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SIERRA LEONE: CIVILIANS CONTINUE TO BE MUTILATED AND KILLED DESPITE
THE PEACE ACCORD

Less than a week after a peace agreement was signed by the Government of Sierra Leone and the armed opposition Revolutionary United Front (RUF) to end a bloody internal conflict, more than 150 civilians have been brutally mutilated and killed in the north of the country, Amnesty International said today.

“There should be an immediate monitoring of human rights in Sierra Leone as only then there may be some hope of bringing such atrocities to an end,” the organization said.

Amnesty International is calling for a human rights verification commission, with the support and participation of the international community, to be immediately established. It should include international human rights observers with the expertise and credibility necessary to monitor human rights effectively while the peace agreement is being implemented.

Failure to do this could seriously undermine the efforts which have been made during 1996 to bring peace and an end to human rights violations in Sierra Leone and which resulted in the signing of a peace accord on 30 November.

Days after the peace accord was signed, the villages of Kubehuna and Magbenka, in Tonkolili District, Northern Province, were attacked by armed men. The villagers, forced to flee their villages because of the conflict, had begun to return to their homes. According to eye-witnesses, the attackers entered the villages and began firing at civilians or attacking them with machetes. Some villagers -- mostly women and children -- died after being forced to enter a house which was then set alight. Other victims had arms and legs cut off. As in previous similar killings, the identity of the perpetrators of the atrocities in Kubehuna and Magbenka was unclear: survivors were unable to say whether it was government soldiers or rebel forces who attacked them.

This latest atrocity is consistent with the torture, ill-treatment and killings of unarmed civilians which have characterized the conflict in Sierra Leone since it began in 1991, but particularly since 1994 when it developed into a campaign of violence directed against civilians. The identity and motives of those carrying out attacks on civilians became increasingly difficult to establish.

On 30 November the Sierra Leone Government and the RUF signed a peace agreement in Côte d'Ivoire. The agreement called for the immediate cessation of hostilities, the demobilization and disarmament of the RUF and its integration into the national army. A neutral monitoring group, with the participation of the international community, is to be established to monitor breaches of the cease-fire provided by the peace agreement.

The latest atrocity in Tonkolili District emphasizes the urgent need for monitoring of the cease-fire to be accompanied by a human rights verification commission to monitor adherence to

the human rights standards referred to in the peace agreement, including those guaranteeing right to life and the right not to be tortured and ill-treated.

In September 1996 Amnesty International published a report, *Sierra Leone: Towards a future founded on human rights*, which made concrete recommendations to the Government of Sierra Leone, to the RUF and to the international community to build on commitments to respect human rights. As well as effective monitoring of human rights, it called for effective control to be exerted over both government soldiers and RUF forces.

Amnesty International also stressed the importance of clarifying the truth about human rights abuses -- by both government soldiers and rebel forces -- during the conflict. True reconciliation cannot be achieved if the right of victims and their families to truth and justice are ignored.

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