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A woman receives psychological and medical treatment in a clinic to assist rape victims in Freetown. In January 1999, she was gang-raped by seven rebels in her village in northern Sierra Leone. After raping her, the rebels tied her down and placed burning charcoal on her body. (c) 1999 Corinne Dufka/Human Rights Watch

I was captured together with my husband, my three young children and other civilians as we were fleeing from the RUF when they entered Jaiweii. Two rebels asked to have sex with me but when I refused, they beat me with the butt of their guns. My legs were bruised and I lost my three front teeth. Then the two rebels raped me in front of my children and other civilians. Many other women were raped in public places. I also heard of a woman from Kalu village near Jaiweii being raped only one week after having given birth. The RUF stayed in Jaiweii village for four months and I was raped by three other wicked rebels throughout this period.

-Testimony to Human Rights Watch

“WE’LL KILL YOU IF YOU CRY” SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN THE SIERRA LEONE CONFLICT

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SIERRA LEONE

“WE’LL KILL YOU IF YOU CRY” Sexual Violence in the Sierra Leone Conflict

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GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS

AFRC	Armed Forces Revolutionary Council
APC	All People's Congress
CAT	Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhumane or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
CCP	Commission for the Consolidation of Peace
CCSSP	Commonwealth Community Safety and Security Project
CDC	Centers for Disease Control
CDF	Civil Defense Forces
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CMRRD	Commission for the Management of Strategic Resources, National Reconstruction and Development
C. O.	Commanding Officer
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Program
DFID	Department for International Development, United Kingdom
ECOMOG	Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EIDHR	European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights
E.U.	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
ICTR	International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda
ICTY	International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia
IMATT	International Military Advisory and Training Team
IRC	International Rescue Committee
FAWE	Forum for African Women Educationalists
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
NPFL	National Patriotic Front of Liberia
OAU	Organization of African Unity
OFR	Operation Focus Relief
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
PHR	Physicians for Human Rights
RUF	Revolutionary United Front
SBU	Small Boys Unit
SCSL	Special Court for Sierra Leone
SLA	Sierra Leone Army
SLP	Sierra Leone Police
SLPP	Sierra Leone People's Party
STD	Sexually Transmitted Disease
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UNAMSIL	United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNOMSIL	United Nations Observer Mission in Sierra Leone
USAID	United States Agency for International Development (USAID)
VRF	Vasico-rectal Fistula
VVF	Vasico-vaginal Fistula
WHO	World Health Organization

DEFINITION OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE, RAPE AND SEXUAL SLAVERY

In this report:

Sexual violence is an overarching term used to describe “[a]ny violence, physical or psychological, carried out through sexual means or by targeting sexuality.”¹ Sexual violence includes rape and attempted rape, and such acts as forcing a person to strip naked in public, forcing two victims to perform sexual acts on one another or harm one another in a sexual manner, mutilating a person’s genitals or a woman’s breasts, and sexual slavery.

Rape as defined in the appeals chamber judgment of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in the 2002 *Foca* case is “[t]he sexual penetration, however slight: (a) of the vagina or anus of the victim by the penis of the perpetrator or any other object used by the perpetrator; or (b) [of] the mouth of the victim by the penis of the perpetrator; where such sexual penetration occurs without the consent of the victim. Consent for this purpose must be consent given voluntarily, as a result of the victim’s free will, assessed in the context of the surrounding circumstances. The *mens rea* is the intention to effect this sexual penetration, and the knowledge that it occurs without the consent of the victim.”² The appeals chamber rejected the “resistance” requirement argued by the appellants as it is justified neither in law or fact, and stated that the use of force in itself is not a necessary element of rape. The coercive circumstances present in the *Foca* rapes, which were committed in circumstances similar to the crimes of sexual violence perpetrated in Sierra Leone, made the victims’ consent to the sexual acts impossible. The use or threat of force often removes any requirement that a victim show resistance and most jurisdictions have discarded the idea that a rape victim must resist under all circumstances as impractical, if not absurd. This definition also underscores that rape is an attack on the physical integrity of a woman and not an attack against her honor or that of her family or community.

Rape was defined in the judgment of the *Akayesu* case at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) as “[t]he physical invasion of a sexual nature, committed on a person under circumstances which are coercive” and is not limited to the insertion of a penis into a victim’s vagina or anus or the insertion of a penis in the mouth of the victim.³ This definition, however, has been criticized for being too broad and has not been included in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Sexual slavery, defined by the 1926 Slavery Convention and the 1953 Protocol amending the same convention, refers to “[t]he status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised, including sexual access through rape or other forms of sexual violence.”⁴ The Statute of the ICC includes the trafficking of women and children in its definition of enslavement.⁵

¹ United Nations, *Contemporary Forms of Slavery: Systematic Rape, Sexual Slavery and Slavery-like Practices during Armed Conflict*, Final Report submitted by Ms. Gay J. McDougall, Special Rapporteur (New York: United Nations, 1998), E/CN.4/Sub. 2/1998/13, pp. 7-8.

² *Prosecutor v. Dragoljub Kunarac, Radomir Kovac and Zoran Vukovic (Foca case)*, Appeals Chamber Judgement, June 12, 2002, IT-96-23 and IT-96-23/1, paras. 127-133.

³ *Prosecutor v. Jean-Paul Akayesu*, Judgement, ICTR-96-4-T, September 2, 1998, para. 688.

⁴ United Nations, *Contemporary Forms of Slavery: Systematic Rape, Sexual Slavery and Slavery-like Practices during Armed Conflict*, p. 9. Sierra Leone ratified the Slavery Convention on March 13, 1962.

⁵ Article 7 (1) (g) lists enslavement as a crime against humanity with the definition given in Article 7 (2) (c). Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, opened for signature July 17, 1998, Article 7, reprinted in 37 I.L.M. 999 (1998). The Rome Statute entered into force on April 11, 2002 and the ICC has the authority to prosecute the most serious international crimes from July 1, 2002.

I. SUMMARY

Throughout the armed conflict in Sierra Leone from 1991 to 2001, thousands of women and girls of all ages, ethnic groups, and socioeconomic classes were subjected to widespread and systematic sexual violence, including individual and gang rape, and rape with objects such as weapons, firewood, umbrellas, and pestles. Rape was perpetrated by both sides, but mostly by the rebel forces. These crimes of sexual violence were generally characterized by extraordinary brutality and frequently preceded or followed by other egregious human rights abuses against the victim, her family, and her community. Although the rebels raped indiscriminately irrespective of age, they targeted young women and girls whom they thought were virgins. Many of these younger victims did not survive these crimes of sexual violence. Adult women were also raped so violently that they sometimes bled to death or suffered from tearing in the genital area, causing long-term incontinence and severe infections. Many victims who were pregnant at the time of rape miscarried as a result of the sexual violence they were subjected to, and numerous women had their babies torn out of their uterus as rebels placed bets on the sex of the unborn child.

Thousands of women and girls were abducted by the rebels and subjected to sexual slavery, forced to become the sex slaves of their rebel “husbands.” Abducted women and girls who were assigned “husbands” remained vulnerable to sexual violence by other rebels. Many survivors were kept with the rebel forces for long periods and gave birth to children fathered by rebels. Some abducted women and girls were forcibly conscripted into the fighting forces and given military training, but even within the rebel forces, women still held much lower status and both conscripted and volunteer female combatants were assigned “husbands.” For civilian abductees, aside from sexual violence their brutal life with the rebels included being made to perform forced labor, such as cooking, washing, carrying ammunition and looted items, as well as farm work. Combatants within the rebel forces had considerable latitude to do what they wanted to abducted civilians, who were often severely punished for offenses as minor as spilling water on a commander’s shoes. Escape for these women and girls was often extremely difficult: In many instances, the women and girls, intimidated by their captors and the circumstances, felt powerless to escape their life of sexual slavery, and were advised by other female captives to tolerate the abuses, “as it was war.” The rebels sometimes made escape more difficult by deliberately carving the name of their faction onto the chests of abducted women and girls. If these marked women and girls were caught by pro-government forces, they would be suspected of being rebels, and often killed. Even though many women did manage to escape, some escaped from one rebel faction or unit only to be captured by another. An unknown number of women and girls still remain with their rebel “husbands,” although the war was declared over on January 18, 2002.

The main perpetrators of sexual violence, including sexual slavery, were the rebel forces of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) and the West Side Boys, a splinter group of the AFRC. Human Rights Watch has documented over three hundred cases of sexual violence by the rebels; countless more have never been documented. From the launch of their rebellion from Liberia in March 1991, which triggered the war, the RUF perpetrated widespread and systematic sexual violence. Its ideology of salvaging Sierra Leone from the corrupt All People’s Congress (APC) regime quickly degenerated into a campaign of violence whose principal aim was to gain access to the country’s abundant diamond mines. The AFRC, which consisted of disaffected soldiers from the Sierra Leone Army (SLA) who in May 1997 overthrew the elected government of President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, were also responsible for subjecting thousands of women and girls to sexual violence, including sexual slavery. After the signing of the peace agreement in Lomé, Togo, in July 1999, sexual violence, including sexual slavery, continued unabated in RUF-controlled areas and was also perpetrated by the West Side Boys, who operated outside of the capital, Freetown. The human rights situation worsened after the May 2000 crisis when fighting broke out again, until relative peace was re-established, with U.N. and British assistance, by mid-2001. The prevalence of sexual violence peaked during active military operations and when the rebels were on patrol. Even in times of relative peace, however, sexual violence continued to be committed against the thousands of women and girls who were abducted and subjected to sexual slavery by the rebels. No region of Sierra Leone was spared.

Human Rights Watch has documented only a limited number of cases of sexual violence by pro-government forces, the Sierra Leone Army (SLA) and the militia known as Civil Defense Forces (CDF), the latter consisting

of groups of traditional hunters and young men who were called upon by the government to defend their native areas. Human Rights Watch has not documented any cases of sexual violence by the SLA prior to 1997. This may in part be due to the fact that survivors would have often found it difficult to distinguish between rebel and government soldiers, as the latter frequently colluded with and disguised themselves as RUF forces. Sexual violence was committed relatively infrequently by the CDF, whose internal rules forbid them from having sexual intercourse before going to battle and who believe their power and potency as warriors depends upon sexual abstinence. Some of this internal discipline, however, was lost as CDF moved away from their native areas and traditional chiefs and were given more responsibility in national security. Human Rights Watch has documented several cases of rape by the largest and most powerful CDF group, the Kamajors, who operate predominantly in the south and east.

Human Rights Watch has documented several cases of sexual violence by peacekeepers with the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), including the rape of a twelve-year-old girl in Bo by a soldier of the Guinean contingent and the gang rape of a woman by two Ukrainian soldiers near Kenema. There appears to be reluctance on the part of UNAMSIL to investigate and take disciplinary measures against the perpetrators. Reports of rape by peacekeepers with the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), the majority of whom were Nigerian, deployed at an earlier stage in the war, were rare. Both ECOMOG and UNAMSIL peacekeepers have sexually exploited women, including the solicitation of child prostitutes, whilst deployed in Sierra Leone.

