



Australian Government
Refugee Review Tribunal

Country Advice

Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone – SLE37003 – All People’s Congress – Sierra Leone People’s Party – Political opposition – Asylum seekers

14 July 2010

1. Is there any recent information that illustrates the All People’s Congress response to those who oppose them?

The ruling All People’s Congress (APC) government has been criticised for its adverse treatment of members and supporters of the main opposition Sierra Leone People’s Party (SLPP). Some reports indicate that the APC government “denied members of opposition parties the right to demonstrate publicly against government policies”.¹ A 2008 report claims that senior members of the SLPP received insulting treatment when they were “guests of the president”. The APC government has also been criticised over “allegations of police bias against government opponents” as well as ill-treatment of journalists. Violent clashes between supporters of the APC and the SLPP have also been widely reported.²

An April 2010 Freedom House report describes Sierra Leone’s political culture as one “that values debate and is tolerant of diverse opinions and backgrounds”. The report claims that “[s]tate agencies do not persecute political opponents or peaceful activists as a matter of formal or informal policy”. As evidence of this assertion, it is reported that “[n]o serious allegations of extrajudicial killings of state opponents have appeared since 2000”. However, individual officials have been known to use their positions to target critics or opponents, particularly in local politics through the use of ‘youth protection squads’. It is widely assumed that official tolerance of such activities amounts to “an informal state policy of acceptance of such intimidation” of political opponents.³

The US Department of State reports that although “[t]he government rarely attempted to impede criticism...some believed that political figures used sympathetic media outlets to target their opposition”. For example, a newspaper was threatened with legal action by high level government officials unless it agreed to retract a critical report. The paper refused, and while the officials did not follow through with the threat, the paper was forced to print a pro-government story as compensation.⁴ Similarly, Sierra Leone’s *Awareness Times* describes a threat made by the Deputy Minister of Employment and Social Security Moijueh Kaikai “that he will ‘hit’ journalist Melvin Rogers of Radio Wanjay and [he] ‘will not survive the hit’”. The threat emerged after Rogers reported on the radio that Kaikai “was publicly campaigning for the APC candidate in the just

¹ US Department of State 2010, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2009: Sierra Leone*, March, Section 2b – Attachment 1

² Cargill, T. 2008, ‘Sierra Leone a year after elections: Still in the balance’, Chatham House website, September, p.5 http://www.chathamhouse.org.uk/files/12202_0908sierraleone.pdf – Accessed 13 July 2010 – Attachment 2

³ Freedom House 2010, ‘Countries at the Crossroads 2010: Sierra Leone’, Freedom House website, 7 April, pp.3, 7 <http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/ccr/country-7914-9.pdf> – Accessed 12 July 2010 – Attachment 3

⁴ US Department of State 2010, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2009: Sierra Leone*, March, Section 2a – Attachment 1

concluded Lugbu Chieftdom bye-election [sic]”. Kaikai further accused Rogers of being an SLPP politician, which Rogers has denied.⁵

Freedom House claims that although the national and local elections in 1996, 2002, 2007 and 2008 were conducted without interference, “scattered acts of violence” were identified.⁶ Furthermore, some incidents of violence were reported during chieftaincy elections held in December 2009.⁷ Reports of violent clashes between APC and SLPP supporters during an election campaign in February 2010 have been provided in a previous Country Advice of 3 March 2010. An SLPP press release indicates that 80 of its supporters were injured, and 41 of its members were unlawfully arrested. However, other reports claim that the APC has blamed the SLPP for starting the violence. The country advice also indicates that APC and SLPP supporters clashed during a by-election in Pujehun district from 9 to 12 March 2009. APC supporters then attacked the SLPP headquarters in Freetown on 13 and 16 March 2009.⁸

