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Amnesty International receives shocking information about mounting atrocities in Sierra Leone

Amnesty International has just received horrifying information that hundreds of unarmed civilians in Sierra Leone are being brutally killed and mutilated by forces of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) and the armed opposition Revolutionary United Front (RUF) -- which were forced from power by West African troops in mid-February.

“Victims have reported women and children being rounded up, locked into a house which was then set alight. Women have been raped and have suffered other forms of sexual assault. Men who refused to rape members of their own family were reported to have had their arms hacked off,” Amnesty International said today.

In the last few days another 13 victims from Kono District in the east of the country have been admitted to Connaught Hospital in the centre of the capital, Freetown. The victims include a 60-year-old woman whose arm had been deliberately amputated, and three men who had both arms cut off and others who had one arm cut off.

These victims joined more than a hundred civilians -- housewives, traders, farmers, miners -- already being treated for crude amputations, bullet and machete wounds in Connaught Hospital by a *Médecins Sans Frontières* surgical team. They have arrived since early April as retreating AFRC and RUF forces in Kono District have killed, tortured and raped. Some people have also had ears cut off

It had taken some of the victims days, if not weeks, to reach medical assistance. One man who had both arms cut off walked from village to village until he was able to find a vehicle to bring him to Freetown. Many others -- possibly hundreds -- have fled into the bush.

“There is an urgent need to protect civilians from these atrocities,” the organization said. “The international community should urgently establish a human rights presence in Sierra Leone which would be able to independently monitor human rights violations and make its findings and recommendations public.”

All steps should be taken to minimise the risk to civilians and to speedily evacuate to safety victims of mutilation and other forms of torture.

Villages between Njaiama-Sewafe and Koidu have been repeatedly attacked by armed men. More recently villages around Alikalia and Yifin in Koinadugu District have been attacked.

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