

26 May 2000  
AFR 51/026/2000

**Sierra Leone: The Human Rights Agenda. Statement by Pierre Sane in Freetown**

*Statement for Pierre Sane - Freetown - May 26, 2000*

*Sierra Leone: The Human Rights  
Agenda*

*Human rights must be at the heart of international concern if this crisis is to be resolved. In two days of meetings in Freetown with President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, government officials, representatives of the United Nations, foreign officials, and members of the NGO community, I have been able to outline the human rights agenda of Amnesty International in Sierra Leone. It is an agenda based on extensive monitoring of human rights in the country over many years, including a visit in March by researcher Tessa Kordeczka who is here with me today.*

*Sierra Leone has faced the most appalling atrocities over many years. Only by concerted and effective action at every level -- national*

*and international -- can the human rights crisis in Sierra Leone be brought to an end.*

*With the representatives of UNAMSIL, including the Force Commander, I emphasized the need, outlined in our letter last week to the United Nations Security Council, for the peace-keeping operation to have a wider mandate. Peace-keepers must actively protect civilians at all times, not just those "under imminent threat of physical violence" which is currently their mandate. UNAMSIL forces must have the necessary training and logistical support to carry out this mandate throughout the country.*

*Human rights abuses in Sierra Leone will not end until there is an end to impunity. Those who are guilty of human rights abuses must be brought to justice. Our opposition to the amnesty in the Lomé agreement of July 1999 is well known. This agreement provides no justice, no accountability. The Revolutionary United Front and its leader Foday Sankoh and others have failed to comply with the most fundamental*

provisions of the peace agreement which included respect for international human rights and humanitarian law. Deliberate and arbitrary killings, mutilations, rape and abductions have continued since the signing of the peace agreement. Twenty-two people have so far died after rebel forces opened fire on civilians demonstrating outside Foday Sankoh's house on 8 May 2000. Two days ago, two journalists were killed in a rebel ambush at Rogberi Junction. UN peace-keepers still held captive are reported to have been ill-treated by rebels.

With the current crisis there are now several different military groups fighting in Sierra Leone. It is also expected that other Western African states will send 3,000 of their soldiers to Sierra Leone. Amnesty International is calling on all those intervening in Sierra Leone to have a clear mandate which should clearly and specifically include the protection of civilians. All these troops must respect international human rights and humanitarian law at all times and must receive special instructions to protect civilians.

*The international community has a vital role to play in supporting the Sierra Leone government in the investigation of these continuing human rights abuses. The Sierra Leone government needs assistance to train the police and to establish a competent, impartial and independent judiciary.*

*An international commission of inquiry to investigate human rights abuses that occurred during the internal conflict must also be established. This may lead to the creation of an international criminal tribunal or another effective mechanism.*

*Any trials in Sierra Leone must conform to international fair trial standards and not impose the death penalty. Under the principle of universal jurisdiction perpetrators of certain gross human rights abuses in Sierra Leone could be extradited to another state if these conditions cannot be guaranteed.*

*I have raised the issue of impunity with the President, the Minister of Justice and Attorney-General and other government officials, and we*

shall continue to campaign forcefully to end impunity finally in Sierra Leone.

Restricting military assistance to rebel forces is central to efforts to stop human rights abuses. Amnesty International is calling on all governments to enforce the existing UN Security Council arms embargo to prevent military assistance from reaching rebel forces. Amnesty International is today demanding an end to the international trade in diamonds from rebel-held areas of Sierra Leone. We are also calling on the Security Council to investigate the origins of diamonds exported from Liberia, Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire to ensure that these do not originate from rebel-held areas within Sierra Leone. The arms and ammunition that have been used to kill and mutilate civilians and the funds from the trade in diamonds used to buy these arms and ammunitions by rebel forces must be cut off.

One result of the crisis is that thousands of people are being forced to leave their homes. In Freetown alone there are over 35,000 additional

internally displaced people since the beginning of May. Others have fled to Guinea to join more than 450,000 refugees already in that country.

All states must grant access to those fleeing human rights abuses in Sierra Leone and much more should be done by the international community to ensure protection, shelter, food and medical care for these refugees in Guinea and elsewhere.

Finally, children are some of the most tragic victims of the conflict in Sierra Leone. They have been recruited by both the rebel forces, the Civil Defence Forces (CDF) and other armed forces supporting the Sierra Leone government. Many of the rebel fighters under the age of 18 have been abducted. The recently-renewed hostilities have resulted in the use of child combatants by rebel forces as well as the Sierra Leonean army, the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council and the CDF.

Amnesty International condemns the recruitment or use of children for military purposes. This is a war crime and those responsible for recruiting and using child soldiers must be brought to justice. Every

effort must be made by the United Nations and non-governmental organizations, as soon as the security situation allows, to secure the release of abducted children held in areas under the control of rebel forces. The disarmament and demobilization of children combatants must be given a high priority. The needs of the children who have been so adversely affected by the conflict in Sierra Leone must be met. In our meetings with the President, he once again stressed the government's commitment to ending the recruitment of children under 18 years. We welcome that commitment and urge that effective measures are taken to ensure that it is enforced especially at this time when hostilities have resumed.

I have also had the opportunity to meet many of the human rights non-government organizations here in Freetown and I want to express Amnesty International's thanks for their tireless efforts to promote the respect and protection of human rights often under the most difficult of

*circumstances. Amnesty International could not do its work without them and without their commitment and courage.*

\*\*\*\*\*

*To arrange interviews please contact Amnesty International Sierra Leone in Freetown on + 232 22 22 73 54 or the Press Office in London on +44 20 7354 3689 or on international mobile +44 7778 472 119.*



