

**Forum:** Historical Security Council

**Issue:** The situation in Sierra Leone

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## Introduction

The Sierra Leone Civil War was an armed conflict mainly between the Revolutionary United Front and the government regime in Sierra Leone between 1991 and 2002. It was one of the most brutal, devastating, and long-lasting conflicts in Africa in which countless human rights violations and war crimes took place. Over 50,000 people were killed, and around 2 million were displaced. Countless civilians were mutilated, raped, and their villages burned down during the conflict. Previously, Sierra Leone was governed by the oppressive All People's Congress party whose trademarks were corruption, economic monopolisation, and violence which set the scene for the first attack in 1991. Diamond-rich Sierra Leone was soon encompassed by armed conflict that lasted over a decade.

Cracks in the implementation of rules-based international order was at the heart of the conflict with all parties refusing to abide by the international humanitarian law. Peace talks started as early as 1996, yet the war ended in 2002. Most of the international agreements signed throughout the course of the war were not respected and violated frequently by parties which prolonged the conflict.

## Definition of Key Terms

**Junta:** Junta refers to a group of people controlling the government after a revolutionary seizure of power such as a military coup (Merriam-Webster Dictionary).

**Blood diamond:** Blood diamond or conflict diamond refers to uncut diamonds mined in areas of armed conflict (usually in Africa) and traded illegally to fund the conflict (Oxford Languages).

**Sobel:** Sobels are people who are soldiers during the day, but act as rebels at night. The term itself is derived from the words "soldier" and "rebel". The presence of sobels is usually an indication that the conflict is profitable for both soldiers and rebels, providing an incentive for people to lengthen the conflict to maximise personal profit (Feldman).

**San-san boys:** San-san boy is a term used for marginalised youth that usually seek to become rich through illegal mining activities (Sierra Leone TRC).

**Kamajor:** Kamajors are a group of traditional hunters from the Mende ethnic group in the south and

east of Sierra Leone.

## General Overview

Following Sierra Leone's independence from Great Britain in 1961, the future of the small African country seemed rather promising. It is a country rich with natural resources, especially diamonds, which later played an important role in the development of the conflict. The situation of the country, however, gradually started to become worse over the years after the first Prime Minister's death in 1964. The collapse of Sierra Leone preceding the war is generally associated with Siaka Stevens from the All People's Congress (APC) party who ruled over Sierra Leone from 1968 to 1985. In order to concentrate the power and money in his own hands, Stevens systematically weakened government institutions and monopolised the economy throughout his reign (Ducasse-Rogier). In 1977, Sierra Leone was declared a one party state by Stevens and was managed with corruption and violence. Fearing a military coup, Stevens also deliberately emptied and weakened the army. He supported militias, private security groups and mercenaries which cultivated a violence culture within the country. His successor, General Joseph Momoh, also wasn't successful in improving the state of the country and reversing Stevens' actions (Ducasse-Rogier).

On 23 March 1991, an attack was launched by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) led by former Sierra Leone army corporal Foday Sankoh, a rebel movement aiming to take down the oppressive APC regime (Richards). The attack, which was launched from Liberian territory, was also supported by a group of Liberian rebels called the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), led by Charles Taylor (Britannica). The collaboration between NPFL and RUF dates back to 1988 with RUF and NPFL fighting alongside each other during the rebel movement in neighbouring Liberia. The NPFL was one of the main weapons and financial providers of the RUF in the early stages of the conflict. The NPFL also had other motives to support the conflict since conflict in the diamond regions of Sierra Leone would pose an opportunity to benefit from diamond trade and in 1991, Momoh was politically supporting ECOMOG, the Economic Community of West African States' Ceasefire Monitoring Group, which was fighting against Taylor's NPFL in Liberia (Ducasse-Rogier).