Rape in wartime is an act of violence that targets sexuality. Moreover, conflict-related sexual violence serves a military and political strategy. The humiliation, pain, and fear inflicted by the perpetrators serve to dominate and degrade not only the individual victim but also her community. Combatants who rape in war often explicitly link their acts of sexual violence to this broader social degradation. The armed conflict in Sierra Leone was no exception. The rebels sought to dominate women and their communities by deliberately undermining cultural values and community relationships, destroying the ties that hold society together. Child combatants raped women who were old enough to be their grandmothers, rebels raped pregnant and breastfeeding mothers, and fathers were forced to watch their daughters being raped.

To date there has been no accountability for the thousands of crimes of sexual violence or other appalling human rights abuses committed during the war in Sierra Leone. The 1999 Lomé Peace Agreement included a blanket amnesty under Sierra Leonean law for offenses committed by all sides, as the price for the RUF/AFRC agreeing to lay down arms. The United Nations (U.N.) stated that it did not recognize the Lomé amnesty insofar as it purported to apply to international crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and other serious violations of international humanitarian law.

Two important transitional justice mechanisms, the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL) and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) have been established with U.N. assistance and are tasked with investigating the human rights abuses, including sexual violence and sexual slavery, committed by all parties during the war. Both bodies were operational by the third quarter of 2002. The SCSL, a hybrid national and international court, is mandated by the U.N. Security Council to try “persons who bear the greatest responsibility for serious violations of international humanitarian law and Sierra Leonean law” committed in the Sierra Leonean conflict since November 30, 1996. As the SCSL is likely to try only a very limited number of persons, due to funding constraints, a clear and comprehensive prosecutorial strategy is essential, with a strong affirmation that gender-related crimes will be thoroughly and competently investigated and rigorously prosecuted as crimes against humanity or war crimes. The TRC, provided for under the 1999 Lomé Peace Agreement partially to offset the controversial amnesty it also included, has the mandate to establish an impartial historical record of violations and abuses of human rights and international humanitarian law from the outset of the war in 1991, promote reconciliation, and make recommendations aimed at preventing a repetition of the violations committed. The final report on the findings of the TRC should highlight the crimes of sexual violence committed throughout the entire country during the armed conflict and make recommendations to strengthen the promotion and protection of women’s human rights.

Sexual violence has remained Sierra Leone's silent war crime. Until recently, little attention has been paid either nationally or internationally to this less visible human rights abuse, although sexual violence was committed on a much larger scale than the highly visible amputations for which Sierra Leone became notorious. The underreporting is a reflection of the low status of women and girls in Sierra Leone as well as the internal shame that survivors suffer and their fear of rejection by family and communities. Women and girls in Sierra Leone are subjected to structural discrimination by practice, custom and law. They face discrimination in terms of education and employment, in the political arena, and in other walks of life. Both customary law, which governs the majority of the population, and general law, which was inherited from the United Kingdom and is primarily applied in Freetown, discriminate against women and girls in terms of family law, as well as property and inheritance rights. In addition, the provisions pertaining to rape under general and customary law offer inadequate protection. The misinterpretation of the complicated provisions of general law by the police and courts means, for example, that those who are alleged to have sexually assaulted a minor are generally charged with "unlawful carnal knowledge of a child," for which the sentence is lighter, rather than rape. Under customary law, the perpetrator is generally required to pay a substantial fine to the victim's family as well as to the chiefs. The victim may also be forced to marry the perpetrator.

The concept of sexual violence as a crime in itself is a very recent one in Sierra Leone's patriarchal society. Only rape of a virgin is seen as a serious crime. Rape of a married woman or a non-virgin is often not considered a crime at all: as in many countries, there is often a belief that the woman must have consented to the act, or she is seen as a seductress. The virtual destruction of Sierra Leone's already corrupt and inefficient court system and police force during the war, moreover, created a climate of impunity that persists, allowing perpetrators of sexual violence (as well as other crimes) to escape justice.

The lack of attention to conflict-related sexual violence means that few assistance programs have been established for women and girls who were subjected to sexual violence, including sexual slavery. Survivors not only live with the severe physical and mental health consequences of the abuses suffered, but also fear ongoing non-conflict-related sexual violence, largely perpetrated with impunity. International donors and nongovernmental organizations should work together with the government of Sierra Leone to establish programs (health care, education, adult literacy, skills training, trauma counseling, and income-generating schemes) that will help to rehabilitate the survivors of sexual violence. To combat impunity and work toward changing societal attitudes toward sexual violence, the government of Sierra Leone should, with the technical and financial support of the international community, revise its discriminatory laws to ensure that they meet international standards. The constitution also needs to be reviewed and the provision exempting personal and customary law from the prohibition against discrimination removed. In addition, the government should take steps to improve the response of the legal system to ongoing sexual and domestic violence, including strategies for effective prosecution and protection. A nationwide public awareness campaign also needs to be undertaken to educate the general population on women's human rights.

Women have a crucial role to play at this critical phase in Sierra Leone's history, but they will only be able to contribute fully in a civic culture in which women and girls are respected as equal partners and gender-based abuses are not tolerated.

II. RECOMMENDATIONS

To the Government of Sierra Leone

- Take all necessary measures to ensure that former rebels release all women and girls abducted during the armed conflict who continue to be held. Provide these women and girls with the necessary social and economic options to enable them to leave these often abusive relationships.
- Prioritize the nationwide establishment of reproductive health clinics for women and girls that can provide testing and treatment for sexually transmitted diseases, along with other services.
- Revoke or revise existing laws (general, customary and Islamic) that discriminate on the basis of gender and ensure that they meet international human rights standards. Take the necessary steps to amend the constitution to remove the provision exempting personal law and customary law from the prohibition on gender-based discrimination. Provide training on these new laws for the judiciary, police, prosecutors, and staff of local courts.
- Establish an inter-ministerial task force with representatives from nongovernmental organizations to deal with the conflict-related sexual violence and related current problems facing women, with the aim of improving the social, medical and legal responses to women's and girls' needs.
- Take steps to improve the response of the legal system to ongoing sexual and domestic violence, including strategies for effective prosecution and protection, such as recruiting and training more female police officers, allowing nongovernment doctors to examine victims and providing legal aid to victims.
- Mainstream gender within the government and government policies. Launch a nationwide public awareness campaign on sexual and domestic violence against women to dispel the prevailing societal attitudes to sexual and domestic violence against women.
- Provide training on human rights and international humanitarian law, with a focus on women's human rights issues and gender-based crimes, to members of the security forces.
- Repeal the provision in the 1999 Lomé Peace Agreement Act that grants amnesty to all warring parties, so that individuals who committed acts of sexual violence (and other crimes) during the war may be prosecuted in the domestic courts.
- Cooperate fully with the Special Court for Sierra Leone and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.
- Establish an independent national human rights commission as provided under the Lomé Peace Agreement that will contribute to the promotion and protection of human rights beyond the lifespan of the Special Court for Sierra Leone and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

To Members of the African Union and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)

- Provide military personnel participating in peacekeeping operations in Sierra Leone (and elsewhere) with training in human rights and international humanitarian law, including a focus on women's human rights issues, and gender-based crimes. Ensure that peacekeepers understand the U.N. Code of Conduct for peacekeepers, which provides that peacekeepers should not commit any act that could result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to members of the local population, especially women and children. Prosecute any nationals that have been repatriated from Sierra Leone for crimes of sexual violence in line with the zero tolerance policy on sexual exploitation by anyone employed or affiliated with UNAMSIL.

- Issue a statement, jointly, if possible, declaring your willingness to support the Special Court for Sierra Leone and to surrender any alleged war criminals to it. Commit to extraditing to Sierra Leone individuals indicted by the Special Court, take the legal steps that may be necessary to ensure that this can happen (for example, by amending extradition laws), and otherwise cooperate with the Special Court, for example, by locating witnesses or providing information.

To Members of the International Community

- Prioritize the funding of reproductive health clinics for women and girls that can provide testing and treatment for sexually transmitted diseases, along with other services.
- Greatly increase funding for legal reform programs, including training, to ensure that both the laws and domestic courts meet international standards, as well as for programs that will establish better medical, legal and social support services for survivors of sexual violence.
- Monitor all aspects of the Special Court for Sierra Leone to ensure that cases involving sexual violence and sexual slavery are fully prosecuted and that survivors and witnesses of sexual violence receive necessary protection and support throughout the judicial process and post-trial period. Cooperate with the court and take the necessary steps for the extradition or surrender of persons indicted by the Special Court for Sierra Leone.
- Fund the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and monitor it to ensure that conflict-related sexual violence and sexual slavery are fully investigated and properly documented by the TRC in a gender sensitive manner.
- Prosecute military personnel, who have been repatriated from Sierra Leone in line with the zero tolerance policy on sexual exploitation by anyone employed or affiliated with UNAMSIL.

To the Special Court for Sierra Leone

- Conduct thorough investigations into incidents of sexual violence against women and girls including sexual slavery during the war for possible prosecution under the court's mandate. Ensure that gender-integrated teams investigating these acts have competence in investigating rape and conducting interviews with rape victims, who should only be interviewed by experienced female investigators.
- Ensure the gender crimes investigators conduct compulsory gender sensitization training for all staff, and provide more in-depth training for staff members dealing most directly with survivors of sexual violence. Ensure the gender crimes investigators have access to all cases under investigation, even the ones not previously identified as gender cases, to provide guidance and expertise.
- Recruit a staff member with expertise in juvenile justice who can provide training on juvenile justice issues and interviewing skills for staff dealing most directly with young children.
- Establish a strong Victims and Witnesses Unit with protection and support for prosecution and defense witnesses. Protect and support the victims and witnesses not only during the investigation and trial phase but extend this to post-trial protection, where appropriate.
- Provide judges, prosecutors and defense counsel with strict guidance to prevent them from unnecessarily re-victimizing witnesses on the stand or releasing their identity publicly in violation of protective measures.

To the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

- Recruit an experienced gender advisor with expertise in sexual violence, and ensure staff of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is gender balanced at all levels.

- Recruit a staff member experienced in dealing with child victims and perpetrators who can provide training on how to interview young children.
- Investigate and document fully gender-based abuses committed throughout the country. Ensure survivors of sexual violence are heard in a manner that ensures their dignity and safety, and avoids any re-traumatization. Guarantee the confidentiality of these hearings when confidentiality is requested.
- Highlight gender-specific abuses in the final report on the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as well as recommendations on legal reform to ensure that the domestic laws and courts meet international standards; on human rights training for the judiciary and law enforcement officers; and on the assistance needs of survivors.
- Promote public awareness of gender-based crimes through the media umbrella organizations, NGOs and mobile community outreach teams as well as the creation of an information and resource center.

