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Sierra Leone: Current (2003-2004) situation of people suspected of prior RUF (Revolutionary United Front) membership or collaboration; treatment by authorities
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

In 2002, Sierra Leone ended an eleven-year conflict in which thousands of children were abducted, used as human shields and/or made to service RUF (Revolutionary United Front) combatants as fighters, porters and sex-slaves (*Country Reports 2003* 25 Feb. 2004; USAID 12 Aug. 2003; HRW 11 July 2002). As part of the Lomé peace agreement, signed on 7 July 1999, the Sierra Leone government granted a general amnesty from prosecution to former RUF combatants and collaborators (Amnesty International 18 Mar. 2004).

Prosecutions

Despite the amnesty agreement, as of mid-2004, the Sierra Leone government has started the process of prosecuting a small number of high-ranking RUF commanders for crimes against humanity, arguing that perpetrators of war crimes cannot be granted immunity from prosecution (AFP 13 May 2004; Amnesty International 18 Mar. 2004; *Country Reports 2003* 25 Feb. 2004, Sec. 1a,d). At the end of 2003, there were more than 60 RUF/AFRC (Armed Forces Revolutionary Council) members detained in the maximum-security Pademba Road Prison in Freetown awaiting trial for murder and related crimes (ibid.).

Reintegration

Since the end of the conflict, many former RUF members (combatants and collaborators) have returned to their families or participated in various reintegration programs (ibid.; ISS Mar. 2003). Details about some reintegration programs are available from the USAID (United States Agency for International Development) Website <http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/humanitarian_assistance/the_funds/dcof/sierraleone.html> (12 Aug. 2003).

In a 2003 article in a monograph of the ISS (Institute of Security Studies), Jeremy Ginifer, a "senior researcher on the Training for Peace Programme ... at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs ... in Oslo" (ISS Mar. 2003b) indicated that both the government and the public in Sierra Leone appeared to accept that ex-combatants would have to be reintegrated into society (ibid.a). USAID reported that the public reaction to the ex-combatants had changed from hostility to acceptance thanks to successful reintegration programs (12 Aug. 2003).

However, Human Rights Watch (HRW) has reported cases of retaliation by "government-allied Civil Defense Force (CDF) militias" supported by local village chiefs and leaders against former RUF members (2003).

Female RUF members

International aid groups have reported that some of the girls abducted by the RUF have remained with

their captors (de facto husbands) despite agreements to allow them to return (USAID 12 Aug. 2003; *Country Reports 2003* 25 Feb. 2004, Intro., Sec. 1b). There are indications that such former RUF 'wives' are staying with RUF captors "due to a lack of viable options and intimidation by their captors" (ibid., Sec. 1b). Aid groups have expressed concern that some of the girls are being kept against their will (ibid.; HRW 2003).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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Additional Sources Consulted

Internet sites, including: AllAfrica.com, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch (HRW), Institute for Security Studies (ISS), Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), International Crisis Group (ICG), Reporters Without Borders, UMCOR-NGO.


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