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Voices of victims of human rights abuses from Sierra Leone (Freetown) -- Amnesty International, which has a delegation in Freetown compiling testimonies of continuing human rights abuses, today called for urgent steps to protect the civilian population from further atrocities.

"All forces party to the conflict, both rebel forces and government-allied forces, must respect international human rights and humanitarian law and immediately end abuses against civilians," Amnesty International said.

The following testimonies obtained by Amnesty International's delegates in recent days from some of the tens of thousands of people who have fled from areas of fighting in Northern Province to internally displaced people's camps in and near Freetown describe continuing deliberate and arbitrary killings, rape and mutilation.

Deliberate and arbitrary killings

"Ten people were captured by the rebels and they asked us to form a queue. My brother was removed from the queue and they killed him with a rifle and they cut his head with a knife. After this, they killed his pregnant wife. There was an argument among the rebels about the sex of the baby she was bearing, so they decided to open her stomach to see the baby."

A man from Lunsar describing an attack by RUF forces on Lunsar on 31 May 2000.

“The RUF knocked at our door at night and asked for money and food. They threatened to kill us if we refused. A shot was fired and my sister Kadiatu, 18 years old, and who was eight months' pregnant, was hit and died.”

A woman whose home in Makeni was attacked by rebel forces on the night of 6 June 2000.

“We were pulling out of Lunsar when the helicopter was dropping leaflets. On our way, my brother, Alex, 25 years old, was captured by the RUF. My neighbours later told me that he was taken to the lorry park at Lunsar where he was executed. His body was left unburied for eight days.”

A woman who told how she fled from Lunsar on 28 May 2000.

“My four sons, aged 11, 21, 23 and 25, were building a new hut when the rebels asked them to join them. They refused and the rebels shot and killed them.”

A man from the village of Magbele, attacked by rebel forces on 11 June 2000.

Rape and other forms sexual abuse

“We fled to a village called Makoth; we hid ourselves in the bush together with our children. We were later surrounded by the RUF who grabbed my husband and tied his hands behind his back. They asked him to choose who will die; the choice was between me and him. He asked them to spare my life. They then tied him to a tree and they tried to cut his throat; this was difficult to do with their knife, so they shot him. I'm still breast-feeding but five RUF rebels raped me. I'm still bleeding.”

A woman aged 29 years who fled Makeni on 30 May 2000.

"The RUF rebels dressed in UNAMSIL uniforms entered our house. I was very happy that we had been liberated, not knowing that they were rebels. They asked me to have intercourse with them; when I refused they hit me on my sides with their guns (delete I had to give in.) My children managed to escape. Three of them raped me; the fourth one ordered them to stop what they were doing. After the rape, they looted my house. I escaped naked looking for a hiding place."

A woman aged 45 years who was attacked by the RUF at her home in Lunsar.

"It was the last Friday in May when we were trying to escape. My sister was running with her baby when the RUF caught us. The baby was placed elsewhere. Then the RUF raped my sister. My husband wanted to take the baby but he was caught and mercilessly beaten, and he collapsed. I managed to take the baby. My husband was later killed. My sister died later the same day."

A woman aged 19 years from Magburaka who was attacked on 26 May 2000.

Amputation

"Mamdou, a 55-year-old trader who sells medicine and tobacco had both hands amputated by the rebels. Usman, a 40-year-old farmer, had his left hand amputated. Mohamed, a farmer in his late twenties, had the fingers of his right hand amputated. Lamin, a 50-year-old farmer, had both hands amputated."

Two men who witnessed amputations by RUF forces in Lunsar on 31 May 2000.

"The government of Sierra Leone and the international community must respond urgently to the continuing human rights crisis in Sierra Leone." Amnesty International said. "United Nations peace-keeping

troops in Sierra Leone must make every effort to fulfil their mandate to protect civilians."

"Continuing abuses further highlight the need for an effective mechanism to bring the perpetrators of human rights abuses to justice.

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