

Freetown again in January 1999 in a display of arson, murder and violence that claimed the lives of over 5,000 people and left thousands more homeless.

Persuaded in part by its military weakness and in part by the blandishments of western governments, the GOSL once again went to the bargaining table with the RUF. It concluded an agreement that provided all combatants full amnesty. It also gave RUF leader Foday Sankoh the rank of Vice President and leadership of a government commission that controlled the country's mineral wealth including diamonds. A UN peacekeeping force, UNAMSIL, was mandated to take over peacekeeping duties from ECOMOG.

In May 2000, however, the RUF attacked UNAMSIL forces, taking more than 500 soldiers hostage. A subsequent public demonstration outside Sankoh's Freetown house led to the deaths of 17 civilians, the arrest of Sankoh and the resumption of war. The intervention of British troops helped to demonstrate international resolve to keep the RUF from power and a November 2000 cease-fire paved the way for peace talks during the first half of 2001. With Nigerian assistance, new agreements were reached in May between the government, the RUF, the CDF and UNAMSIL to end the fighting.

A more detailed account of these historical events can be found in Annex 1. The following sections of this report deal with security, humanitarian and development assistance, political and governance and other regional issues confronting Sierra Leone and its neighbours. The next section on security retraces and analyzes some of the recent events described above in more detail.