

**EXTERNAL (for general distribution)**

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**UA 08/95      Death Penalty**

**12 January 1995**

**SIERRA LEONE      Lieutenant-Colonel Chornor M. Deen**

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A senior military officer has been sentenced to death by a court-martial in the capital, Freetown.

Lieutenant-Colonel Chornor Deen, aged 55, was formerly commander of the 2nd Battalion of the Republic of Sierra Leone Military Force (RSLMF) based at Teko Barracks in Makeni, Bombali District, in the Northern Province. He was dismissed in April 1994 together with twelve other senior military officers, including the Chief of Staff of the RSLMF. He was arrested in September 1994 and brought before a court-martial in November charged with collaborating with rebel forces which have been fighting government troops since 1991. He had apparently been overheard by other soldiers talking on a military radio. He was convicted on 11 January 1995 on five counts of aiding and communicating with rebel forces and sentenced to death by firing squad.

Defendants before courts martial have no right of appeal to a higher court but a petition for clemency may be submitted to a Committee of Mercy. The death sentence has to be confirmed by the Head of State, Captain Valentine Strasser, Chairman of the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC).

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Armed conflict between government forces and an armed political group, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), began in 1991 when the RUF invaded from neighbouring Liberia. Fighting continued after the NPRC came to power following a coup in April 1992. The conflict has been characterised by gross human rights abuses by both sides, including the torture and killings of captured opponents and civilians.

Although by the end of 1993 government troops had regained control of areas in the south and east previously held by RUF forces, fighting continued and worsened during 1994. Attacks spread to the centre and north of the country, previously unaffected by fighting, and were aimed largely at the civilian population, resulting in hundreds of dead and injured and causing devastation to towns and villages throughout the country; thousands of people fled their homes, seeking refuge in displaced people's camps or neighbouring countries. Attacks were marked by particular brutality: rape and mutilation were common.

During 1994 the identity and motives of those carrying out attacks became increasingly difficult to define. Many of the attacks on both civilians and government troops which were officially attributed to rebel forces of the RUF were in fact carried out by disaffected soldiers, some deserters but others still serving in the army. Some attacks appeared to be for economic gain - to loot property and illegally exploit minerals, especially diamonds - but it also appeared that there was fighting between factions within the army loyal to the NPRC and those opposed to it.

The NPRC admitted indiscipline within the army, that large numbers of soldiers were unaccounted for in areas where attacks occurred and that some were disloyal. Twelve soldiers were executed on 11 and 12 November 1994 after being convicted of charges including collaborating with rebels, armed robbery, robbery with violence and murder. Since the NPRC came to power in 1992, at least 26, but possibly more, soldiers have been sentenced to death by courts-martial.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters either in English or in your own language:**

- expressing concern that Lieutenant-Colonel Chernor Deen was sentenced to death by a court-martial on 11 January 1995;
- explaining that Amnesty International does not condone or question the gravity of the offences reported to have been committed and is concerned about the serious human rights violations, including killings of unarmed civilians, which have occurred during the conflict in Sierra Leone;
- pointing out, however, that Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases as a violation of the right to life and the right not to be subjected to cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment;
- urging that this and all other death sentences be commuted and that no executions take place.

**APPEALS TO:**

Captain Valentine E.M. Strasser  
Chairman, Supreme Council of State  
National Provisional Ruling Council  
State House

Independence Avenue

Freetown, Sierra Leone

**Telegrams: Captain Strasser, NPRC, Freetown, Sierra Leone**

**Telexes: 3230**

**Salutation: Dear Captain Strasser**

Captain Julius Maada Bio  
Deputy Chairman and  
Chief Secretary of State  
National Provisional Ruling Council  
State House

Independence Avenue

Freetown, Sierra Leone

**Telegrams: Captain Maada Bio, NPRC, Freetown, Sierra Leone**

**Telexes: 3230**

**Salutation: Dear Captain Maada Bio**

Mr Claude V. Campbell  
Attorney General and Secretary of State for Justice  
Department of Justice and Office of the Attorney General  
Guma Building  
Lamina Sankoh Street  
Freetown, Sierra Leone

**Telegrams: Attorney General Campbell, Justice Department,  
Freetown, Sierra Leone**

**Salutation: Dear Mr Campbell**

**COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:**

Captain Sahr Tom Nyuma  
Under-Secretary of State for Defence  
Department of Defence  
Tower Hill  
Freetown, Sierra Leone

Colonel Kellie Conteh  
Chief of Staff

Republic of Sierra Leone Military Force (RSLMF)  
New Office  
Wilkinson Road  
Freetown, Sierra Leone

and to the editors of following newspapers:

The New Citizen, 5 Hannah Benka-Coker Street, Brookfields,  
Freetown, Sierra Leone

Daily Mail, 29-31 Rawdon Street, PO Box 53, Freetown, Sierra  
Leone

and to diplomatic representatives of Sierra Leone accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat,  
or your section office, if sending appeals after 23 February 1995.