To the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL)

- Investigate fully any allegations of sexual violence by UNAMSIL personnel, which will serve to enforce the policy of zero tolerance for any such acts perpetrated by anyone employed or affiliated with UNAMSIL. Establish a mechanism with the Sierra Leone Police whereby cases of sexual exploitation by persons employed or affiliated with UNAMSIL are immediately reported to the relevant UNAMSIL staff member, including the provost marshal and gender specialist in the human rights section. Establish a mechanism to follow up on cases that have resulted in military personnel who commit such crimes being repatriated to their country of origin to ensure that states properly prosecute the offender. Civilian staff that have perpetuated sexual violence should be fired and their misconduct properly recorded in their personnel file so that they are not rehired in another U.N. mission.
- Provide in-depth gender sensitization training to military and civilian staff and ensure the human rights unit systematically monitors and reports on issues of gender-based violence. Ensure that peacekeepers understand the U.N. Code of Conduct for peacekeepers, which provides that peacekeepers should not commit any act that could result in the physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to members of the local population, especially women and children.
- Collaborate with the U.N. Department of Peacekeeping Operations to revise the U.N. Code of Conduct and the Military Observer Handbook, ensuring that the zero tolerance policy for sexual exploitation by persons employed or affiliated with U.N. missions and the consequences of such acts are clearly stated in these guidelines. Compile similar guidelines for civilian staff.
- Provide capacity building with a focus on women's human rights issues to national women's groups and human rights organizations across the country under the guidance of the gender specialist in UNAMSIL human rights units.

III. METHODOLOGY

Over three hundred women and girls were interviewed by Human Rights Watch as part of ongoing research and for this report. For a variety of reasons, including the lack of an ideological aspect and the limited ethnic dimension to the civil war in Sierra Leone and the all-pervasiveness of abuse, victims of human rights abuses, including survivors of sexual violence, generally feel free to talk very openly about their experiences.⁶

Great care was taken with the victims to ensure that recounting their experience did not further traumatize them. While we sought as much information as possible from each interview, the well-being of the interviewee was always paramount and some interviews were cut short as a result. The interviews were conducted in private settings in the presence of a female interpreter. The interviews with survivors were mostly conducted in Krio, the *lingua franca* of Sierra Leone, or in one of the other languages spoken by the different ethnic groups and interpreted into English. In most interviews only females were present and in the few cases where a man was present, it was with the permission of the interviewee. In order to guarantee the confidentiality of all information, interviewees are not identified by name.

In addition to the survivors, government officials, law enforcement officers, lawyers, key figures from the rebel forces, health personnel, religious leaders, and representatives of local and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) working in the areas of human rights, women's rights, and health, as well as U.N. officials were interviewed.

IV. BACKGROUND

The Civil War

Sierra Leone is a coastal West African country that shares borders with Guinea and Liberia. It has a population of close to five and a half million (July 2001 estimate) composed of sixteen ethnic groups.⁷ These are the Fullah, Gola, Koranko, Kissi, Kono, Krim, Krio, Limba, Loko, Mandingo, Mende, Sherbro, Susu, Temne, Vai and Yalunka. The Mende, in the south, and the Temne, in the north, are the largest ethnic groups (around 30 percent each). The Krio, who are descendants of freed slaves, were settled in the area of Freetown (now the capital) in the late eighteenth century and make up 10 percent of the total population. The educated Krio minority generally still occupies a higher social and economic position and has traditionally been resented by the other groups. Sierra Leone was a British colony, and English is Sierra Leone's official language. Krio, largely based on English vocabulary but with its own grammar, is the first language of the Krios as well as Sierra Leone's *lingua franca*. Though there are no reliable figures, Sierra Leone is a predominantly Muslim country (around 60 percent) with the remainder of the population practicing indigenous religions (10 percent) and Christianity (30 percent).⁸

In 1961, Sierra Leone gained its independence from the United Kingdom. For most of the next three decades, Sierra Leone was governed by the All People's Congress (APC), dominated by the northern Temne and Limba ethnic groups, which came into power in 1967.⁹ The corruption, nepotism and fiscal mismanagement under the one-party rule of the APC led to the decay of all state institutions and the impoverishment of Sierra Leone's population, notwithstanding the country's large deposits of diamonds, gold, rutile, and bauxite. Frustration with government corruption and mismanagement led to the formation of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in 1984. The RUF claimed to be a political movement with the aim of salvaging the country and overthrowing the APC. Its invasion of Sierra Leone from Liberia on March 23, 1991 triggered the civil war that was to last ten years.

⁶ Women and girls who have been raped can be presented and/or perceived either as victims or survivors and there is an ongoing debate as to which is the more appropriate term. In this report, both terms are used interchangeably without significant distinction.

⁷ See <http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/sl.html>.

⁸ See <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2001/5730.htm>.

⁹ See generally, J.A.D. Alie, *A New History of Sierra Leone* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990).

At its inception, the RUF consisted of a mixture of middle class students with a populist platform, unemployed and alienated youths, and Liberian fighters from Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), who had helped Charles Taylor in his quest to become the president of Liberia. A lesser-known covert sponsor of the RUF was the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP), with its ethnic base among the Mendes from the south, which also sought the overthrow of the APC.¹⁰ The RUF was led by Foday Sankoh, a former army corporal who had been imprisoned in 1971 for his alleged involvement in an attempted coup against the APC. Sankoh had also reportedly received training in Libya with Taylor.¹¹ The RUF initially consisted of two small groups of only 150 combatants in total. As the RUF captured border towns and villages in Kailahun and Pujehun districts, they used tactics similar to those used to terrorize civilians during the Liberian civil war: seizing and summarily executing chiefs, village elders, traders, government agents and suspected SLA collaborators.¹² The violence and looting or "jah-jah," especially by the Liberian mercenaries within the RUF, was sanctioned by Sankoh who justified them as reward for the mercenaries' support.¹³ The RUF's ideology of salvation quickly degenerated into a campaign of violence whose principal aim was to gain access to the country's diamond and other mineral wealth. From the very beginning, the RUF's campaign of terror included sexual violence and sexual slavery, committed on a widespread and systematic basis.

In April 1992, APC President Joseph Momoh was overthrown in a military coup by twenty-six-year-old army captain Valentine Strasser, who formed the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC). Strasser vowed to end corruption and create opportunities for all Sierra Leoneans. The new regime, however, was as corrupt as the old. The RUF continued to gain strength and was joined by numerous soldiers from the Sierra Leone Army (SLA) who were disgruntled with their poor conditions. These soldier-rebels or "sobels" discarded their uniforms at night to loot but wore government uniforms and continued to work for the government during the day. The "sobels," who included officers, also provided weapons, ammunition, and intelligence to RUF forces.

Starting in January 1991, Momoh and later Strasser embarked on a recruitment drive that swelled the army's ranks to approximately twelve thousand, aiming to dislodge the RUF including by offering its youthful constituency a lucrative alternative. Many of the new soldiers were unemployed drifters, petty criminals, and street children as young as twelve. Given the inability of the undisciplined and ill-trained SLA to drive out the RUF, in March 1995, Strasser invited Executive Outcomes (E.O.), a South African private security company, to fight the RUF and guard the mining areas, in return for concessions over their production. The RUF was by that time approaching Freetown and controlled most of the diamond mining areas. By December 1995, E.O. had retaken a number of key diamond areas and began to collaborate with the pro-government militia known as the Civil Defense Forces (CDF), of which the Kamajors are the largest and most powerful.

The CDF movement began with the establishment of the Eastern Region Defence Committee in 1993-4 and was greatly expanded in 1996 when regent chief Hinga Norman was appointed deputy minister of defense in Kabbah's government and head of the CDF, with the government providing the CDF with training, weapons and food.¹⁴ The CDF movement consists of groups of traditional hunters and young men who were used by the government to defend their native areas. The Kamajors operate mainly in the south and east, the Tamaboros in the far north, the Gbettis in the north and the Donzos in the far east. Civilians who joined the CDF underwent initiation ceremonies, which were said to bestow magical powers, making them immortal and invincible.¹⁵ Units of fighters were initially deployed only in their own chiefdoms to ensure their loyalty and discipline and make the

¹⁰ Paul Richards, *Fighting for the Rainforest: War, Youth and Resources in Sierra Leone* (London: The International African Institute in association with James Currey and Heinemann, 1996), p. 7. When the RUF first invaded from Liberia, villagers in Kailahun were ordered to cut palm fronds—the symbol of the SLPP—"in support" of the rebels.

¹¹ Ibrahim Abdullah and Patrick Muana, "The Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone," in Christopher Clapham (ed.), *African Guerrillas* (Oxford: James Currey, 1998), pp. 173-178.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 178.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 185. By 1999, the CDF had grown into a movement of an estimated fifteen thousand fighters who had to be disarmed and demobilized.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* This is a throwback to the venerated esoteric Mende cult of invincible traditional hunters who were given power through initiation ceremonies. These powers enabled the hunters, *inter alia*, to turn into an animal in order to catch their prey.

best use of their superior bush knowledge. The CDF, in contrast to the SLA and the RUF, had the support of the local civilians and were very effective, overrunning main RUF camps in late 1996 with the support of E.O. and the army.

In January 1996, Strasser was overthrown by his deputy, Brigadier Julius Maada Bio. Bio initiated peace negotiations with the RUF, which had begun to suffer a number of defeats, as well as a program to return Sierra Leone to civilian rule. In March 1996, elections were held, and Ahmad Tejan Kabbah of the SLPP, who pledged to bring about an end to the war, became president of Sierra Leone.

In November 1996, the RUF and Kabbah's government signed the Abidjan Peace Accord, which provided for a ceasefire, disarmament, demobilization, an amnesty to the RUF, and the withdrawal of all foreign forces. The ceasefire was broken in January 1997, however, when serious fighting broke out in southern Moyamba district. In January 1997, Sankoh was arrested in Nigeria on an arms charge and imprisoned by the Nigerian government.

In May 1997, fourteen months after assuming power, President Kabbah was overthrown in a coup led by Major Johnny Paul Koroma, who formed a new government called the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC). Koroma had escaped from prison, where he had been held following an earlier attempted coup in September 1996. The AFRC suspended the constitution, banned political parties, and announced rule by military decree. Days of looting by soldiers followed the coup, which also ushered in a period of political repression characterized by arbitrary arrests and detention. An attempt by Nigerian and Guinean troops (who had been in Sierra Leone since 1995 as part of bilateral security accords to give support to the NPRC), supported by South African mercenaries, to oust Koroma failed.¹⁶

The AFRC consisted primarily of disgruntled ex-SLA soldiers who had become disillusioned by President Kabbah's decision to cut back support for the military. Koroma also cited the government's failure to implement the peace agreement as the reason for the coup. The SLA accused Kabbah of having put greater confidence for the country's defense in and giving more economic resources to the CDF than to the army. Formalizing an alliance between the army and the rebels based on joint opposition to President Kabbah and the SLPP, the AFRC invited the RUF to join its government in June 1997.

From exile in Guinea, President Kabbah mobilized international condemnation for and a response to the coup makers. In response to a plea from Kabbah, hundreds of Nigerian troops based in Liberia as part of the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) moved to Freetown, reinforcing ECOMOG colleagues already based at the Freetown airport to defend it from attacks by the RUF. Nigerian vessels stationed off Freetown shelled the city, reportedly killing at least fifty people. Nigerian forces were, however, eventually forced to withdraw from around the capital. In August 1997, following the AFRC's announcement of a four-year program for elections and return to civilian rule, which represented a breakdown in negotiations initiated by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), ECOWAS established a strict economic embargo against Sierra Leone. In October 1997, the U.N. Security Council adopted a resolution also imposing mandatory sanctions on Sierra Leone, including an embargo on arms and oil imports, which ECOMOG forces were mandated to enforce.

