step-up HQ at Mange. The 11th battalion has also deployed in the northwest of Kabala, Koinadugu district.

Kambia district has been under attack by the Guinean militia and the RUF since the resumption of hostilities in May 2000, making it impossible for humanitarian agencies to operate there. Up to 30,000 civilians have been internally displaced as a direct result of military activities in the area. A return to stability there may present an opportunity for victims to go home, including some of the returnees from Guinea currently settled in the Lokomassama area. Humanitarian agencies, through an adhoc task force for Kambia, are working closely with relevant government authorities to ensure that adequate plans and resources are in place to support the residents as they return home to devastated communities.“

(Source: UN-OCHA Sierra Leone Humanitarian Situation Report 09 May - 29 May 2001 [Internet  
<<http://www.reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf/vID/4A58557840970841C1256A5C0050441B?OpenDocument>> accessed 30 May 2001]

### *Child soldiers*

„At the time of writing, Child Protection Agencies reported that the RUF has so far released a total of 591 children in their care (424 in Makeni and 167 in Port Loko). The children are being released to UNAMSIL and UNICEF rather than to individual agencies to ensure proper coordination. They are presently accommodated in at the Interim Care Centers (ICCs) in Makeni, run by Caritas. Despite their fragile health condition, the children have expressed a strong desire to go back to school.

Of those released, only 10 are girls -- three in Makeni (6 and 11 years old) and seven in Port Loko. Obviously this raises a number of concerns, as large numbers of girls remain missing. UNICEF estimates that some 5,400 children have been engaged in Sierra Leone's war, serving both with RUF and CDF, but the majority being within the RUF. Many others were abducted and used as forced labour, or as sex slaves by rebel fighters. Since 1998, UNICEF has documented 2,789 missing girls, of which 1,557 were reported abducted by RUF. It is hoped that more of these girls will be released to their families as part of the overall effort to build confidence and move the peace process forward.“

(Source: UN-OCHA Sierra Leone Humanitarian Situation Report 09 May - 29 May 2001 [Internet

<<http://www.reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf/vID/4A58557840970841C1256A5C0050441B?OpenDocument>> accessed 30 May 2001]

In his report on developments in Sierra Leone between December and March 2001, the UN Secretary-General commented the human rights aspects as well as the security and humanitarian situation:

**„Human rights concerns**

44. The already fragile human rights situation in Sierra Leone has been exacerbated by cross-border rebel attacks into Guinea and, in turn, by retaliatory shelling and cross-border attacks by the Guinean army. The internally displaced people who fled the attacks reported human rights violations committed by RUF as well as by Guinean military personnel, who allegedly looted and burnt villages, and abducted men they considered to be RUF members or sympathizers.

45. Reports continue to be received about RUF allegedly harassing civilians and forcibly recruiting both adults and children for fighting and forced labour. UNAMSIL also continues to investigate any allegations of human rights abuses committed by other military groups, including the Sierra Leone Army and the Civil Defence Force.

46. Approximately 280 persons, mostly RUF and members of other armed groups, remain detained in “safe custody” without charge under emergency powers declared by the Government. The conditions of detention are monitored by UNAMSIL and, since January 2001, by the International Committee of the Red Cross. Conditions in Freetown Central Prison at Pademba Road have been assessed by UNAMSIL as not fully satisfactory but there has been no evidence of physical mistreatment of the detainees. However, the detainees have not been informed of their legal status nor have they had access to legal advice.

[...]

**VIII. Humanitarian aspects**

84. Access to the areas under RUF control remained restricted except for a programme of immunization which was held over a four-day period in February and which reached children in all parts of the country. A second round of immunizations is planned for 16 and 17 March in RUF-controlled areas. 85. Talks have begun with RUF through various contact groups, including UNAMSIL and United Nations agency staff to seek access to RUF-controlled areas. Several international non-governmental organizations which are interested in expanding their programmes have also been in touch with RUF.

