

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AFR 51/02/98

UA 26/98

Torture or ill-treatment/  
Probable prisoners of conscience

27 January 1998

SIERRA LEONE Brima S. Massaquoi, chairman of Kenema town council  
Brima Kpaka, businessman  
Swaray Kokowa, retired local government officer  
Dr Momoh, medical doctor  
Dr Stevens, medical doctor  
a man known as "Potor Potor"  
and several others

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At least 10, but possibly many more, prominent community members from the town of Kenema in Sierra Leone's Eastern Province have been arrested in the last two weeks. Amnesty International is seriously concerned for their safety. Those arrested are believed to be suspected of supporting a civil defence force composed of local hunters, known as the *kamajors*, who support the government of President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, ousted in a military coup in May 1997. The *kamajors* are fighting against soldiers who have joined forces with members of the former armed opposition Revolutionary United Front (RUF).

Among those reported to have been arrested are Brima S. Massaquoi, chairman of Kenema town council, Brima Kpaka, a businessman, Swaray Kokowa, a retired local government officer, Dr Momoh and Dr Stevens, both medical doctors, and another man known by the nickname "Potor Potor". They are reported to be held at the military brigade headquarters in Kenema. It is difficult to assess the exact number of those held; while some of those arrested are believed to have subsequently been released, further arrests have taken place.

According to reports, some of those detained have been tortured and ill-treated. One detainee is reported to have had his ears cut off.

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Since the military coup on 25 May 1997, soldiers, together with members of the RUF who have joined forces with them, have repeatedly committed serious human rights violations. Hundreds of people suspected of opposing the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), which came to power following the coup, have been arbitrarily arrested and detained; many have been tortured and ill-treated. Some of those suspected of opposing the AFRC have been extrajudicially executed. Victims of human rights violations have included people associated with the ousted government, journalists, students and human rights activists.

In October 1997 the AFRC agreed to return power to President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah by 22 April 1998. However, there have been serious set-backs to the implementation of this agreement. Fighting between soldiers, together with RUF forces, and the *kamajors* has intensified throughout the country, including around Kenema in Eastern Province. The serious human rights abuses, including torture, ill-treatment and deliberate and arbitrary killings of unarmed civilians by both sides, which characterized the internal armed conflict between government forces and the RUF from 1991 to 1996, are once again occurring.

In October 1997 Amnesty International published a report - *Sierra Leone: A disastrous set-back for human rights* - which documented the serious human rights violations which have occurred since the coup, and made specific recommendations to the AFRC for ending these abuses. It also called on the international community, which has condemned the coup and sought to resolve the political

crisis in Sierra Leone, to ensure the protection of fundamental human rights in any decisions and actions it takes.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Because of disruption to communications with Sierra Leone since May 1997, Urgent Action coordinators are asked to organize a limited number of appeals only: up to FIVE per section. A restricted international postal services is operating through neighbouring Guinea, but delays are inevitable. Fax machines operate but sometimes intermittently.

**Please send faxes/express/airmail letters in English or your own language:**

- expressing serious concern about reports of recent arrests of several community members from Kenema, including Brima S. Massaquoi, chairman of Kenema town council, Brima Kpaka, a businessman, Swaray Kokowa, a retired local government officer, Dr Momoh and Dr Stevens, both medical doctors, and another man known by the nickname "Potor Potor";
- requesting details of all those held and clarification of the reasons for their continuing detention;
- calling for their immediate and unconditional release, unless they are to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence;
- expressing serious concern about reports that some of those detained have been tortured or ill-treated while in custody and urging immediate measures to ensure that they are protected from torture and ill-treatment and are humanely treated;
- requesting an immediate investigation into these reports of torture or ill-treatment in order to bring those responsible to justice;
- urging that all those detained be allowed immediate access to a doctor, a lawyer and members of their families.

**APPEALS TO:**

Lieutenant Colonel Johnny Paul Koroma  
 Chairman, Armed Forces Revolutionary Council  
 State House  
 Independence Avenue  
 Freetown, Sierra Leone  
**Fax: + 232 22 24 21 26 or 232 22 22 78 78**  
**Salutation: Dear Lieutenant Colonel Koroma**

Colonel Abdul K. Sesay  
 Secretary General, Armed Forces Revolutionary Council  
 State House  
 Independence Avenue  
 Freetown, Sierra Leone  
**Fax: + 232 22 22 94 73**  
**Salutation: Dear Colonel Sesay**

Mr Allieu Kamara  
 Spokesman, Armed Forces Revolutionary Council  
 State House  
 Independence Avenue  
 Freetown, Sierra Leone  
**Fax: + 232 22 22 88 99**  
**Salutation: Dear Mr Kamara**

Mr Alimamy Paolo Bangura  
 Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs  
 Department of Foreign Affairs

14 Gloucester Street  
Freetown, Sierra Leone

**Fax: + 232 22 22 56 15**

**Salutation: Dear Mr Bangura**

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat,  
or your section office, if sending appeals after 10 March 1998.