

INTRODUCTION

This report follows an earlier one, *Sierra Leone: The Forgotten Crisis*, produced in April 1999 for the Honourable Lloyd Axworthy, then Minister of Foreign Affairs. That report was written before the Lomé Agreement that was signed later in the year, before the arrival in Sierra Leone of UN peacekeepers and before the collapse of the Lomé Agreement and a return to war. Much has changed in Sierra Leone since then, but the history of the conflict has not.

The years immediately before and after Sierra Leone's independence in 1961 were marked by optimism and high expectations. Political cleavages and a mismanaged election in 1967, however, set the stage for the country's first military takeover. Civilian rule was reestablished in 1968 under the populist trade unionist, Siaka Stevens. But the Stevens' years were marked by a systematic destruction of the formal state apparatus and by the growth of a large informal economy, much of it based on illicit trade in the country's high-value diamond resources. One-party rule, combined with the systematic destruction of the judiciary, the public service, the police and the military, paved the way for a downward spiral in the economy. After 1985, attempts at reform and revival by Stevens' successor, Joseph Momoh, were largely ineffective. During the Momoh years there was a dramatic growth in the number of unemployed and disaffected youth. They drifted from the countryside either to Freetown and other urban centres or to the diamond fields of Kono. In either case, they became socialized into a climate of violence, drugs and crime.

The RUF drew its first recruits from groups of alienated youth that initiated attacks from Liberia with support from then Liberian rebel leader Charles Taylor in 1991. Ostensibly aimed at ending corruption in government, the RUF has never gained a significant political or ethnic following. A humanitarian crisis quickly resulted from its tactics involving brutal attacks on unarmed civilians and children.

A military takeover by the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) in 1992 saw various attempts to deal with the RUF threat militarily. The creation of a CDF, made up of traditional hunting societies ('kamajors' or 'kamajohs'), was effective in protecting areas of the south and some of the east from the RUF. An Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) intervention force known as the Economic Community Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) defended government positions, but was unable to defeat the RUF. A brief intervention by Executive Outcomes, a private military force, did push the RUF back from Freetown in 1995 and temporarily cleared the diamond areas, but the war continued.

In 1996, Sierra Leone held its first democratic elections in almost three decades and returned to civilian rule. The government of President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah negotiated a peace agreement with the RUF that year in Abidjan, but the agreement failed soon afterwards. RUF attacks continued and their brutality escalated. A military coup in 1997 ousted the Kabbah government, and the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) invited the RUF to join it in governing the country. Several months of chaos, murder and barbarity ensued. The AFRC was finally forced out of power in 1998 by ECOMOG and the Kabbah government was reinstated. The RUF was far from finished, however. Together with elements of the AFRC, they temporarily invaded