Freedom House’s 2010 report on Sierra Leone also outlines the March 2009 political violence in Pujehun district and Freetown. It is argued that the Freetown attacks “caused serious injuries and damage to SLPP offices and city council buildings...[and] included vehicle arson and alleged acts of sexual violence”.⁹ An Independent Review Panel was established to investigate the March attacks.¹⁰ A February 2010 report claims that the Independent Review Panel named senior APC members as key organisers of the attacks against the SLPP. Included in this list were President Koroma’s brother, the Mayor of the Freetown Municipality and the Close Protection Guard of the President.¹¹ The APC and the SLPP signed an agreement to end all acts of political violence on 2 April 2009.¹² However, despite this indication that both parties were committed to peaceful politics, it is

⁵ Bundu, B. 2010, ‘APC Minister Admits Threat Against Journalist’, *Awareness Times*, 3 March http://news.sl/drwebsite/publish/article_200514710.shtml – Accessed 12 July 2010 – Attachment 4

⁶ Freedom House 2010, ‘Countries at the Crossroads 2010: Sierra Leone’, Freedom House website, 7 April, p.3 <http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/ccr/country-7914-9.pdf> – Accessed 12 July 2010 – Attachment 3

⁷ Freedom House 2010, ‘Freedom in the World 2010: Sierra Leone’, Freedom House website <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2010&country=7914> – Accessed 12 July 2010 – Attachment 5

⁸ RRT Country Advice 2010, *Country Advice SLE36127*, 3 March – Attachment 6; ‘SLPP-NA Condemns Violence in Tongo Fields’ 2010, *The Exclusive News Paper*, 17 February http://exclusivepress.net/app/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1506&Itemid=37 – Accessed 2 March 2010 – Attachment 7; Munu, A.B. 2010, ‘APC, SLPP Set Houses on Fire’, *Premier News*, 16 February <http://www.premiernews-sl.com/detail.php?id=1923> – Accessed 2 March – Attachment 8; Blyden, S.O. 2010, ‘As SLPP Clinches Tongo Elections, Political Violence Re-Erupts in Sierra Leone’, *Awareness Times*, 15 February http://www.news.sl/drwebsite/publish/article_200514554.shtml – Accessed 2 March 2010 – Attachment 9; United Nations Security Council 2009, *Second report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone*, Relief Web website, 22 May <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900sid/MYAI-7SK5HW?OpenDocument> – Accessed 2 March 2010 – Attachment 10; Denney, L. 2009, ‘Sierra Leone: Wave of Violence or Wake-Up Call?’, AllAfrica Global Media, source: *Pambazuka News*, 18 June <http://allafrica.com/> – Accessed 2 March 2010 – Attachment 11; Bah, A. 2009, ‘Sierra Leone: Riots Commission Sworn-in’, AllAfrica Global Media, source: *Concord Times*, 7 October <http://allafrica.com/> – Accessed 2 March 2010 – Attachment 12

⁹ Freedom House 2010, ‘Freedom in the World 2010: Sierra Leone’, Freedom House website <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2010&country=7914> – Accessed 12 July 2010 – Attachment 5

¹⁰ Freedom House 2010, ‘Freedom in the World 2010: Sierra Leone’, Freedom House website <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2010&country=7914> – Accessed 12 July 2010 – Attachment 5

¹¹ Turay, A. 2010, ‘Ruling APC Big Guns Named in Political Violence Scandal in Sierra Leone’, *Awareness Times*, 22 February http://news.sl/drwebsite/publish/article_200514623.shtml – Accessed 12 July 2010 – Attachment 13

¹² Jalloh, B. 2009, ‘Sierra Leone: SLPP, APC Ceasefire’, AllAfrica Global Media, source: *Concord Times*, 8 April <http://allafrica.com/> – Accessed 2 March 2010 – Attachment 14

argued that their relationship “continues to be plagued by mutual mistrust and suspicion”.¹³

