

PART II



SIERRA LEONE

OVERVIEW

The civil war in Sierra Leone began in March 1991 when a small number of fighters called the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) attacked Sierra Leone from Liberia. An Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), comprising mutinous members of the Sierra Leone Army (referred to as 'ex-SLA'), overthrew the government in May 1997. The RUF accepted the AFRC's invitation to join the new junta, but the international community overwhelmingly supported the government of Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, exiled in Conakry. In March 1998, Nigerian troops participating in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) reinstalled Kabbah, but the civil war raged on until January 2002.

Low points in the conflict included the AFRC–RUF siege of Freetown in January 1999 that resulted in more than 5,000 deaths, and an RUF hostage-taking incident involving the capture of some 500 UN peacekeepers in May 2000. The civil war was noteworthy for the sheer scale of

human rights violations and extensive use of child soldiers. The country has remained relatively stable since President Kabbah was re-elected in a landslide victory in May 2002. This is partly because the UN Security Council has successively extended the drawdown of the UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL). In April 2005, several thousand UN peacekeepers continued to serve in the mission there.

ARMED GROUPS

Revolutionary United Front (RUF)

Origins/composition:

At its height, the RUF may have numbered around 20,000. Although more than 24,000 RUF combatants participated in the various phases of the government's disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programme,¹ this is an inaccurate indicator of the group's actual strength. Many RUF members report that they were recruited by force and promised material rewards (sex slaves, drugs, money) in exchange for their participation.²

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Foday Sankoh led the RUF until his capture in May 1999. Issa Sesay emerged as interim leader in November 2000. Sankoh died in custody in July 2003. Sesay, who was indicted by the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL), is currently awaiting trial.

Areas of control/activity:

Widespread and long-standing discontent with the country's government and political elites in Freetown initially provided the RUF with a base of popular support that ran across ethnic and district lines throughout parts of the hinterland. As the RUF relied increasingly on terror and forced conscription, its control of several districts within the northern and eastern provinces increased, but at the expense of its popular support.

Sources of financing/support:

The RUF received considerable funding from the illegal sale of alluvial diamonds.³ Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, and Libya are widely reported to have provided the RUF with weapons.⁴

Status:

The peace accords called for the RUF to be transformed into a political party. This effectively occurred under Sesay. The RUF is no longer a

cohesive fighting force. While many RUF members disarmed and demobilized, others left Sierra Leone to fight in neighbouring wars. Internal divisions, the indictment of four of its leaders, and waning support all point to the eventual demise of the RUF.⁵

Civil Defence Force (CDF)**Origins/composition:**

The CDF constituted a loose-knit collection of tribally based hunting societies that defended their communities, initially against the SLA and later the RUF. Its members included the Kamajors (Kailahun area), Tamaboros (Koinadugu district), the Donsos (Kono district), the Kapras (Tonkolili district), and the Gbethis (Port Loko and Tonkolili districts). More than 37,000 CDF members participated in the DDR programme,⁶ but the number of CDF fighters was considerably larger. According to a survey of ex-combatants, CDF members largely joined the militia in order to defend their communities, and recruitment occurred on the basis of family or community networks. Consequently, CDF discipline appears to have been relatively stronger than that of other groups.⁷

Leadership:

Sam Hinga Norman, who served as Kabbah's deputy minister of defence for a time, was the CDF's National Coordinator. The degree to which he exerted control over militias other than his Kamajor kinsmen is believed to have varied among other CDF groups, but is reported to have been not particularly strong.

Areas of control/activity:

(See 'Origins/composition' above.)

Sources of financing/support:

The Kamajors received some training from Sandline International, a British private security company.⁸

Status:

Hinga Norman, indicted by the SCSL in March 2003, currently awaits trial. The Kamajors still have a well-organized command structure and claim to be ready to mobilize at any time,⁹ but the status of many other CDF militias is unclear.¹⁰

Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC)

Origins/composition:

Disgruntled members of the armed forces established the group at the time of the coup d'état.

Leadership:

Johnny Paul Koroma was chairman of the AFRC and ruled the junta from May 1997 to February 1998. He remained influential with 'ex-AFRC' and members of the former Sierra Leone armed forces through the May 2002 elections.

Areas of control/activity:

The AFRC was forced to flee Freetown in February 1998, but some elements continued to operate in small groups. Koroma continued to enjoy the allegiance of some ex-SLA and gained additional supporters among the general Freetown population for his defence of the capital in May 2000.

Sources of financing/support:

The AFRC was politically isolated, although it might have received support from Liberia and perhaps some of Liberia's supporters.¹¹ Financially and militarily, the AFRC benefited from exercising effective control of the country and its assets during its eight-month rule.

Status:

Koroma has not been seen in public since his reported 'death' in June 2003. Some believe his disappearance is simply a ploy to avoid arrest by the SCSL, which had handed down its indictment three months earlier.

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Indeed, according to the SCSL Koroma's 'fate and whereabouts remain unknown'.¹² The AFRC, however, is no longer believed to be a cohesive force.