After negotiations in Guinea under the auspices of ECOWAS, the Kabbah government-in-exile and the RUF/AFRC signed an agreement on October 23, 1997, providing for the return to power of President Kabbah by April 1998. The RUF/AFRC, however, undermined the implementation of the accord by stockpiling weapons and attacking the positions of ECOMOG forces. In February 1998, ECOMOG forces together with Kamajor militia launched an operation that drove the RUF/AFRC forces from Freetown. In March 1998, President Kabbah was

¹⁶ See Human Rights Watch/Africa, "Getting Away with Murder, Mutilation and Rape," *A Human Rights Watch Short Report*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (A), June 1999, p. 8 for a discussion of the role of foreign mercenaries in the armed conflict. See Human Rights Watch/Africa, "Transition or Travesty? Nigeria's Endless Process of Return to Civilian Rule," *A Human Rights Watch Short Report*, vol. 9, no. 6, October 1997, for a discussion of the Nigerian intervention in Sierra Leone.

reinstated. Over the succeeding months ECOMOG forces were able to establish control over roughly two-thirds of the country, including all regional capitals: as of mid-1998, the ECOMOG contingent in Sierra Leone was composed of approximately 12,500 troops, predominantly Nigerian with support battalions from Guinea, Gambia, Ghana and Niger.¹⁷ Sankoh was transferred to Sierra Leone from Nigeria and incarcerated in July 1998. In October 1998, the Supreme Court of Sierra Leone tried and sentenced Sankoh to death for his role in the 1997 coup.

Once expelled from Freetown, the AFRC/RUF rebels tried to consolidate their own positions in other parts of the country. The Kabbah government, which had negligible forces of its own, had to rely on ECOMOG to stay in power. Through a series of offensives, the RUF/AFRC managed to gain control of the diamond-rich Kono district and several other strategic towns and areas. By late 1998, the rebels had gained the upper hand militarily and were in control of over half of the country, including all the mineral-rich areas. From this position, the RUF/AFRC launched a major offensive on Freetown in January 1999.

The battle for Freetown and ensuing three-week rebel occupation of the capital were characterized by the systematic and widespread perpetration of a wide range of abuses against the civilian population, and marked the most intensive and concentrated period of human rights abuses and international humanitarian law violations in Sierra Leone's ten-year civil war. At least five thousand civilians were killed and one hundred civilians had limbs amputated, including twenty-six double arm amputations. Thousands of women and girls, including girls as young as eight, were raped and subjected to other forms of sexual violence. In addition, the rebels used civilians as human shields, both while advancing towards ECOMOG positions and as a defense against ECOMOG air power. They also burnt whole neighborhoods, often with the residents in their houses.

Government and the Nigerian-led ECOMOG forces also committed serious human rights abuses, though on a lesser scale, including over 180 summary executions of rebels and their suspected collaborators. Prisoners taken by ECOMOG, some of who had surrendered and many of whom were wounded, were executed on the spot often with little or no effort to establish their guilt or innocence. Officers to the level of captain were present and participated in the executions. ECOWAS officials have yet to initiate a formal investigation into these killings.

As the RUF/AFRC were driven out of Freetown in February 1999, they abducted thousands of civilians, who were used to carry looted goods and ammunition, forcibly conscripted into fighting or used for forced labor. Thousands of girls and women were used as sex slaves by the rebels and forced to "marry" rebel husbands. As they moved eastward, the rebels continued to commit egregious human rights abuses, including killings and amputations, particularly in the villages around the towns of Masiaka, Lunsar, and Port Loko.¹⁸

In the months following the January invasion, and as a result of intense international pressure, Kabbah's government and RUF rebels signed a ceasefire agreement on May 18, 1999,¹⁹ followed by a peace agreement in Lomé, Togo, on July 7, 1999.²⁰ Sankoh was released from prison by the Sierra Leonean government to participate in the peace negotiations. The accord, brokered by the U.N., the Organization of African Unity (OAU), and ECOWAS, committed the RUF/AFRC to lay down its arms in exchange for representation in a new government. Sankoh was given the chairmanship of the board of the Commission for the Management of Strategic Resources, National Reconstruction and Development (CMRRD) and the status of vice-president.²¹ Johnny Paul Koroma was made the chairman of the Commission for the Consolidation of Peace (CCP), provided for under Article 6 of the peace agreement.²²

¹⁷ See Human Rights Watch, "Sowing Terror: Atrocities against Civilians in Sierra Leone," *A Human Rights Watch Short Report*, Vol.10, No. 3 (A), July 1998.

¹⁸ See Human Rights Watch/Africa, "Getting Away with Murder, Mutilation and Rape," for a comprehensive report on the January 1999 invasion.

¹⁹ See the annex to U.N. Security Council report, S/1999/585, May 18, 1999.

²⁰ Lomé Peace Agreement at <http://sierra-leone.org/lomeaccord.html>.

²¹ Article 5 (2) of the Lomé Peace Agreement.

²² The RUF delegation to the peace talks in Lomé included members of the AFRC who were also appointed as ministers as part of the agreement to share power.

The peace agreement also included a general amnesty for all crimes committed by all parties during the civil war until the signing of the peace agreement.²³ At the last minute, the U.N. secretary-general's special representative attending the talks added a hand-written caveat that the U.N. held the understanding that the amnesty and pardon provided for in Article 9 did not apply to international crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and other serious violations of international humanitarian law. In addition, the peace agreement mandated the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and a national human rights commission.

The United Nations Observer Mission in Sierra Leone (UNOMSIL), initially established in July 1998 to monitor the military and security conditions, was transformed into a much larger peacekeeping mission.²⁴ In October 1999, months later than had been planned, UNOMSIL, which at its maximum deployment included 192 military observers as well as a small human rights unit of four persons, was transformed into the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL). UNAMSIL was mandated to maintain the peace and monitor the ceasefire and had a maximum authorized strength of 6,000 military personnel, including 260 military observers.²⁵ The human rights unit was authorized to expand to a total of fourteen human rights officers. Two further Security Council resolutions followed, increasing the authorized troop strength to 11,100²⁶ and then 13,000.²⁷

The peace process was marred by cease-fire violations, missed deadlines and infighting within rebel ranks. The RUF/AFRC failed to comply with several commitments, including the release of all civilian abductees. There was a relative decrease in human rights abuses following the peace agreement, although the RUF/AFRC continued to terrorize the civilian population in the north and east, which largely remained under its control. Sexual violence, in particular against the thousands of abducted women and girls, continued. In addition, a splinter group of the AFRC known as the West Side Boys established numerous bases in the Occra Hills near Freetown, from where they staged looting raids. The West Side Boys abducted hundreds of civilians, including girls and women, whom they raped and kept as sex slaves. In August 1999, they took hostage for one week forty-two members of a U.N.-led delegation composed of ECOMOG soldiers, religious leaders, aid workers, and journalists, who had gone to the Occra Hills to have abducted children released to them.

The Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) program progressed slowly, with only 25,000 out of a total 45,000 combatants demobilized by May 2000.²⁸ There was also considerable delay in the deployment of U.N. peacekeeping forces, with only 8,700 peacekeepers deployed by the same month. The peace process then broke down completely, when, in early May, the RUF captured over five hundred UNAMSIL peacekeepers and military observers deployed in the north and the east, holding them for several weeks.²⁹ The conflict erupted again throughout the country and many of the combatants, including child combatants, who had been disarmed and demobilized, were re-conscripted. The human rights situation deteriorated sharply with numerous reports of RUF abuses, including murder, widespread rape, abduction, forced labor, and looting. During a demonstration in Freetown to protest the collapse of the peace process and hostage taking of the peacekeepers, twenty-two civilians were killed outside the house of the RUF leader, Sankoh. On May 17, 2000, several days

²³ Lomé Peace Agreement. Under Article 9 (1) of this agreement, the Government of Sierra Leone was required to grant Sankoh absolute and free pardon. Article 9 (3) refers to the amnesty granted to all combatants of the RUF/SL, ex-AFRC, ex-SLA or CDF for any crimes they may have committed in pursuit of their objectives (*See* below, p. 61, for a discussion on the amnesty).

²⁴ U.N. Security Council resolution 1181, S/RES/1181 (1998), July 13, 1998.

²⁵ U.N. Security Council resolution 1270, S/RES/1270 (1999), October 22, 1999.

²⁶ U.N. Security Council resolution 1289, S/RES/1289 (2000), February 7, 2000.

²⁷ U.N. Security Council resolution 1299, S/RES/1299 (2000), May 19, 2000.

²⁸ U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Sierra Leone Humanitarian Situation report, May 29, 2001. *See* <http://www.relief.int/w/Rwb.nsf/s/4A58557840970841C1256A5C0050441B>.

²⁹ The hostages in the north were released on May 28, 2000. The hostages in the east, however, were not released until June 29, 2000. Two hundred and thirty-three peacekeepers and military observers who had been encircled by the RUF were finally freed by the U.N. military operation "Khukri" on July 15, 2000.

after the demonstration, Sankoh was arrested by the government and held in custody, together with over 125 members of the RUF, without charge, using powers under a state of emergency declared in 1998.

There was also a disturbing intensification of abuses by pro-government forces. The Sierra Leonean government caused numerous civilian casualties through helicopter gunship attacks during May and June 2000 against the RUF strongholds of Makeni, Magburaka, and Kambia. Abuses by both the government forces and the RUF caused the displacement of some 330,000 civilians from behind rebel lines. Civilians leaving RUF territory were often captured and accused of being rebel sympathizers by the CDF. Whereas previously sexual violence against women had been very uncommon among the CDF, numerous cases of sexual violence were reported, including gang rape by Kamajor militiamen and commanders.

When, in May 2000, it seemed as though the fighting would threaten Freetown again, several hundred British soldiers were rapidly deployed to Sierra Leone—in the first instance to evacuate foreign nationals who wished to leave, but also to secure the airport, allow reinforcement of the U.N. contingent, and assist in the reorganization of the pro-government forces as an effective fighting force. At their maximum, there were more than 1,200 British soldiers in Sierra Leone, though they began to withdraw within two months of the first deployment. UNAMSIL was rapidly brought up to strength: by June 5, 2000 there were 11,350 U.N. troops in the country.

At the behest of Johnny Paul Koroma, the West Side Boys in May 2000 briefly fought on the government side to prevent the RUF from entering Freetown. However, they continued to commit human rights abuses, and in August 2000 abducted eleven British soldiers of the International Military Advisory and Training Team (IMATT) and one SLA officer. In September 2000, the West Side Boys bases were destroyed during an operation by British paratroopers to free the captured soldiers. Numerous West Side Boys, including their leader, were arrested and incarcerated.

From September 2000 through April 2001, RUF rebels and Liberian government forces acting together attacked refugee camps and villages accommodating several hundred thousand Sierra Leonean and Liberian refugees just across the border with Guinea. Following the attacks, Guinean security forces and the local population retaliated against the refugees, frequently looting, raping, and unlawfully detaining them. Guinean forces also responded to these RUF raids by killing and wounding dozens of Sierra Leoneans in indiscriminate helicopter and artillery attacks in the rebel-held areas in the north of Sierra Leone. Guinean troops conducted several ground attacks during which several civilians were gunned down and girls and women were raped.

