



U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

Bureau of Democracy,
Human Rights and Labor
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ISSUE PAPER: **SIERRA LEONE --REPRISALS AGAINST FORMER COMBATANTS**

Introduction:

This issue paper was drafted by the Department of State's Office of African and European Affairs in the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor for use by the Executive Office of Immigration Review and the Department of Homeland Security in assessing asylum claims. It is intended to provide a convenient, updated summary regarding reprisals arising from the conflict in Sierra Leone. Under 8 C.F.R. §§ 208.11 and 1208.11, the Department of State may provide information on country conditions that may be pertinent to the adjudication of asylum claims. The purpose of this issue paper is to provide information relating to such conditions; it is not intended to convey a description of all of the circumstances from which legitimate asylum claims may arise.

Profiles and issue papers are prepared by State Department officers with expertise in the relevant area and are circulated for comment within the Department, including to overseas missions, and to other agencies if appropriate. Adjudicators may also wish to review the applicable chapter of the Department of State's annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices on line at: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/> and other publicly available material on conditions in this country.

Sierra Leone --Reprisals Against Former Combatants :

For Sierra Leoneans today, the decade of brutality 1991-2001 (which Sierra Leoneans simply call "the war") is an ever-present memory. However, since the war ended, the Department of State has not been aware of any reports of former combatants having been killed for their role in the war. The memory of the war is a factor for present-day stability in the face of grinding poverty, the sagging economy, and widespread dissatisfaction with the government. According to U.S. Embassy sources, which include government and civil society members in Sierra Leone as well as international non-governmental organizations that closely follow human rights in the country, many Sierra Leoneans, from different political persuasions, religions, regional and ethnic groups, share a common perspective that anything is better than returning to brutal days of

violence and persecution. This sentiment seems to be a restraining factor among people who went through the war (i.e., not the very young) to seek reprisals. Sierra Leoneans today are largely focused on survival in the present.

There are other factors that contribute to the absence of retribution. The war affected the whole country, but the severest impact was in the south, from whence came both the most violent rebel group, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), and the Sierra Leone People's Party of President Tejan Kabbah, who made an effort, with outside assistance, to promote reconciliation (including establishing a Truth and Reconciliation Commission), and succeeded in restraining retributive tendencies within his party.

The capture of RUF leader Foday Sankoy also was a factor in stemming retribution. In addition, some of the former combatants were teenagers and younger children, and there is a widespread recognition in Sierra Leone that they, in particular, cannot be held responsible. Another factor in leveling animosities is the population explosion in the country's capital city Freetown after the war. Although there was a huge influx of rural migrants to the city, there is no pattern of segregation along regional or ethnic lines. Following the 2007 elections, Kabbah stepped down, and die-hard members of his southern-based SLPP also were voted out of power. The northern-based All People's Congress (APC), which ruled the country for over two decades prior to the war, returned to power and has had less motivation to dredge up the violent past than the SLPP.

A process of disarmament and reintegration took place after the war, as packets of cash and tools were handed out to former combatants as enticement to settle down to a peaceful life. As early as 1998 the system for handling combatants and victims was separated, yet there was always a parallel focus on both, and an emphasis on total community development as a way to restart the lives of both combatants and victims. Religious leaders and reconciliation organizations were extremely active in the reconciliation process. By 2004, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission disbanded and there were no more officially-designated internally displaced people. Reparations have continued to be paid to victims through the National Commission for Social Action. Large numbers of people who came to the capital city remained.

The Embassy has not received any reports of retribution against ex-combatants by the government. At the village level, there are reports of societal shunning, but instances of physical retribution against former combatants appear to be infrequent.