West Side Boys (WSB)**Origins/composition:**

The nucleus of the WSB included former SLA members. Its strength was believed to number in the hundreds.

Leadership:

Foday Kallay headed the WSB.

Areas of control/activity:

Largely limited to the Rokel Creek area near Occra Hills in Port Loko district.

Sources of financing/support:

The WSB attacked and robbed people travelling along the roads in their area of control.

Status:

Defunct. The WSB was neutralized in September 2000 after 'Operation Barass', a mission the British undertook to rescue their soldiers taken hostage by the WSB in August. Those not killed in the raid surrendered and later enlisted in the DDR programme.

SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS***Stockpiles*****Small arms:**

The RUF possessed a wide array of weapons including rifles such as AK-47 assault rifles of Chinese, Soviet, and eastern European origin, Belgian FN-FALs, German G3s, and British Lee-Enfield no. 4s, and sub-machine guns such as the German Sten and Israeli Uzi.¹³ The CDF possessed large numbers of hunting rifles, but also a few assault rifles. For example, Gbethis who disarmed in Port Loko district turned in AK-47s, self-loading rifles (SLRs), and G3s.¹⁴

Light weapons:

The RUF possessed Chinese 12.7 mm machine guns, various 60 mm, 82 mm, and 120 mm mortars, and small numbers of anti-tank and surface-to-air missiles.¹⁵

Sources**Domestic:**

Sierra Leonean armed groups seized weapons from the Sierra Leone armed forces as well as from UN and ECOWAS peacekeeping troops. For example, the RUF took hundreds of

weapons from Guinean, Kenyan, and Zambian troops during the May 2000 UNAMSIL hostage crisis. The AFRC took weapons from the Malians in ECOMOG.¹⁶ Many of the CDF's hunting rifles were craft-manufactured. The Kamajors received some weapons from Nigerian ECOMOG troops and from the SLA.¹⁷

Foreign:

At least eight countries—Burkina Faso, Bulgaria, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia, Libya, the Slovak Republic, and Ukraine—reportedly provided materiel to the RUF.¹⁸ The RUF also seized arms from the ECOMOG, the SLA, and UNAMSIL.¹⁹

Recovered

DDR:

Between September 1998 and January 2002, some 25,000 small arms, 1,000 light weapons, and almost one million rounds of ammunition were collected during the DDR process.²⁰ However, the programme aimed primarily at collecting assault weapons, and failed to recover many of the CDF's craft hunting rifles.²¹

Other:

A Community Arms Collection and Destruction Programme (CACD), which focused on weapons exempted

from DDR such as pistols and hunting rifles, retrieved some 9,660 weapons and 17,000 rounds of ammunition between December 2001 and March 2002.²² The success of this initiative led to a second undertaking, known as CACD II, which began in February 2003 and was subsequently renamed the Arms for Development (AfD) project. The project aims to completely clear 67 chiefdoms—approximately half the country—of arms by the end of 2005. As of 31 December 2004, arms collection had either been completed or was ongoing in 17 chiefdoms, and a total of 1,892 weapons had been collected.²³ So far, mostly hunting rifles and unexploded ordnance (UXO) have been recovered. Of the relatively few assault rifles collected—perhaps 40 or so in all—most are G3s and AK-47s.²⁴

HUMAN SECURITY ISSUES

CAFF

Extent of recruitment:

The government and UNAMSIL demobilized approximately 6,850 children during and after the civil war, but this figure does not repre-

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sent the full scale of the numbers of children recruited. For example, some commanders did not register children associated with fighting forces (CAFF) in the DDR programme, preferring instead to enter into kick-back schemes with non-combatants whereby the commanders would receive some of the recipients' benefits. Some children, especially those associated with the RUF, were afraid of being stigmatized and elected instead to remain anonymous.

Some 3,000 CAFF are in school. According to UN officials, the 'Sierra Leone model for the demobilization and reintegration of child combatants is widely considered a success that could be applied to other peace-keeping operations'.²⁵ However, a range of organizations, such as the Women's Commission on Refugee Women and Children, criticized the structure of the programmes because it largely neglected the needs of girls and former RUF child soldiers, leaving large numbers of the target population ignored and underserved.²⁶ The overwhelming majority of children associated with the RUF were forcefully recruited, as a result of which many ended up belonging to several—sometimes opposing—groups throughout their youth.²⁷

Functions:

CAFF's most common functions within the RUF included (in order of importance) spying, looting, camp maintenance, manning checkpoints, and looking for food.²⁸ Sierra Leonean CAFF were also directly involved in the hostilities,²⁹ particularly in ambushes against vehicles, killings of civilians, looting, as well as rapes and kidnapping. Children associated with the RUF often had access to firearms—even though these were usually owned by adult members of the group—and were given drugs before being sent to the front line.³⁰ Human Rights Watch has documented how adult rebels of the RUF and the AFRC used girls and in some cases boys as sex slaves.³¹