86. Thousands of Sierra Leoneans living in border areas close to the fighting in the Kambia district have fled to safer areas, mainly on the Lungi peninsula. There was a new influx of such displaced people following helicopter gunship attacks on villages at Yelibuya Island on 20 January 2001, when reportedly many houses were destroyed and at least 20 persons were killed or wounded.

87. The large numbers of displaced persons place an added burden on United Nations agencies and humanitarian non-governmental organizations. While many displaced people have been accommodated in host communities in the Lungi peninsula, others receive little if any assistance and some are living in unacceptable conditions. The influx of returnees, internally displaced persons and discharged excombatants to already crowded areas in Freetown and Kenema has also led to an increase in criminal activities.

88. The situation in Guinea has caused the movement of refugees and thousands of internally displaced persons both in Sierra Leone and in Guinea. UNHCR, together with the International Organization for Migration, has begun a programme of transporting many of the returnees by providing boats from Conakry to Freetown for up to 2,500 people a week to help avoid the danger of crossing borders controlled by rebel forces. Taking into account those refugees repatriated with the assistance of the Government of Sierra Leone since September 2000, the total number of refugees returned by boat to Freetown now stands at 40,000. UNCHR and its implementing partners have opened several new transit centres to screen and process returning refugees before they are sent to more permanent shelter in secure areas of the country.

89. The Government’s resettlement programme is scheduled to begin by the end of March, at which time internally displaced persons currently living in camps will be moved to safe areas

where they have chosen to be resettled with the assistance of a wide variety in March 2001 with the assistance of a wide variety of humanitarian partners.

[...]

#### **X. Observations and recommendations**

94. While the situation in Sierra Leone has remained relatively stable since the signing of the Abuja Agreement, deep concerns remain about the continuing incursions and violence at the borders of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. I call upon the Governments of these countries to work closely with ECOWAS and the United Nations to bring an urgent end to the current crisis and create conditions for peace and human development in the subregion. In this connection, the ongoing efforts by regional leaders to facilitate a meeting of the Heads of State of the Mano River Union

countries deserve the full support and encouragement of the international community.

95. It is imperative that the leaders of RUF and their principal backers stop any further incursions by RUF fighters and other armed elements across the borders of the subregion. This would bring much-needed stability to the volatile borders and facilitate efforts to assist and, where possible, repatriate the many refugees stranded there. UNAMSIL, within its mandate and available resources, would stand ready to provide the necessary assistance in this regard.

96. At the same time, the relative stability in Sierra Leone and direct contacts with RUF have enabled UNAMSIL to conduct the relief-in-place of the two large contingents and the rotation of other units, without abandoning any location where the Force had been deployed. Moreover, the Mission's contingents have managed to consolidate their positions in their areas of responsibility, thus setting the stage for the forward deployment of UNAMSIL.

97. The continuing reluctance of RUF to disarm and to allow the Government to extend its authority to areas held by the rebels remains a cause for deep concern and leaves serious doubts about their intentions. In particular, it would appear that so far RUF is ready to implement only those aspects of the Abuja Agreement that pose no threat to its military strength and to its exploitation of the natural resources of the country. Obviously, this position deepens considerably the reluctance on the part of the Government to engage RUF in a political dialogue and to create the confidence that is necessary for such a dialogue to bear fruit.

98. A key objective of the peace process in Sierra Leone remains to end, as soon as possible, the RUF rebellion, to extend the legitimate authority throughout the country, to disarm and demobilize combatants and also to allow the rebels to pursue political objectives in a democratic process. The two-track approach, which had been endorsed by the Security Council, continues to offer the best chances of achieving a durable peace through a combination of a strong military deterrent and a political dialogue between the parties to the Abuja Agreement."

(Source: UN Security Council: S/2001/228 Ninth report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone, 14 March 2001

[Internet <<http://www.un.org/Docs/sc/reports/2001/228e.pdf>>])