RUF initially received popularity and support from Sierra Leoneans who were complainants of the APC regime. Sobels and "San-san boys" especially contributed to the advancements of the RUF (Ducasse-Rogier). The rebel attack, initially not taken seriously by the government, couldn't be controlled by the Republic of Sierra Leone Military Force (RSLMF) which was weakened during Stevens' time. The army was also further weakened by the prevalence of sobels in the army. In 1992, the RUF, which was quickly advancing in Sierra Leone, took control over the Kono region, one of the main regions for diamond mining. This became a major development, since money from illegal diamond mining was used to obtain illegal weapons and to finance most of the RUF's operations (Britannica). Taking control of the diamond regions and the diamond trade also remained one of the

main objectives of other parties that joined the war later on.

The RUF continued to expand through the southern region of Sierra Leone. They started to ransack villages, forcibly recruit young people and children which started to change the public opinion on RUF. On 29 April 1992, a military coup was staged against Momoh and the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) led by Valentine Strasser was established as the new regime (Britannica). RUF continued fighting against the NPRC. The war escalated as RUF took control over more territory using “blood diamond” money to fund its operations. During the conflict, civilians faced horrible human rights violations such as mutilation, rape, forced labour, burning etc.

Meanwhile, RSLMF troops had gained support and supplies under the new government. They managed to push back RUF troops into thick forest regions, away from towns. RUF troops, who were able to successfully establish forest camps and train new soldiers, revived once again by 1994 (Richards). Having learned jungle warfare and memorised the forest of Sierra Leone, RUF troops were able to successfully ambush RSLMF trucks and increase their supplies. The RUF, once again started to gain territory and threaten towns. The movement took 17 international hostages during their advancements which gained international attention and media coverage (Richards). In the meantime, the Civil Defence Forces (CDF) were starting to form from local defence groups who used traditional hunting techniques and magical protections to defend local villages from attacks. The CDF was mostly composed of kamajors, who became an important factor in fueling the conflict (Ducasse-Rogier). This group was later armed and received professional training from Executives Outcomes (EO), a South-African private security firm contracted by the NPRC in 1995 to fight against RUF. CDF and EO were able to successfully push back RUF which had started to threaten Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone.

In January 1996, Valentine Strasser was ousted in an internal coup and General Julius Maada Bio took control of the government for a short while (BBC). The international community and Freetown were more concerned about the governance of the state rather than the RUF and the NPRC was under international pressure to hold democratic elections in the country. The RUF requested for the elections to be postponed until a peace agreement was reached. However, the elections took place in February and March 1996. Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) and Ahmed Tejan Kabbah took over the government (Britannica). The conflict between CDF/EO and RUF continued and took on an even more violent form with countless human rights violations. Peace talks between President Kabbah and the RUF leader Sankoh started and the Abidjan peace Agreement was signed in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire between Kabbah and Sankoh on 30 November, 1996 (Peace Accords Matrix). However, the parties refused to honour the terms of the agreement and the conflict resumed. The agreement also outlined the departure of EO from Sierra Leone, which was more or less the only term of the agreement which was carried out in 1997. The departure of EO further fueled the conflict (Ducasse-Rogier).

The Abidjan peace process formally collapsed on 25 May 1997 when another military coup was

staged and Kabbah's government fell. The Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) led by Major Johnny Paul Koroma came into power and formed a military junta with the RUF (Britannica). The junta exercised extreme violence during its reign and the conflict reached its peak. At this point, with the Sierra Leonean government siding with RUF, international intervention was necessary. In October 1997 the UN Security Council established an arms embargo on Sierra Leone, however, this did not stop the illegal arms trade and weapons entering Sierra Leone (Ducasse-Rogier). The Economic Community of African States (ECOWAS) and ECOMOG entered Sierra Leone to fight against AFRC/RUF. ECOWAS's intervention led to the signing of the Conakry Peace Plan on 23 November 1997 which called for an immediate ceasefire and the reinstatement of Kabbah's government (The Sierra Leone Web). The ceasefire, however, couldn't be honoured as ECOWAS launched an attack against the junta in February 1998. This attack was able to weaken the junta's forces, allowing for the return of Kabbah's government on 10 March 1998. The junta forces retreated back into the jungle, where they continued their fight against the government. After the government's reinstatement, the army was disbanded until May 1999.