In November 2000, the government and RUF signed a cease-fire, which committed both parties to restarting the disarmament process, the reestablishment of government authority in former rebel-held areas, and the release of all child combatants and abductees. On March 30, 2001, the U.N. Security Council authorized the further expansion of UNAMSIL to 17,500 military personnel, including 260 military observers. These forces, contributed by Bangladesh, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, Ukraine, and Zambia, were deployed into RUF strongholds, including the diamond-rich Kono district.³⁰ The DDR program recommenced in May 2001, and by the end of 2001 over three thousand child soldiers, abductees, and separated children had been released by the RUF and the CDF.

During this period, serious human rights abuses continued to be committed, though on a reduced scale. Fighting between the RUF and the CDF broke out in the east of the country in June through August 2001, leaving tens of civilians dead. RUF forces committed scores of serious abuses including rape, murder, and abduction. The victims of these abuses included Sierra Leoneans returning from refugee camps in Guinea; Guinean civilians who were attacked during the cross-border raids by the RUF from September 2000 through April 2001; and Liberians fleeing renewed fighting in Lofa county of Liberia from April 2001. While the RUF released or demobilized more than 1,500 male child combatants, they were reluctant to release Sierra Leonean and Guinean female abductees, most of whom are believed to have been sexually abused.

³⁰ U.N. Security Council resolution 1346, S/RES/1346 (2001), March 30, 2001.

The human rights situation continued to improve in 2002, with the disarmament and demobilization phases declared completed. By January 2002, 47,710 combatants had been disarmed and demobilized. On January 18, 2002, the armed conflict was officially declared to be over in a public ceremony attended by many dignitaries. In addition, the state of emergency was lifted for the first time in four years on February 28, 2002. Following the end of the state of emergency, the government charged Sankoh, and the other RUF and West Side Boys members held in custody since May 2000, with a number of crimes, including murder and related charges. The resettlement of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and returnees from Guinea and Liberia was ongoing as of the writing of this report. By July 2002, approximately 250,000 refugees and IDPs had been resettled. The RUF transformed itself into a political party and nominated presidential and parliamentary candidates for elections held on May 14, 2002.

In the elections, President Kabbah's SLPP was re-elected for a second term and faced the challenge of rebuilding the country and its economy. After a decade of war, Sierra Leone ranks last out of 162 countries in terms of life expectancy at birth; adult literacy; combined enrolment in primary, secondary and tertiary education; and GDP per capita.³¹ Fifty-seven percent of Sierra Leone's population struggles to survive on only U.S. \$1 per day.³² Unemployment is rampant and the current economy is driven by the presence of UNAMSIL and other international organizations. Investors who could create desperately needed jobs remain cautious given the rampant corruption that permeates all levels of Sierra Leonean society and their concerns about regional security.

Women and Girls under Sierra Leonean Law

The Sierra Leonean Legal system

Three systems of law—general, customary, and Islamic—co-exist in Sierra Leone.

General Law

General law consists of the statutory law (codified) and common law (based on case law) mainly inherited from the United Kingdom, the former colonial power. General law is administered through the formal court system, which follows the usual Commonwealth structure, under which the High Court hears more important cases, and magistrates courts the less important ones, both civil and criminal. There is an appeal system, first to the Court of Appeal and then the Supreme Court, which is the ultimate court of appeal and also hears cases relevant to the interpretation of the constitution. The Court of Appeal and Supreme Court are located in Freetown. A High Court and magistrates courts are constituted in Freetown. The High Court was re-established in Kenema and Bo in 2002 and there are magistrates courts in Bo, Kenema and Port Loko.³³ The court system in the provinces, which had a limited infrastructure before the war broke out in 1991, was virtually destroyed during the war—the High Court has not held hearings outside Freetown for six years—and was only gradually being rehabilitated from 2002. Access to the judiciary for rural Sierra Leoneans is further limited by their lack of funds for lawyers, or even transport money.

Only a small number of women, primarily those who reside in the Western Area (where Freetown is located) and women with sufficient funds, have access to the formal court system. As many general law provisions have not been updated since colonial days, the protection that general law affords women is often only marginally better than that provided under customary or Islamic law.

Customary Law

Customary law is defined by the 1991 constitution as “the rules of law by which customs are applicable to particular communities in Sierra Leone.”³⁴ Although there are sixteen ethnic groups in Sierra Leone, a general treatment of customary law is justified, as there are many fundamental similarities between the customary laws of

³¹ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Human Development Report 2001: Making New Technologies Work for Human Development* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 141-144.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 151.

³³ An itinerant judge covers the High Court in both Bo and Kenema.

³⁴ The Constitution of Sierra Leone (1991), Chapter XII - The Laws of Sierra Leone, Section 170 (3). See <http://www.sierra-leone.org/constitution-xii.html>.

these ethnic groups.³⁵ Customary law has not been written down or codified and is only applied by the local courts.³⁶ These courts operate in the provinces and not in the Western Area, which is historically where the Krio and the British colonizers settled. A chairman presides over the local courts with the assistance of chiefdom councilors who are knowledgeable in customary law. The chairmen in theory should be independent from the paramount chiefs who used to preside over the local courts before reforms were introduced both prior to and after independence.³⁷ Customary law officers who are trained lawyers are supposed to review decisions of local courts and provide training to the personnel of local courts. The government Law Officers' Department, however, remains chronically understaffed, and few of the customary law officers' posts are filled.

As the majority of Sierra Leoneans live in the provinces, customary law governs at least 65 percent of the population in relation to issues not reserved by statute to the magistrates courts or High Court. In practice, issues that should be dealt with in the magistrates courts and High Court are also dealt with under customary law. In addition to problems accessing the formal court system, rural Sierra Leoneans, in particular, have historically always preferred to administer justice amongst themselves to ensure that good community relations are maintained in villages where the other residents are invariably relatives by marriage or descent, rather than turning to outsiders.

Although customary law is not applied in the formal court system, it is recognized and there is some interaction between the two systems. There is the right of appeal from the local courts to the District Appeal Court, where a magistrate sits with two assessors who are chiefdom councilors from the given area of the local court and are knowledgeable about the customary law in their respective areas.³⁸ The assessors advise the magistrate on questions of customary law, with the decision remaining with the magistrate. Likewise, a decision of the District Appeal Court can be appealed to the High Court, with the High Court judge being advised by assessors with expertise in customary law.³⁹

Islamic Law

Islamic law has been recognized by statute in Sierra Leone in relation to marriage, divorce, and inheritance among Muslims.⁴⁰ Otherwise, Islamic law, if applicable at all, is considered part of customary law. In this report, Islamic law is therefore treated as part of customary law except when referring to the specific areas dealt with by the Mohammedan Marriage Act, and cases involving Islamic law are heard by the local courts. Criminal *sharia* law is not applicable in Sierra Leone.

Constitutional Status of Women

In theory, Sierra Leonean women are granted equal rights to men under the 1991 constitution, which provides as one of the "fundamental principles of state policy" that the state "... [s]hall discourage discrimination on the grounds of place of origin, circumstances of birth, sex, religion,...."⁴¹ The equal rights of women are again underscored in the human rights chapter of the constitution.⁴² Under Section 27 of the constitution, however,

³⁵ H. M. Joko Smart, *Sierra Leone Customary Family Law* (Freetown: Atlantic Printers Ltd., 1983), p. 6.

³⁶ See 1963 Local Courts Act.

³⁷ Richards, *Fighting for the Rainforest*, p. 46.

³⁸ Section 29 (1) of the 1963 Local Courts Act and Section 76 of the 1965 Courts Act.

³⁹ Section 31 (1) of the 1963 Local Courts Act.

⁴⁰ The Mohammedan Marriage Act (Cap. 96 of the revised laws of Sierra Leone, 1960) deals with marriage, divorce, and intestate succession. Joko Smart, *Sierra Leone Customary Family Law*, p. 20. Intestate successions occur when the deceased did not leave a will.

⁴¹ The Constitution of Sierra Leone (1991), Chapter II – Fundamental Principles of State Policy, Section 6 (2). See <http://www.sierra-leone.org/constitution-ii.html>. Under Section 8 (2) (a), "... [e]very citizen shall have equality of rights, obligations, and opportunities before the law..." and specific safeguards of equality before the law in terms of health care, employment and education are provided under Section 8 (3) (d); Section 8 (3) (a), (c), (e) and Section 9 (1) (a), (b) and (2) respectively.

⁴² *Ibid.*, Chapter III - The Recognition and Protection of Fundamental Human Rights and Freedoms of the Individual, Section 15. See <http://www.sierra-leone.org/constitution-iii.html>. Section 15 provides that "every person in Sierra Leone is entitled to the fundamental human rights and freedoms of the individual, that is to say, has the right, whatever his race, tribe, place of origin, political opinion, colour, creed or sex, but subject to respect for the rights and freedoms of others and for the public

discrimination is permitted, *inter alia*, under laws dealing with “adoption, marriage, divorce, burial, devolution of property on death or other interests of personal law,” which have direct bearing on the rights of women, as well as under customary law.⁴³ This important contradiction in the constitution—similar to that in many African constitutions—has contributed to the low status of women in Sierra Leone, as it legitimizes the application of discriminatory customary law. No protection from discriminatory customary law can be sought under the constitution on the basis of sex. Customary and Islamic laws also continue to be widely applied, notwithstanding the fact that legislation provides that general law should prevail over customary law when customary law is “repugnant to statute or natural justice, equity, and good conscience.”⁴⁴

Marriage

The rights of married women remain limited, particularly for those married under customary and Islamic laws, which govern most marriages. Women married under the general law have comparatively more rights.⁴⁵

A married woman’s position under customary law is comparable to that of a minor: a woman is generally represented by her husband who has the right to prosecute and defend actions on his spouse’s behalf.⁴⁶ Sierra Leonean women can gain status through marriage as well as through their role as mothers: a woman’s status within society and the polygynous household increases with the number of children she bears. Sierra Leone has one of the highest birth rates in the world, with the average number of children born to each woman estimated at 6.5.⁴⁷ Most households are polygynous, apart from the monogamous Christians (approximately 30 percent of the population); under customary law, a husband can marry as many wives as he wishes. Muslims (60 percent of the population) can marry up to four wives.

Under customary law, a girl is considered of marriageable age once her breasts have developed, her menses have started and she has been initiated, which could mean as young as twelve. Marriages are usually arranged, and the consent of the bride-to-be is not considered essential in most ethnic groups, but the consent of the girl’s/woman’s family is required.⁴⁸ The fact that a girl is considered “ready” for marriage at such a young age and her consent is not sought has contributed to the common practice of early forced marriages. Men wishing to marry do not need to seek consent from their own parents. The statutory age of marriage under general law is twenty-one years.

interest, to each and all of the following—(a) life, liberty, security of person, the enjoyment of property, and the protection of law; (b) freedom of conscience, of expression and of assembly and association; (c) respect for private and family life, and (d) protection from deprivation of property without compensation.”