Displacement**IDPs:**

Completion of the Sierra Leone DDR programme in early 2002 facilitated large-scale repatriation of refugees and resettlement of internally displaced persons (IDPs). At least 600,000 Sierra Leoneans were displaced within their own country at the end of 2001.³² More than 65,000 IDPs and returnees were resettled between May 2001 and February

2002.³³ The final 'official' group of 12,800 IDPs were resettled in November 2002.³⁴

Refugees abroad:

By July 2004, 280,000 refugees had returned to Sierra Leone, and 15,000 remained in asylum countries in the subregion.³⁵

Refugees hosted:

By late 2004, Sierra Leone also hosted 50,000 refugees,³⁶ mostly Liberians.³⁷

Other violations or abuses

Killings, rape, and torture:

All parties to the conflict engaged in human rights violations during the civil war. The RUF and the AFRC committed systematic and widespread violations of human rights including amputations, rape, torture, mutilations, and summary executions. The CDF and the SLA reportedly committed serious human rights violations as well.³⁸

Other:

In March 2003, the SCSL indicted former RUF leader Sesay. His trial began in July 2004. He faces charges of crimes against humanity, serious violations of international humanitarian law, and war crimes.³⁹

OUTLOOK

Although the DDR was imperfect, it appears that small arms and light weapons are no longer easily available in the capital and throughout the country. Unemployment remains high, yet armed robberies and assaults are rare. Johnny Paul Koroma's supporters tried (unsuccessfully) to steal weapons from the army engineer unit's depot in Wellington in January 2003. This attempt suggests weapons are not circulating freely. Reasons for concern remain, however.

Popular support for the SCSL may dissipate depending on how the three group trials of nine indictees, which began in mid-2004, evolve. Youth groups have appeared in the eastern diamond-mining districts, and the government continues to struggle to assert control over illegal mining in this area. The Security Council's decisions to continue to extend the mandate for UNAMSIL have provided essential support to the post-conflict peace-building process. The Sierra Leone armed forces and police are still far from being able to provide for the country's defence or to uphold law and order on their own.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ENDNOTES

AfD	Arms for Development	1	Thokozani and Meek (2003, p. 33).
AFRC	Armed Forces Revolutionary Council	2	Humphreys and Weinstein (2004, pp. 28–29).
CACD	Community Arms Collection and Destruction Programme	3	Smillie, Gberie, and Hazleton (2000, pp. 52–54).
CAFF	Children associated with fighting forces	4	Obasi (2002, pp.58–59); Global Witness (2001; 2003).
CDF	Civil Defence Force	5	ICG (2003, p. 15).
DDR	Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration	6	Thokozani and Meek (2003, p. 33).
ECOMOG	ECOWAS Monitoring Group	7	Humphreys and Weinstein (2004, pp. 28–29).
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States	8	Berman (2000, p. 12).
IDP	Internally displaced person	9	ICG (2003, p. 13).
RUF	Revolutionary United Front	10	Confidential written correspondence with a knowledgeable source, 5 May 2004.
SCSL	Special Court for Sierra Leone	11	Liberia, as a member of ECOWAS, offi- cially condemned the coup d'état and continued to recognize the Kabbah govern- ment. However, given then Liberian President Charles Taylor's long-standing support for the RUF, which entered into an alliance with the AFRC, it would seem that Taylor's support for the sanctions that ECOWAS and the UN imposed were in word rather than deed.
SLA	Sierra Leone Army	12	Special Court for Sierra Leone (2003).
SLR	Self-loading rifle	13	Berman (2000, p. 15).
UNAMSIL	United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone	14	<i>Concord Times</i> (2001).
UXO	Unexploded ordnance	15	Berman (2000, p. 15).
WSB	West Side Boys	16	Berman (2000, pp. 7–8).
		17	Berman (2000, p. 12).
		18	See Berman (2000, pp. 3–10); UNSC (2000, paras. 194–95, 203–11).

- 19 Berman (2000, pp. 7–8).
- 20 Thusi and Meek (2003, p. 29).
- 21 Other limitations included the inadequate reintegration of women and children. For an analysis of Sierra Leone’s DDR programme, see Ginifer (2004, pp. 32–34)
- 22 Thusi and Meek (2003, p. 33).
- 23 UNDP (2005, Annex 2, p. 14). See also Bah (2004, pp. 8–10) for a description of the programme.
- 24 Interview with Andrew Gbanie, Assistant Superintendent, Sierra Leone Police, Abuja, 25 October 2004.
- 25 UNSC (2004, para. 21).
- 26 CSC (2004a, p. 37).
- 27 See Chapter 6 and HRW (2003).
- 28 See Chapter 6.
- 29 See also CSC (2004b, p. 37).
- 30 See Chapter 6.
- 31 HRW (2003, pp. 28, 42).
- 32 USCR (2004).
- 33 Malan (2003, p. 15).
- 34 Global IDP Project (2004).
- 35 UNHCR (2004).
- 36 UNOCHA (2004a, p. 9).
- 37 UNOCHA (2004b).
- 38 Special Court for Sierra Leone (2004); HRW (2003, pp. 25–48).
- 39 Special Court for Sierra Leone (2004).

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