In July 1998, the United Nations deployed a small mission called UNOMSIL. This mission wasn't able to reach its purpose as it was too small in scale and the RUF was growing stronger day by day. 1998-1999 was the ultimate peak of the conflict with AFRC/RUF entering Freetown on 6 January 1999 (Human Rights Watch). The rebel forces executed immense violence against the civilians during the four day invasion and turned the capital to a rebel base before they were finally pushed out of the capital by ECOMOG forces.

On 7 July 1999, a new peace agreement was signed in Lomé between Kabbah and Sankoh which required RUF and AFRC forces to surrender their weapons. The Lomé accord along with the planned withdrawal of ECOMOG started a slow peace process and allowed for UN intervention into the area (Peace Accords Matrix). The UN launched a peacekeeping force, UNAMSIL, in the area however, the understaffed and ill-equipped force proved unable to contribute to the implementation of the agreement. In May 2000, rebel forces took hostage 500 UN peacekeepers which halted the peace process and prompted the military involvement of the United Kingdom. The British military was also tasked with training the new Sierra Leone Army (SLA). In a battle that took place in Freetown in May 2000, Sankoh was captured by British and government forces. The RUF continued its attacks under General Issa Sesay (Britannica).

In August 2000, the UN Security Council passed a resolution which mandated the creation of the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL) tasked with the trials of people who violated international humanitarian law during the conflict (The Advocates for Human Rights). During 1999-2000, the UN strengthened its peacekeeping mission in Sierra Leone and the Security Council openly denounced and sanctioned Liberian support for the RUF.

## Major Parties Involved and Their Views

**Revolutionary United Front (RUF):** The RUF was established in the late 1980s by Foday Sankoh, Abu Kanu, and Rashid Mansaray. It maintained close ties with Liberia and Charles Taylor, who eventually helped them organise the first attack in 1991. Its initial political agenda was to overthrow the oppressive one-state APC government and gain control over the diamond mining industry (Ducasse-Rogier). However, instead of freeing Sierra Leone from the APC regime, they started to attack, rape, and loot civilians. They were mainly composed of marginalised youth, former illegal diamond miners “San-san boys”, foreign (mainly Liberian) fighters, and other people forcibly converted to the cause. Even after the fall of the APC, they started to fight against the government and attack civilians without a solid political agenda.

**Republic of Sierra Leone Military Force (RSLMF) (later on the Sierra Leonean Army (SLA)):** The official military force of the state, which was weakened during Siaka Stevens’ reign, was composed of only about 3000 personnel. Most of the soldiers were sobels and took part in illegal mining activities. It was mostly inefficient in fighting against the RUF and staged two military coups (1992, 1997) during the war. It was disbanded in 1998 and later re-established as the SLA in 1999.

**Civil Defense Forces (CDF):** The CDF is composed of regional fighters and local defense groups, mainly kamajors. It is the only armed group that was popular among civilians throughout the course of the war. It grew especially close with the Kabbah government elected in 1996 and acted as some sort of an army for the government considering that Sierra Leone’s army was very weak during 1996-1998. It received military training from EO and is one of the few forces that was able to successfully push back RUF. However, it is also acknowledged that kamajors also committed human rights violations against civilians during the war.

**Executive Outcomes (EO):** EO is a private South-African security company which intervened against RUF in 1995 after being contracted by the NPRC. It fought alongside the CDF against the rebels until its departure from Sierra Leone in 1997 following the Lome agreement.

**ECOMOG:** ECOMOG was initially deployed in Sierra Leone to oversee ECOWAS and UN sanctions against the military junta. They fought against the AFRC/RUF coalition. It was mainly composed of Nigerian soldiers. ECOMOG left Sierra Leone in May 2000 to make place for UNAMSIL, the UN mission to replace ECOMOG:

**Liberia:** Liberia has been a center for diamond and arms trade for years and has fuelled the conflict in Sierra Leone in order to benefit from the illegal diamond and arms trade. A group of Liberian rebels known as the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), led by Charles Taylor also played a major role in the attacks organised by the RUF and in providing weapons to the RUF. The conflict and turmoil in Sierra Leone continued to benefit Liberia and the NPFL. Liberia remained one of the main supporters of the RUF.