⁴³ *Ibid.*, Section 27. Subsection 27 (1) provides that “Subject to the provisions of subsections (4), (5), and (7), no law shall make provision which is discriminatory either of itself or in its effect.” Under Subsection 4, however, the protection provided under Subsection 1 does not apply “... (d) with respect to adoption, marriage, divorce, burial, devolution of property on death or other interests of personal law, or (e) for the application in the case of members of a particular race or tribe or customary law with respect to any matter to the exclusion of any law with respect to that matter which is applicable in the case of other persons.” Discrimination is also permitted against persons who are not citizens of Sierra Leone or naturalized Sierra Leoneans. According to Dr. Tucker, former Chairperson of President’s Kabbah’s Advisory Committee, the original intent of Section 27 was “to preserve certain areas of segregation which are embedded in traditional practices and are generally acceptable to both sexes, such as the segregation between male and female secret societies. What was taken up in the constitution was more extensive than what was intended.” Human Rights Watch interview with Dr. Tucker (Consultant on the Law Development Program funded by the U.K.’s Department for International Development (DFID)), Freetown, April 25, 2002.

⁴⁴ Section 2 of the 1963 Local Courts Act and Section 76 of the 1965 Courts Act.

⁴⁵ Marriages under the general law are governed, *inter alia*, by the Christian Marriage Act, (Cap. 95), the Civil Marriage Act (Cap. 97), and the Matrimonial Causes Act (Cap. 102).

⁴⁶ Joko Smart, *Sierra Leone Customary Family Law*, p. 98. Under customary law, a Sierra Leonean woman is always under the guardianship of a male relative.

⁴⁷ UNDP, *Human Development Report 2001*, p. 157. This figure is based on births recorded for 1995-2000.

⁴⁸ Consent is a very relative term, as girls generally will find it very difficult to disobey their parents’ wishes, which can result in severe punishment, including ostracism from the immediate and extended family.

Under Islamic law, a male or female dependant can be given in marriage against his or her will, and the legal guardian of an adult woman has the right to object to her choice of husband if the prospective husband is not of equal birth.⁴⁹ Under customary law, a dowry is usually paid to the wife's family. Under Islamic law, the dowry is paid to the bride, although the contract is concluded with the legal guardian of the bride-to-be.⁵⁰

Under customary law, a wife can only refuse to have sexual intercourse with her husband if she is physically ill, menstruating or suckling a young child. She can also refuse intercourse during the daytime, in the bush or during Ramadan.

Under customary law, a wife's decision-making powers are limited since she is obliged to always obey her husband. This lack of decision-making power means that women in families where the breadwinner is the man find it very difficult to influence decisions on how the (generally) little income that the family makes is disbursed. Under customary law, a married woman must ask her husband for permission to work outside the house or visit her family. In families where the woman has been given permission to work outside the house and is the breadwinner, it seems that the added responsibility has not necessarily come with increased decision-making power.

A wife, especially in rural communities, is expected to cultivate food for herself and her children, whilst the husband's responsibility is limited to providing accommodation and clothing.⁵¹ A wife residing in an urban area is generally given a lump sum of money by her husband to start a small business, usually petty trading. If the business fails, the wife must refund the capital to her husband. Given the heavy work burden on women, however, there is little opportunity for women to seek remunerated work outside the house.

Divorce and Death of Husband

Under customary law, both parties can bring divorce proceedings either extrajudicially or judicially before a local court, but in practice women are generally not as free to do so as men.⁵² Only the husband has the right to divorce through unilateral repudiation.⁵³ A wife married under customary or Islamic law may, however, seek dissolution of marriage on grounds of impotence of the husband, for example.⁵⁴

Under customary law, the dowry is refundable upon divorce. Dowries paid to poor families are sometimes set purposely excessively high to ensure that the wife's family will not sanction a divorce given their inability to repay the dowry, again highlighting how little control women married under customary law have over their lives.⁵⁵ Under general law, a husband is expected to pay alimony for his wife and children on divorce, which both parties may initiate.⁵⁶

When a husband dies, the widow is expected under customary law to undergo a mourning period and rituals.⁵⁷ It is only after these rituals that widows are considered purified and can remarry. Some ethnic groups

⁴⁹ Joseph Schacht, *An Introduction to Islamic Law* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), pp. 161-2.

⁵⁰ Schacht, *Introduction to Islamic Law*, p. 161.

⁵¹ Full maintenance of his wife is only the responsibility of the husband during the rainy season (approximately between the months of May and November) or when his wife is sick or nursing a baby. Joko Smart, *Sierra Leone Customary Family Law*, pp. 106-7.

⁵² Judicial divorces are rare as they are more expensive. *Ibid.*, pp. 146-149.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 143-4.

⁵⁴ Schacht, *Introduction to Islamic Law*, p. 165.

⁵⁵ Joko Smart, *Sierra Leone Customary Family Law*, p. 79. Strict tribal Muslims do not require that the dowry be repaid on divorce.

⁵⁶ Christian Marriage Act, Cap. 95 of the revised Law of Sierra Leone, 1960, s. 7 (2), s. 15 (1) (b), and s. 5 respectively.

⁵⁷ A widow must mourn for forty days. Her head is shaved or, in some chiefdoms, disheveled and her body is washed with the same water used to wash her husband's corpse. In some chiefdoms her body is smeared with mud to indicate her mourning. After either one week or forty days for strict Muslims, widows are taken to a stream to be ceremonially washed.

still insist that if the widow remarries, she does so within her deceased husband's family, otherwise all marriage payments are refundable.⁵⁸

As Sierra Leone is a patrilineal society and the husband has custodial rights over children, children are handed over to the husband's family head upon his death.⁵⁹ Under Islamic law, the mother has the right to care for a boy child until the age of nine and a girl child until she comes of age.⁶⁰

Under customary matrimonial property law, a wife is generally only able to keep her own possessions and her self-acquired property in the event of divorce or death. A wife is generally not entitled to keep property acquired through the joint efforts of husband and wife and has no rights over the matrimonial home.⁶¹ Nor can a wife inherit under Islamic law: either the eldest son or brother or the official male administrator of the deceased inherits.⁶² Under general law, a wife is also only entitled to one third of her deceased husband's property, if he has not made a will.

This denial of inheritance rights of women is a major problem given the large number of war widows who are now able to return to their villages of origin, but have no access to land.

Domestic Violence

Societal attitudes to domestic violence are another indicator of the status of women and girls in society; physical violence against women and children is common in Sierra Leone. Indeed, under customary law, a husband has the right to "reasonably chastise his wife by physical force."⁶³ If the husband is persistently cruel and frequently beats his wife to the point of wounding her or causing her great pain, the wife can divorce her husband, but under customary law a single act of physical and brutal force is permitted. A population-based assessment of war-related sexual violence in Sierra Leone carried out by Physicians for Human Rights among 991 female-headed households in camps for displaced people found that, although 80 percent of women surveyed expressed that there should be legal protections for the rights of women, more than 60 percent of the women believed that a husband had the right to beat his wife.⁶⁴

Rape as a Crime under General Law

The laws governing rape in Sierra Leone are very confusing even for persons working in the criminal justice system, such as members of the judiciary and police force. They are also archaic and date back to the British 1861 Offences Against the Person Act. Under this Act, rape is defined as "the unlawful carnal knowledge of a woman without her consent by force, fear or fraud."⁶⁵ Penetration (however slight) is required to constitute the crime of rape.⁶⁶ In addition, although a child is defined as a person under the age of sixteen,⁶⁷ Sierra Leonean law makes the extremely unhelpful distinction between unlawful carnal knowledge of a girl under the age of thirteen and

⁵⁸ The Mende, Krim, Sherbro, Vai, Karonko and Yalunka adhere to this custom, whereas the Temne, Susu, Limba, Loko, Kissi and Kono allow a widow to select her own husband and do not require a refund of the marriage payments if she marries outside her deceased husband's family. Joko Smart, *Sierra Leone Customary Family Law*, p. 138.

⁵⁹ If the couple was married under general law, the custody of the children is often determined by the courts, which generally grant the mother custody of the children.

⁶⁰ Schacht, *Introduction to Islamic Law*, p. 167. In practice, the mother and children will stay with whomever has the money to provide for them.

⁶¹ As customary marriages are generally polygynous, a divorce with one of the wives would result in the dissolution of the whole household if she were to ask for a refund for her contribution to building the house. Joko Smart, *Sierra Leone Family Customary Law*, pp. 113-120.

⁶² Mohammedan Marriage Act, Cap. 96 of the revised laws of Sierra Leone, 1960, s. 9.

⁶³ Joko Smart, *Sierra Leone Family Customary Law*, p. 152.

⁶⁴ Physicians for Human Rights, *War-related Sexual Violence in Sierra Leone: A Population-based Assessment* (Boston: Physicians for Human Rights, 2002), p. 55 (hereafter referred to as PHR report).

⁶⁵ Offences Against the Person Act, 1861 (24 & 25 Vict. c 100), s. 63. Unlawful carnal knowledge refers to sexual intercourse between unmarried persons. The law does not actually forbid or make sexual intercourse between unmarried persons a punishable crime, but it only recognizes the right to sexual intercourse for married couples.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Prevention of Cruelty to Children Act (1926), Cap. 31 of the revised Laws of Sierra Leone 1960, s. 2.

unlawful carnal knowledge of a girl between thirteen and fourteen years of age. The law is unclear about unlawful carnal knowledge committed against persons aged between fourteen and sixteen, although the few cases involving this age group that have gone to trial have reportedly been prosecuted as rape.⁶⁸

Nor is the age of consent explicitly stated, although it is presumably by necessary implication sixteen years old. Marital rape does not exist under Sierra Leonean statutory law, and most Sierra Leoneans firmly believe that it is the duty of a wife to have sex with her husband even if she does not want to.⁶⁹

Unlawful carnal knowledge of a girl under the age of thirteen, whether with or without her consent, is a felony and carries a maximum sentence of fifteen years of imprisonment.⁷⁰ Unlawful carnal knowledge of a girl between the ages of thirteen and fourteen, whether with or without her consent, is, however, only considered a misdemeanor and carries a maximum sentence of two years.⁷¹ The language “with or without her consent” refers only to cases of unlawful carnal knowledge that do not constitute rape; for example, an eighteen-year-old man who has sexual intercourse with a thirteen-year-old girl with her consent.

The police and judiciary seem to have misconstrued the meaning of the law. When an offence of rape against a girl under the age of fourteen is reported, the police and judiciary turn to either Section 6 or 7—depending on the age of the victim—of the Prevention of Cruelty to Children Act and determine that the girl did not consent. Based on her age, they then charge unlawful carnal knowledge and not rape. This misinterpretation therefore leads to a lesser charge for the rape of a child than for the rape of an adult.⁷²

Rape of a person over the age of sixteen is considered a felony and carries a maximum sentence of life imprisonment.⁷³ Indecent assault—sexual assault without penetration—on or attempts to have carnal knowledge of girls under the age of fourteen years carry the same maximum sentence as unlawful carnal knowledge of girls between the age of thirteen and fourteen i.e. only two years of imprisonment.⁷⁴ No person can be convicted of unlawful carnal knowledge, indecent assault or attempted unlawful carnal knowledge “upon the evidence of one witness, unless such witness be corroborated in some material particular by evidence implicating the accused.”⁷⁵

The law pertaining to the abduction of girls for immoral purposes applies to any unmarried girls under the age of sixteen.⁷⁶ Abduction of girls for immoral purposes is a misdemeanor, carrying a maximum sentence of two years of imprisonment.