A number of recent news reports highlight the treatment of SLPP members and supporters by the APC. A March 2010 report explains that “the unexplained detention of a prominent SLPP Leader” is an indication of the APC’s anxieties over increasing reports of ‘inroads’ made by the SLPP into APC strongholds in northern Sierra Leone. The arrest and detention of Mr. Bai Sheku Wurie, who serves as the SLPP’s Port Loko Young Generation Leader and Greenland Chairman, was confirmed by police in the Port Loko district. The police claimed that Wurie “was arrested in connection with the attack on the residence of the Chairman of the Port Loko District Council, Mr. Muniru Fofana” in February 2010.¹⁴

Fofana was attacked over a dispute with local youths regarding the construction of a football field. Five youths were questioned, although only Wurie was detained. While the police could not explain Wurie’s exact role in the attack, they argued that it was necessary to detain him during the investigation. The detention has been viewed as “unlawful and politically motivated” by many locals, particularly those who support the SLPP, as “the police never detained the other youth leaders who were invited by the police for statements because they are believed to be associated with the ruling All People’s Congress (APC)”. Furthermore, Wurie has asserted that he was not even in the area at the time of the attack; “I left Port Loko on the 13th February and only returned on the 10th March”.¹⁵

A May 2010 report highlights “unfounded claims made by the APC” against supporters of the SLPP, who were accused of “riotous conduct and the brandishing of machetes” during local elections won by the SLPP. APC Minister of Mineral Resources and Presidential Affairs, Alpha Khanu, claimed that “a set of SLPP youths on [election] day gathered holding cutlasses and sticks to intimidate APC voters from casting their votes”. However, a video recording viewed at a government press briefing vindicated the SLPP of these accusations, showing “no amount of violence as there were only youth who were dancing and singing all about”. Minister Khanu had previously publicly asserted that video evidence supported his accusations; however, the footage in fact was contrary to his claims.¹⁶

2. Is there any information that failed asylum seekers are at heightened risk of harm on their return to Sierra Leone?

There is no indication that failed asylum seekers are at heightened risk of harm upon their return to Sierra Leone. The US Department of State reports that “[t]he constitution and law provide for freedom of movement within the country, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights in practice”.¹⁷ This indicates that Sierra Leoneans who return from overseas travel, as well as citizens who are being repatriated, do not face adverse treatment from the authorities. However, the only

¹³ Freedom House 2010, ‘Freedom in the World 2010: Sierra Leone’, Freedom House website <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2010&country=7914> – Accessed 12 July 2010 – Attachment 5

¹⁴ Kabia, A. K. 2010, ‘SLPP Youth Leader Arrested & Detained in Port Loko’, *Awareness Times*, 15 March http://news.sl/drwebsite/publish/article_200514840.shtml – Accessed 12 July 2010 – Attachment 15

¹⁵ Kabia, A. K. 2010, ‘SLPP Youth Leader Arrested & Detained in Port Loko’, *Awareness Times*, 15 March http://news.sl/drwebsite/publish/article_200514840.shtml – Accessed 12 July 2010 – Attachment 15

¹⁶ Bundu, B. 2010, ‘APC video clip vindicates SLPP, nails Alpha Khan’, *Awareness Times*, 14 May http://news.sl/drwebsite/publish/article_200515378.shtml – Accessed 12 July 2010 – Attachment 16

¹⁷ US Department of State 2010, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2009: Sierra Leone*, March, Section 2d – Attachment 1

specific reference to failed asylum seekers returning to Sierra Leone is an unsubstantiated comment by UK organisation Knowledge Inclusion Project (KIP). In a 2005 community briefing paper on refugees, KIP claims that “[s]ome countries, like Sierra Leone, will not accept failed asylum seekers”.¹⁸ No further information on failed asylum seekers was found.