**United Kingdom:** The United Kingdom executed military intervention in Sierra Leone after the hostage incident of May 2000. They fought against the RUF alongside government troops and also provided military training to the Sierra Leone army.

## Timeline of Events

<b>1977</b>	Sierra Leone is declared a one party state ruled by the APC.
<b>23 March 1991</b>	The first attack by the RUF was launched.
<b>1992</b>	RUF took control over the Kono region, one of the main regions for diamond mining.
<b>29 April 1992</b>	National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) led by Valentine Strasser took control of the government after a military coup.
<b>1993-1994</b>	CDF is beginning to form as a disorganised local initiative against RUF.
<b>April 1995</b>	EO is contacted by the NPRC to fight against RUF.
<b>January 1996</b>	Valentine Strasser was ousted in an internal coup and General Julius Maada Bio took control.
<b>29 March 1996</b>	SLPP and Ahmed Tejan Kabbah won the elections and took over.
<b>30 November 1996</b>	Abidjan Peace Agreement signed.
<b>January 1997</b>	EO left Sierra Leone.
<b>25 May 1997</b>	AFRC and the RUF formed a junta after a military coup.
<b>October 1997</b>	The UN Security Council established an arms embargo on Sierra Leone.

<b>23 November 1997</b>	The Conakry Peace Agreement was signed.
<b>10 March 1998</b>	Kabbah's government was reinstated and the army was disbanded shortly after.
<b>July 1998</b>	Peacekeeping mission UNOMSIL was deployed by the UN which later developed into UNAMSIL.
<b>6 January 1999</b>	Rebel forces took control of Freetown.
<b>May 1999</b>	The Sierra Leone Army was established.
<b>7 July 1999</b>	The Lome Peace Agreement was signed.
<b>August 2000</b>	SCSL was created by the Sierra Leonean government in cooperation with the UN.

## UN Involvement

UN involvement in the region started with the arms embargo to Sierra Leone established by the UN Security Council in October 1997. The UN put sanctions and an arms embargo on Liberia, the main actor of the arms and diamond trade. However, this embargo was not successful in putting an end to the illegal arms trade in the area. Later on, a small UN mission UNOMSIL was deployed to the area but it was insufficient in preventing the conflict. After the Lome agreement, UNOMSIL was transformed to a more proper peacekeeping mission, UNAMSIL. However, UNAMSIL was understaffed, the deployments were delayed, and it was ill-equipped. UNAMSIL also wasn't very sufficient in implementing peace in the area. After the May 2000 hostage crisis, the UN strengthened the peacekeeping mission and employed more peacekeepers in the area. In August 2000, Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL) was created jointly by the UN and Sierra Leonean government for the trials of people who have committed international humanitarian law violations during the conflict.

## Relevant UN Documents

United Nations Security Council resolution on the Situation in Sierra Leone (8 October 1997, S/RES/1132)

Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation in Sierra Leone (21 October 1997, S/1997/811)



1st report on the UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) (6 December 1999, S/1999/1223)

United Nations Security Council resolution on the Situation in Sierra Leone (7 February 2000, S/RES/1289)

Fifth report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (31 July 2000, S/2000/751)

United Nations Security Council resolution on the Situation in Sierra Leone and UNAMSIL (4 August 2000, S/RES/1313)

Letter dated 9 August 2000 from the Permanent Representative of Sierra Leone to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (10 August 2000, S/2000/786)

United Nations Security Council resolution on the Situation in Sierra Leone (14 August 2000, S/RES/1315)

Letter dated 13 September 2000 from the Chairman of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1132 (1997) concerning Sierra Leone addressed to the President of the Security Council (13 September 2000, S/2000/861)

United Nations Security Council resolution on the extension of UNAMSIL in Sierra Leone (22 December 2000, S/RES/1334)

## Treaties and Events

**Abidjan Peace Agreement (30 November, 1996):** The Abidjan Peace Agreement was the first peace agreement signed by RUF leader Sankoh and president Kabbah. The terms of the agreement included the disarmament of RUF rebels, withdrawal of foreign troops, immediate end to violent conflict, a National Commission for the Consolidation of Peace and a Neutral Monitoring Group to be established (Peace Accords Matrix). However, Sankoh's refusal to honour the terms of the agreement, and Kabbah's exile following the 1997 military coup led to the agreement not being carried out.