In addition to the legal confusion that exists in general law concerning rape, attempts by women to obtain the prosecution of rapists are frustrated by the collapsed state of the judiciary and the lack of effective law enforcement, which has contributed to the ongoing climate of impunity for offenders.

⁶⁸ Human Rights Watch interviews with Abdul Tejan-Cole (human rights lawyer and acting coordinator for the national nongovernmental organization Campaign for Good Governance), Freetown, February–May, 2002.

⁶⁹ As the right to have intercourse between a husband and wife is recognized, a husband cannot be guilty of raping his wife unless he has been legally separated from his wife. *See* also PHR report, p. 55.

⁷⁰ Prevention of Cruelty to Children Act, s. 6.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, s. 7. If a man were legally married to a girl under fourteen years of age, sexual intercourse with her would not be an offence.

⁷² Human Rights Watch interview with Bill Roberts and Anne Hewlett (respectively crime adviser and criminal investigation trainer with the Commonwealth Community Safety and Security Project), Freetown, May 1, 2002.

⁷³ Offences against the Person Act, s. 48.

⁷⁴ Prevention of Cruelty to Children Act, s. 9. Section 9 stipulates that “whosoever commits an indecent assault or attempts to have carnal knowledge shall be guilty of a misdemeanor, and shall on conviction before the Supreme Court be liable for imprisonment, with or without hard labour, for any period not exceeding two years.” Consent is no defense to a charge of indecent assault of a child under fourteen years.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, s. 14.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, s. 12. There are also problems with the term “unmarried” because abduction of persons should obviously be prohibited irrespective of their marital status.

Prosecution of Sexual Violence under Customary Law

The manner in which rape is dealt with under customary law is indicative of the societal values towards sexual violence and the low status of women and girls in Sierra Leone. Although all serious criminal cases should automatically be tried under general law, rape cases continue to be prosecuted under customary law in the local courts.⁷⁷

Under customary law, when a case is brought to the local court, the perpetrator is generally required to pay a substantial fine to the victim's family as well as to the chiefs. "Virgin money" is payable to the victim's family if the victim was a virgin. In some communities, in particular Muslim communities, the victim is forced to marry the offender, as a girl who is not a virgin is considered less eligible for marriage. Traditionally, in some ethnic groups, both the victim and the perpetrator will be made to undergo a purification ceremony. For the victim, the purification ceremony is supposed to restore her virginity and for the perpetrator to cleanse the guilt. Any man who invades the husband's exclusive sexual rights over a wife compensates the husband, and not the wife, for "woman damage."⁷⁸

In addition to applying discriminatory laws, the local court system is problematic as women of some ethnic groups do not have direct access to the local courts, but must be represented by a male guardian.⁷⁹ The situation is further exacerbated as the chairmen and chiefdom councilors of the local courts are generally all male, which makes it difficult for women to bring cases of sexual violence as the women are often embarrassed and their cases are generally dealt with insensitively by the male court staff. The local courts are also prone to interference by the chiefs as well as the concerned parties, especially in cases dealing with sexual violence.

Many people in rural areas prefer to settle the case between the families and do not go to court. In cases settled between the two families, money or goods are given to compensate the victim's family. Paradoxically, the giving of gifts or money to a rape victim may even elevate her status within her family.

Some families turn to the local chiefs who can arbitrate between the two families but have no right to impose any fines. In practice, however, the local chiefs have been known to impose fines.

Discrimination against Women and Girls in Practice

In addition to being subjected to discriminatory laws, all women and girls face structural discrimination in Sierra Leone's patriarchal society, which accords automatic respect to its older male members. As a result of the low status accorded to them by law and by custom, women in Sierra Leone face substantial discrimination in practice.

Education

Systemic discrimination against women starts in childhood, when many parents prefer to spend their scarce resources on the education of their sons rather than their daughters. According to the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) Gender-Related Development Index, females account for only 21 percent of the combined primary, secondary and tertiary gross enrolment ratio, compared with 32 percent males.⁸⁰ This gender disparity illustrates not only that fewer girls attend school but also that their education is discontinued at an earlier age than boys. This is reflected in the literacy rate of persons over fifteen years: only 20 percent of females are literate compared to 40 percent of males.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Under Section 13 (1) of the 1963 Local Courts Act, the local courts have no jurisdiction in seduction actions, which includes any act intended to lead the wife astray. Joko Smart, *Sierra Leone Family Customary Law*, footnote 34, p. 121.

⁷⁸ Joko Smart, *Sierra Leone Customary Family Law*, p. 5.

⁷⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Dr. Mariane Ferme (Lecturer, Department of Social Anthropology, Cambridge University, U.K.), Freetown, April 19, 2002.

⁸⁰ UNDP, *Human Development Report 2001*, p. 213.

⁸¹ Government of Sierra Leone, *The Status of Women and Children in Sierra Leone: A Household Survey Report (MICS-2)* (Freetown: 2000), p. 30. The literate population includes those who are able to read "easily" or "with difficulty." Only 30 percent of the total population over fifteen years is literate.

The high illiteracy rate among women can in part be explained by the higher demand for female labor in the family. Girls are required to work in the house at an early age given that their mothers have to take care of the household and the children and do farm work. Another contributing factor to women's illiteracy is the harmful traditional practice of early forced marriage, which is very common in the provinces (see below).

The Workplace

Sierra Leone has ratified numerous international labor conventions.⁸² Some discriminatory practices, such as restricting the right to maternity leave to married women, which was the norm in the formal sector in the 1970s, have been prohibited by law. Extremely poor working conditions, however, persist in Sierra Leone for the majority of workers. In addition, women working for male bosses continue to be subjected to sexual harassment. According to the president of the Sierra Leone Labour Congress, the trade union federation, much work remains to be done to ensure the full and even application of the labor laws, especially in the provinces.⁸³

Sierra Leone's rural population is primarily engaged in subsistence farming, with women constituting 80 percent of the labor that produces 70 percent of the nation's food.⁸⁴ This agricultural labor is generally not remunerated by cash wages and women have unequal access to land or technology. In Sierra Leone, the different ethnic groups continue to operate under communal and family land holding systems. Women can use the land for subsistence farming but the control and management of the land and any property on it is vested in the male head of the family. With the post-war resettlement process underway, war widows returning to their villages of origin often lack the legal means or community support to reclaim their families' properties. As women have little or no property to offer as collateral, their access to credit is limited. Women therefore tend to rely on traditional sources of credit such as rotating savings, which only provide small loans.⁸⁵

Due to the limited number of educated women, which is partly the result of the high demand for girls to perform household tasks at a young age, the preference of sending boys to school, and early forced marriages, few women are represented in the better remunerated professional or managerial jobs. Sierra Leone's crushing poverty and high unemployment have also meant that positions that in the West are perceived as women's jobs are often held by men in Sierra Leone, leaving even fewer openings for women. In the formal employment sector, women therefore constitute only 40 percent of the clerical staff and a mere 8 percent of the administrative and managerial cadre.⁸⁶ In the informal sector outside agriculture, where the cash returns are low, women are mainly involved in petty trading, soap making and tie-dyeing. Given the lack of opportunities for remunerated work, women tend to be heavily dependent on their husbands.

The breakdown of community values as the result of the war, combined with cultural practices, also serves to make girls and women vulnerable to abuse and sexual exploitation, which has historically been rampant in Sierra

⁸² Multilateral Convention (no. 29) concerning Forced or Compulsory Labor, as modified by the Final Articles Revision Convention, June 28, 1930, 39 U.N.T.S. 55 (entered into force May 28, 1947); Multilateral Convention (no. 105) concerning the Abolition of Forced Labor, June 25, 1957, 320 U.N.T.S. 291 (entered into force January 17, 1959); Multilateral Convention (no. 100) concerning Equal Remuneration for Men and Women Workers for Work of Equal Value, June 29, 1951, 165 U.N.T.S. 303 (entered into force May 23, 1953); Multilateral Convention (no. 111) concerning Discrimination in Respect of Employment and Occupation, June 25, 1958, 362 U.N.T.S. 31 (entered into force June 15, 1960). Sierra Leone has not signed Convention 47 (40 hour week), Multilateral Convention (No. 95) concerning the Protection of Wages, July 1, 1949 (entered into force September 24, 1952), Multilateral Convention (No. 102) concerning Minimum Standards of Social Security, June 28, 1952, 210 U.N.T.S. 131 (entered into force April 27, 1955) or Multilateral Convention (No. 182) concerning the Worst Forms of Child Labor, although a social security system for both the public and private sector was recently established.

⁸³ Human Rights Watch interview with Uriah O. H. Davies, president of the Sierra Leone Labour Congress, Freetown, April 14, 2002.

⁸⁴ Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs, *National Policy on the Advancement of Women* (Freetown: Government of Sierra Leone, 2000), p. 7.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 15. Rotating schemes are schemes whereby groups of women pool their resources and each member of the group has access to the funds on a rotating basis.

⁸⁶ Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs, *National Policy on Gender Mainstreaming* (Freetown: Government of Sierra Leone), p. 3.

Leone.⁸⁷ Many women and girls have been driven to prostitution as a result of the increased poverty caused by the conflict and their lack of other opportunities and skills.

In the Political Arena

Discrimination against women is evident in the political arena. Women were not granted the right to vote or stand for election for any political office until after independence in 1961. Given their economic dependence on men, it is also much more difficult for women to raise the necessary campaign funds. In the Northern Province, women continue to be excluded from contesting and voting for the elections for traditional leadership positions (although there are reportedly several female chieftom councilors).⁸⁸ Out of the 149 paramount chiefs in the country, only three are female, all based in the south.

Under the new block voting system which was introduced for the 2002 elections, 112 parliamentary seats are elected by popular vote. An additional twelve parliamentary seats are reserved for paramount chiefs who are elected in separate elections by chieftom councilors. There are presently only eighteen female parliamentarians, including two female paramount chiefs. This does represent an increase over the previous government, which had a total of eight women parliamentarians, including two female paramount chiefs. At government level, there are only three female ministers and three female deputy ministers, which is a marginal increase from President Kabbah's previous Cabinet.⁸⁹

Harmful Traditional Practices and Their Impact on Women's and Girls' Health

Early forced marriages

The health of many women and girls in Sierra Leone is compromised by early forced marriage.⁹⁰ Early forced marriages are very common in the provinces, where men often sponsor a girl from birth (paying for school fees, clothes, etc.) and marry her after she has been initiated (see below for an explanation of the initiation process).

Early forced marriage is one of the factors contributing to Sierra Leone's high maternal mortality rate, since young girls have several children before their bodies are fully mature. At 1,800 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births, Sierra Leone's maternal mortality rate is one of the highest in the world. This mortality rate translates to approximately 4,000 maternal deaths per year based on a total population of five million.⁹¹

Girls who are forced to marry early not only miss out on education, but also on skills training opportunities and are therefore highly dependent on their husbands.

⁸⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with a highly respected international observer who has worked in Sierra Leone for two decades, Freetown, February 27, 2002.

