

THE SECURITY SITUATION

Background

The security situation in Sierra Leone has changed frequently and dramatically over the past ten years and the fourteen months between May 2000 and June 2001 have been no exception. Following the collapse of the peace process in May 2000, fighting resumed between the RUF and various Sierra Leonean forces – notably the remains of the AFRC/SLA and different CDF groups. RUF attacks on the Forecariah area of Guinea and that country's Forest Region in September 2000 and afterwards created great damage and significant human dislocation among Sierra Leonean and Guinean refugees and IDPs. The attacks on Forecariah may have been a diversionary effort to draw Guinean attention away from the subsequent and more devastating attacks on Guékédou, Macenta and Kissidougou. These attacks were more strategic and inflicted systematic damage on government infrastructure including police stations, communications systems, government offices and hospitals.

There were undoubtedly several reasons for the attacks. The RUF, possibly acting at the behest of Charles Taylor, may have sought to deal a blow to its own enemies and those of Taylor. It is likely that Sierra Leonean CDF fighters (Kono-speaking 'Donsos' rather than Mende-speaking Kamajors) had been staying in or near some of the refugee camps in the 'Parrot's Beak' area of Guinea (known in Guinea as the 'Languette'). The RUF attacks may have aimed to create chaos among the refugees and to neutralize these CDF forces. Attacks further east on Macenta were likely aimed at the United Liberation Movement for Democracy in Liberia (ULIMO) forces that had settled there after the Liberian civil war. Continued unrest in Liberia's Lofa Country may have had a cross-border element to it and the RUF attack on Macenta may have sought to neutralize ULIMO and other Liberian dissident forces.* There is speculation that, if the RUF attacks had been successful, an eventual aim was to reach the alluvial diamond fields north of Macenta and to reenact the scenario choreographed by the RUF in Sierra Leone.

However, the Guinean Armed Forces (GAF) repelled the attacks and was reportedly operating at various times with both ULIMO and CDF fighters. It is believed that serious damage was inflicted on the RUF forces some of which may have occurred when GAF troops followed the RUF in hot pursuit raids into Sierra Leone. Clashes between GAF troops and ULIMO are also said to have occurred in Guinea and there was a cross-border shelling incident on May 18, 2001.

In early May 2001, the RUF began a dialogue with the GOSL and UNAMSIL that resulted in high-level meetings at Abuja in Nigeria. Two communiqués were signed in Sierra Leone in mid-

* There have been several serious outbreaks of fighting in Liberia since the 1997 elections. According to Human Rights Watch, "there were two outbreaks of violence in Monrovia in 1998 in which state security forces battled with faction leader Roosevelt Johnson's officially disbanded ULIMO-J ("J" for Johnson) and his predominantly ethnic Krahn supporters. In April and August 1999, Liberian rebels operating from neighboring Guinea carried out attacks in Lofa County, northern Liberia. Although unconfirmed, the rebel attacks may have been led by former ULIMO-K (K for Alhaji Kromah) faction fighters - largely ethnic Mandingos. The fighting resulted in civilian deaths and displacement, forcing thousands of Liberians and Sierra Leonean refugees to flee. In July 2000, another invasion was launched by a group calling itself Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) from the Guinean border into Liberia resulting in fighting and displacement yet again in Lofa County." *Human Rights Watch World Report 2000, 2001*