**Conakry Peace Plan (23 November 1997):** The Conakry Peace Plan called for "an immediate cessation of hostilities and the reinstatement of the legitimate government of President Tejan Kabbah within a period of six months" (UN Peacemaker). This was the 6-month peace plan of ECOWAS for Sierra Leone to be implemented between 23 October 1997 - 22 April 1998. However, ECOWAS's attack against the junta in February 1998 led to the peace agreement not being carried out and armed conflict continuing.

**Lome Peace Agreement (7 July 1999):** The Lome Peace Agreement was signed between RUF leader Sankoh and president Kabbah. The terms of the agreement included ending armed conflict,



reestablishing the Commission for the Consolidation of Peace, and disarmament of the RUF. It also granted amnesty to the RUF and allowed the RUF to become a political party. It called for UNAMSIL and ECOMOG to form a neutral peacekeeping force, and all private forces to leave the country (Peace Accords Matrix). However, the RUF frequently violated the terms of the agreement and later attacked UN peacekeepers in the May 2000 hostage crisis; therefore, the Lome Peace Agreement could not be implemented and armed conflict resurged.

## Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

The first attempts to solve the issue started with the intervention of third party forces such as ECOMOG and EO. Even though these forces were successful at stabilising the situation to certain extent and some of the important military victories during the course of the war (such as pushing back RUF from Freetown), they were not enough in terms of supplies and numbers. With a very weak and at some point inexistent national army, these third party forces along with CDF could only balance the situation. The RUF was forcibly recruiting child soldiers and marginalised youth, resulting in an unpredictable and immense force. The absence of an overpowering military force led to the war being drawn out for over a decade.

There were three major peace agreements/plans signed during the war: Abidjan, Conakry, and Lome. Even though these agreements were carefully planned and well-written, they were ineffective in practice as one or more of the parties decided not to honour the terms of the agreement. Without a body/organisation/council that could hold the parties accountable, these agreements were simply not carried out. Rules-based international order is essentially based on the mutual agreement and trust between parties to respect international organisations and agreements. With the RUF having the upper-hand for the most part and a lack of mutual respect, the implementation of these agreements couldn't be ensured. UNOMSIL and UNAMSIL along with some other small forces sent to regulate the implementation of these agreements, these interventions couldn't gain the upper-hand in conflict.

Even though an arms embargo was put on Liberia, the biggest arms provider in the region, by the UN Security Council, this embargo was not sufficient in ending the illegal arms trade or the use of blood diamonds for arms trade across the Liberia-Sierra Leone border.

## Possible Solutions

Illicit trade of diamonds between Liberia and Sierra Leone was one of the main causes that fueled and prolonged the war. Therefore, a possible solution could be the implementation of a regulation system regarding diamond trade which requires Member States to certify the Certificate of Origin of traded diamonds. The embargo and sanctions on Liberia could be tightened and neutral border control forces

could be deployed to the Liberia-Sierra Leone border to oversee border traffic and arms trade. Regulating the use of blood diamonds to fuel armed conflict would help solve not just the situation in Sierra Leone, but the conflicts in a lot of diamond-rich African countries. International military intervention in the area could be increased to gain the upper-hand in armed conflict. As long as the RUF has the upper-hand, any ceasefire that's signed will most probably end in the same way as Abidjan or Lome agreements. Committees and councils to oversee the economic advancement, the eradication of government corruption, and the fortification of state organisations could also be established so that such a conflict is not repeated. All parties and individuals who committed war crimes and violations of the international humanitarian law should be tried accordingly and held accountable. Measures to improve education facilities and employment opportunities could also be taken to redirect and reintegrate the marginalised youth (who made up most of the RUF) to society.

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