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MEDIA ADVISORY

SIERRA LEONE

Publication of a new document addressed to the UN special conference

The United Nations special conference on Sierra Leone: the protection of human rights must be a priority for the international community (AI Index: AFR 51/14/98)

On 30 July 1998 the United Nations Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, convenes a special conference in New York to galvanize the international community's response to the political, humanitarian and human rights situation in Sierra Leone.

In a four-page report addressed to the conference, Amnesty International makes specific recommendations aimed at ending the gross human rights abuses being committed by the ousted Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), and at preventing further abuses and laying solid foundations for the respect and protection of human rights in the future.

In the AFRC and RUF's systematic campaign of killing, rape and mutilation, which they have called "*Operation no living thing*", several thousand unarmed civilians, many of them women and children, have been killed. Many hundreds of others have suffered mutilation and crude amputations of their arms, legs, lips or ears, laceration and gunshot wounds. Girls and women have been raped and forced into sexual slavery.

Children have been particular victims of the violence and brutality in Sierra Leone and have not escaped killing, mutilation and maiming. Many thousands of children have been and continue to be abducted by AFRC and RUF forces and forced to fight.

Amnesty International strongly endorses the joint statement in June 1998 by the heads of five UN agencies, shortly after the conference on the creation of a permanent international criminal court opened in Rome, that the atrocities in Sierra Leone are a brutal reminder of the urgent need for such a court to bring to trial those responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The scale of human rights abuses by the AFRC and RUF in Sierra Leone demands a forceful response from the international community. In particular:

- the UN Observer Mission in Sierra Leone (UNOMSIL) must be given the necessary resources and political support to effectively monitor violations of international humanitarian and human rights law and to make its findings public;
- the international community should assist in creating effective institutions in Sierra Leone for the protection and respect for human rights;
- particular attention should be given to the needs of children affected by the conflict in Sierra Leone, as called for by the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict;

- the international community should assist in establishing accountability for the atrocities in order to combat impunity and contribute to lasting peace in Sierra Leone.

For a copy of the document, or to arrange an interview, please contact Tessa Kordeczka on 0171 413 56 14

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