

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The security situation in Sierra Leone has frequently and dramatically changed over the past ten years. It has widened to engulf other countries in the region causing widespread destruction and death or displacement for hundreds of thousands of people. The past year has been no exception. In May 2000, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) attacked and kidnapped several hundred UN peacekeepers. It subsequently mounted attacks on the Forecariah and Forest Region of Guinea causing great physical damage and displacing of tens of thousands of civilians.

Efforts to negotiate with the RUF culminated in new peace agreements that were signed in May 2001. Disarmament and demobilization began soon thereafter. Three major questions arise from the current security situation: first, *why has the RUF sought a peace agreement now?* Secondly, *is their desire for peace genuine?* And third, *is it likely that the peace will hold?* This report attempts to answer these questions and concludes that, while there is reason for optimism, there are also many reasons to proceed with extreme caution. The ultimate test will be the diamond areas of Kono and Tongo Field. Until both the RUF and the Civil Defence Force (CDF) cede full control of these areas to the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) and full control of diamond mining to the Government of Sierra Leone (GOSL), it would be premature to believe that peace has been achieved.

Much of the future security of the region depends on the role that Liberian President Charles Taylor assumes for himself in the months ahead. If he believes that it is no longer in his interest to support the RUF, and if he acts accordingly, the conflict could well be at an end. There are worrying signs, however. Government-sponsored human rights abuse in Liberia is escalating. There is also growing evidence some of the recent 'fighting' in northern Liberia has been instigated by Taylor's forces. There are reliable reports that Liberian troops have fired their weapons near villages – simulating firefights – to cause panic forcing residents to flee. The result is more refugees and more internally displaced people (IDPs).

Taylor's strategy appears to be intended to generate sympathy for Liberia. By casting Liberia as the victim of aggression by dissident groups operating out of Guinea and Sierra Leone, he demonstrates that he has external enemies and therefore needs to have the arms embargo lifted. His purposes are served by creating instability on his borders as this draws attention away from his own internal weaknesses. It also places added pressure – in the form of Liberian refugees – on neighbouring Guinea. Taylor's behavior in other areas remains a source of concern. He continues to import weapons and support the RUF spending an estimated one third of the country's known income on military efforts which he finances with what the IMF calls 'off-budget' income. This is derived to a great extent from massive logging operations of Liberian tropical hardwood that threaten to eliminate the largest and best stands of timber within a decade.

This report describes the role of and changes among military actors in Sierra Leone. Canada currently contributes to the UK-led IMATT. This initiative aims at rebuilding the Sierra Leone Army (SLA) and the Ministry of Defence (MOD) to eliminate corruption, improve efficiency and to ensure appropriate civilian control. UNAMSIL has been through a protracted period of difficulties that appeared to be nearing an end at the time of writing. The arrival of Pakistani