Attachments

1. US Department of State 2010, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2009: Sierra Leone*, March.
2. Cargill, T. 2008, ‘Sierra Leone a year after elections: Still in the balance’, Chatham House website, September http://www.chathamhouse.org.uk/files/12202_0908sierraleone.pdf – Accessed 13 July 2010.
3. Freedom House 2010, ‘Countries at the Crossroads 2010: Sierra Leone’, Freedom House website, 7 April <http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/ccr/country-7914-9.pdf> – Accessed 12 July 2010.
4. Bundu, B. 2010, ‘APC Minister Admits Threat Against Journalist’, *Awareness Times*, 3 March http://news.sl/drwebsite/publish/article_200514710.shtml – Accessed 12 July 2010.
5. Freedom House 2010, ‘Freedom in the World 2010: Sierra Leone’, Freedom House website <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2010&country=7914> – Accessed 12 July 2010.
6. RRT Country Advice 2010, *Country Advice SLE36127*, 3 March.
7. ‘SLPP-NA Condemns Violence in Tongo Fields’ 2010, *The Exclusive News Paper*, 17 February http://exclusivepress.net/app/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1506&Itemid=37 – Accessed 2 March 2010.
8. Munu, A.B. 2010, ‘APC, SLPP Set Houses on Fire’, *Premier News*, 16 February <http://www.premiernews-sl.com/detail.php?id=1923> – Accessed 2 March.
9. Blyden, S.O. 2010, ‘As SLPP Clinches Tongo Elections, Political Violence Re-Erupts in Sierra Leone’, *Awareness Times*, 15 February http://www.news.sl/drwebsite/publish/article_200514554.shtml – Accessed 2 March 2010.
10. United Nations Security Council 2009, *Second report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone*, Relief Web website, 22 May <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900sid/MYAI-7SK5HW?OpenDocument> - Accessed 2 March 2010.
11. Denney, L. 2009, ‘Sierra Leone: Wave of Violence or Wake-Up Call?’, AllAfrica Global Media, source: *Pambazuka News*, 18 June <http://allafrica.com/> – Accessed 2 March 2010.

¹⁸ Knowledge Inclusion Project 2005, ‘Briefing Sheet Number 4: Refugees & Asylum Seekers’, December [http://www.scotswoodareastrategy.co.uk/KIP%20Reports%20and%20Sheets/KIP%20Report%201\(Refugees%20and%20Asylum%20Seekers\).doc](http://www.scotswoodareastrategy.co.uk/KIP%20Reports%20and%20Sheets/KIP%20Report%201(Refugees%20and%20Asylum%20Seekers).doc) – Accessed 12 July 2010 – Attachment 17

12. Bah, A. 2009, 'Sierra Leone: Riots Commission Sworn-in', AllAfrica Global Media, source: *Concord Times*, 7 October <http://allafrica.com/> - Accessed 2 March 2010.
13. Turay, A. 2010, 'Ruling APC Big Guns Named in Political Violence Scandal in Sierra Leone', *Awareness Times*, 22 February http://news.sl/drwebsite/publish/article_200514623.shtml – Accessed 12 July 2010.
14. Jalloh, B. 2009, 'Sierra Leone: SLPP, APC Ceasefire', AllAfrica Global Media, source: *Concord Times*, 8 April <http://allafrica.com/> – Accessed 2 March 2010.
15. Kabia, A. K. 2010, 'SLPP Youth Leader Arrested & Detained in Port Loko', *Awareness Times*, 15 March http://news.sl/drwebsite/publish/article_200514840.shtml – Accessed 12 July 2010.
16. Bundu, B. 2010, 'APC video clip vindicates SLPP, nails Alpha Khan', *Awareness Times*, 14 May http://news.sl/drwebsite/publish/article_200515378.shtml – Accessed 12 July 2010.
17. Knowledge Inclusion Project 2005, 'Briefing Sheet Number 4: Refugees & Asylum Seekers', December [http://www.scotswoodareastrategy.co.uk/KIP%20Reports%20and%20Sheets/KIP%20Report%201\(Refugees%20and%20Asylum%20Seekers\).doc](http://www.scotswoodareastrategy.co.uk/KIP%20Reports%20and%20Sheets/KIP%20Report%201(Refugees%20and%20Asylum%20Seekers).doc) – Accessed 12 July 2010.