

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AFR 51/09/95

27 October 1995

Further information on UA 231/95 (AFR 51/08/95, 4 October 1995) - Fear of death sentences and executions

SIERRA LEONE Lieutenant James CONTEH
Captain Abu Bakarr KAMARA
Major Matthew KAMARA
Captain Ali Badara KOROMA
Lieutenant Sahr PANDA
Lieutenant Patrick SAMURA
Lieutenant Ina SANU
and also: Lieutenant Kanja SANDY

An eighth soldier has been arrested in connection with an alleged coup attempt. Lieutenant Kanja Sandy was reported to have been arrested in neighbouring Guinea on 20 October 1995; he had earlier been declared wanted by the authorities.

The seven other soldiers were arrested either during the night of 2 October 1995 or the following day. They are apparently suspected of planning a coup to overthrow the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC), headed by Captain Valentine E.M. Strasser.

Although the government has announced that they are to be shortly brought before a court-martial, they are not known to have yet been formally charged. They are expected to be charged with treason and, if convicted, they could face the death penalty.

They are being held in the Central Prison, Pademba Road, in the capital, Freetown. According to reports, since their arrest they have been denied visits from their families and it is not clear that they have been allowed access to lawyers.

Recent trials before courts-martial in Freetown have allowed no right of appeal against conviction or sentence to a higher court. Twelve soldiers were executed on 11 and 12 November 1994 after being convicted of charges which included collaborating with rebel forces, armed robbery and murder. On 11 January 1995 a senior military officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Chernor Deen, was sentenced to death after being convicted of aiding and communicating with rebel forces; his sentence has not been carried out. Three border guards were sentenced to death on 26 October 1995 after being convicted by a court-martial of murder, conspiracy and robbery.

In late December 1992, 26 people - nine civilians and 17 military officers - were executed and at least three others extrajudicially executed. The NPRC claimed that the 26 had been convicted of treason by a Special Military Tribunal and their sentences confirmed by the NPRC. However, there was no evidence that a trial actually took place.

FURTHER RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/express/airmail letters in English or in your own language:

- repeating your concern that death sentences may be passed by a military court and carried out hastily on eight military officers charged with treason;

- expressing concern about reports that since their arrest they have been denied visits from their families and urging that they be allowed regular access to both members of their families and doctors;
- requesting assurances that they are allowed full access to lawyers of their choice in order to properly prepare their defence;
- reiterating concern that their trial may not conform to international standards, in particular that they may not have the right to appeal to a higher court against their conviction and sentence;
- urging that any death sentences passed be commuted.

APPEALS TO:

Captain Valentine E.M. Strasser
Chairman
National Provisional Ruling Council
State House
Independence Avenue
Freetown, Sierra Leone

Telegrams: Captain Strasser, NPRC, Freetown, Sierra Leone

Telexes: 3230

Salutation: Dear Captain Strasser

Brigadier Julius Maada Bio
Deputy Chairman
National Provisional Ruling Council
State House
Independence Avenue
Freetown, Sierra Leone

Telegrams: Brigadier Maada Bio, NPRC, Freetown, Sierra Leone

Telexes: 3230

Salutation: Dear Brigadier 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 TO:

Brigadier (ret'd) J.O.Y. Turay
Chief of Staff
Republic of Sierra Leone Military Force (RSLMF)
RSLMF Headquarters
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 6 December 1995.