⁸⁸ Only persons paying tax can contest and participate in elections for paramount chiefs who are elected from ruling houses. The paramount chieftaincy system was introduced by the British Colonial Administration to administer the various chiefdoms in the Protectorate (i.e. the whole of Sierra Leone excluding the Western Area). Although there is reportedly no law against women paying taxes, women in the Northern Province have historically not done so probably due to lack of opportunities to find remunerated work. The tax is a negligible amount that women are willing to pay to ensure their eligibility for these elections. Human Rights Watch interview with Joseph Hall and Honerin Muyoyatta from the National Democratic Institute (NDI), Freetown, March 22 and 23, 2002.

⁸⁹ The three ministerial posts are Minister for Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs, Minister for Trade and Industry, and Minister of Health and Sanitation. The three female deputy ministers are in the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs, the Ministry of Trade and Industry, and the Ministry of Works, Housing and Technical Maintenance. The new government was sworn in on July 12, 2002.

⁹⁰ Early forced marriages are marriages whereby the consent of either party is not sought or more commonly whereby the consent of the girl is not sought and whereby one or both spouses is/are under the age of consent (which under international law should not be less than fifteen years of age). This harmful traditional practice contravenes article 16(3) of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which states that the betrothal and marriage of a child shall have no legal effect, article 16(1) and (2) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and article 23(3) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which says that "[n]o marriage shall be entered into without the free and full consent of the intending spouses."

⁹¹ Government of Sierra Leone, *The Status of Women and Children in Sierra Leone*, p. 63.

Female Genital Cutting

Sierra Leonean girls as well as boys are traditionally initiated into secret societies at adolescence. The secret societies that perform the initiation rites take the adolescents into a sacred place in the bush where they are circumcised and taught about traditional practices. The male and female societies are segregated and males are not supposed to know what happens in female secret societies or vice versa.

Traditionally, initiation for girls entailed spending an extended period (up to two years) in the bush with girls of the same age, being taught various cultural skills (dancing, singing, drama, arts and craft, how to use local herbs, how to respect elders, etc.) and being a good wife (cooking, cleaning, child welfare, hygiene, fishing, etc.) by older women. Girls who undergo initiation through the secret societies are treated with deference after having completed the ritual and are feted by their communities.⁹² Today, the duration of the initiation ceremony has been greatly reduced, minimizing the skills transfer aspect, and thus focusing on the cutting itself. Because it was not always possible to hold the ceremonies during the war, initiation rites are now often practiced on adults, girl mothers, and pregnant girls—whereas traditionally it was seen as a rite of passage into adulthood for adolescent girls, who had to be virgins. In recent years, girls and/or adult women who do not wish to be initiated have been abducted and circumcised by force by female members of the community.

Ninety percent of Sierra Leonean women have undergone female genital cutting, which can have major health repercussions, including pain, injury to adjacent tissue of the urethra, hemorrhage, shock, acute urine retention, and infection.⁹³ Longer-term health effects include recurrent urinary tract infections, pelvic infections, infertility, keloid scar, and problems during childbirth.⁹⁴ The high prevalence of conflict-related sexual violence, which causes trauma to the genital area, can only have served to aggravate these health repercussions and both have in turn contributed to the increased spread of sexually transmitted diseases, including Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS).

This harmful traditional practice, which is contrary to provisions of several international human rights instruments, continues to be practiced due to the significant societal pressure exerted by adults as well as peers.⁹⁵ Girls who have not been initiated are seen as less eligible for marriage and many future husbands sponsor the initiation of their bride-to-be.

Societal Attitudes to Sexual Violence against Women and Girls

The low status of women and girls is highlighted by the prevalent societal attitudes towards sexual violence. The notion of sexual violence as a crime is a very recent concept in Sierra Leone. It is still widely believed that only rape of a virgin is rape, which in Krio is called “to virginate.” Rape of a non-virgin, on the other hand, is not considered rape, and there is often a belief that the woman must have consented to the act or is a seductress. Marital rape is not recognized under either customary or general law in Sierra Leone.

⁹² Human Rights Watch interview with Dr. Mariane Ferme, (lecturer, Department of Social Anthropology, Cambridge University, U.K.), Freetown, April 19, 2002.

⁹³ Dr. Olayinka Koso-Thomas, *The Circumcision of Women: A Strategy for Eradication* (London and New Jersey: Zed Books Ltd., 1992), p. 19. The type of female genital cutting performed in Sierra Leone is clitoridectomy (removal of the prepuce of the clitoris) and excision (removal of the prepuce, the clitoris and all or part of the labia minora). The extreme form of infibulation is not practiced in Sierra Leone.

⁹⁴ U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), *Report on the First Donors Meeting For FGM/FGC Elimination* (Washington D.C.: USAID, 2001), p. 12.

⁹⁵ Female genital cutting violates the right to be free from violence (Article 1 of the CEDAW) and the right to bodily integrity (Article 6 of the CRC). Under Article 5 (a) of the CEDAW, states are called upon “to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women.” Article 24 (1) and (3) of the CRC also requires states to abolish traditional practices that are harmful to the health of children. General Recommendation 19 of the CEDAW Committee also links traditional attitudes which subordinate women and violent practices, including female genital cutting, that “... justify gender-based violence as a form of protection or control of women.”

Given the lack of statistics about rape cases before the war, it is impossible to establish the historical prevalence of sexual violence, but several doctors reported to Human Rights Watch that, before the war, they only treated a limited number of young girls who generally had been raped by older men.⁹⁶ According to the doctors interviewed, many cases of rape before the war occurred within the extended family and were considered family matters. They were rarely discussed or reported, in order to ensure that the victim's chances of marriage and obtaining a good dowry were not destroyed. Rape was also apparently unlikely to occur within a village community, where everyone knew each other and the shame attached to the offender would be too great. Rape outside the extended family was more likely to be committed in environments where there were mixed ethnic groups, such as in mining areas or larger towns. The cultural definition of rape and lack of reporting, however, may have led to the understanding that rape rarely occurred before the war. Sexual exploitation, however, has always been rampant in Sierra Leone, where economic options for women are limited and which has traditionally condoned a high level of promiscuity, despite the high value placed on virginity. With the increased poverty caused by the war, sex has become even more of a commodity.⁹⁷

The societal attitudes to rape and the low status of women have meant that no cases of conflict-related sexual violence and few cases of non-conflict-related sexual violence are prosecuted.⁹⁸ (See also below at p. 61 for a discussion on the amnesty included in the Lomé Peace Agreement.)

V. SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS DURING THE CIVIL WAR

Prevalence of Sexual Violence during the War

Throughout the ten-year civil war, thousands of Sierra Leonean women and girls were subjected to widespread and systematic sexual violence, including rape and sexual slavery. A survey of 991 female heads of households in communities of displaced persons carried out by Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) in 2002 found that approximately one of every eight household members (13 percent) had been subjected to one or more incidents of conflict-related sexual violence; among the actual respondents to the survey, the prevalence rate of conflict-related sexual violence was 9 percent (94 out of 991).⁹⁹ Based on this prevalence rate, as many as 50,000 to 64,000 internally displaced women may have been subjected to sexual violence as a result of the war.¹⁰⁰ Adding extrapolated data for other types of victim, PHR calculated that as many as 215,000 to 257,000 Sierra

⁹⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Dr. Olayinka Koso-Thomas, Freetown, February 25, 2002; Dr. Noah Conteh, Freetown, March 1, 2002 and Dr. Bernard Fraser, Freetown, March 3, 2002. The latter two doctors practiced in the provinces as well as in Freetown.

⁹⁷ Sex can be bought for as little as U.S. \$0.50. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and Save the Children U.K., *Sexual Violence and Exploitation: The Experience of Refugee Children in Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone* (Geneva/London: UNHCR/SC-UK: 2002). Human Rights Watch has some concerns about this report as the report does not provide an adequate review of the context, including the status of women and girls within the given countries. Given the low status of women and girls in these countries, the sexual exploitation is much wider than reported: the power dynamic means that men of all walks of life, such as teachers, pastors, police, businessmen as well as aid workers or peacekeepers, exploit girls and women. It would also appear that the short-term solutions proposed do not adequately address the underlying structural issues, such as poverty, lack of education or alternative means of income generation for many women.

⁹⁸ It was not possible to obtain reliable statistics as reporting and recording of cases by the police and judiciary are not consistent.

⁹⁹ PHR report, p. 2. The PHR report captures some of the different types of sexual violence that women were subjected to. Of the ninety-four internally displaced women reporting their own experience of sexual violence to PHR, interviewees reported among other things: rape (89 percent); being forced to undress/stripped of clothing (37 percent); gang rape (33 percent); abduction (33 percent); molestation (14 percent) and insertion of foreign objects into genital opening or anus (4 percent). It should be noted that the definition of rape used by the PHR report differs from that used throughout this report. The definition used in this report, as mentioned above, is that used by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, in the *Foca* case.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3. As PHR points out this figure might be an underestimate due to deliberate non-disclosure of sexual violence and the lack of privacy in some of the interviews, despite efforts made to ensure privacy.

Leonean women and girls may have been subjected to sexual violence in the conflict period.¹⁰¹ Although these figures are necessarily no more than estimates, they do give an indication of the widespread nature of sexual violence during the war.

Human Rights Watch has primarily documented sexual violence committed during the latter stages of the war when the organization had a full-time presence in the country, beginning April 1999. This does not mean that sexual violence was at its worse during this period. Since that time, Human Rights Watch extensively documented crimes of sexual violence during the January 1999 invasion of Freetown as well as ongoing human rights abuses. Human Rights Watch has also received numerous reports of sexual violence dating from earlier in the war.

Perpetrators

Survivors of sexual violence mostly reported being raped by rebel forces, but were at times not able to identify which rebel faction the perpetrators belonged to or whether—especially given the frequent collaboration between soldiers and rebels—the perpetrators were indeed rebels or rather soldiers from the Sierra Leone Army (SLA). In addition, survivors explained that they often deliberately did not want to look at their rapists out of fear and because they did not want to make eye contact. For example, D.T., a twenty-five-year-old woman raped by four rebels, including one child combatant, said that she would not be able to recognize any of the perpetrators, as she was too afraid to look at them (see below at p. 36).¹⁰² A. B., a thirty-year-old who was raped by two rebels, also said that:

When you are with these people [rebels], you do not ask questions. I did not even look into their faces. Many of them rubbed black chalk on their face and when you looked at them would say, “What are you staring at?”¹⁰³

Rebel Forces

The RUF committed crimes of sexual violence—often of extreme brutality—from the very beginning of the war when they invaded Sierra Leone from Liberia in March 1991. RUF rebels committed crimes of sexual violence in the course of their military operations, during which thousands of women and girls were abducted and forced to “marry” rebel “husbands.” These abducted women and girls were repeatedly raped and subjected to other forms of sexual violence throughout the duration of their captivity, which in many cases lasted years. During captivity, these women and girls were also made to carry out forced labor, including carrying heavy loads, cooking, cleaning, etc. Many women and girls have given birth to children fathered by rebels. Especially during the early years of the war, the RUF were assisted by Liberian forces, who also committed rape and other sexual violence.

The AFRC committed crimes of sexual violence from May 1997, using the same tactics as the RUF. Sexual violence by the RUF and the AFRC continued to be committed after the signing of the Lomé Peace Agreement on July 7, 1999, and they were joined in this by the West Side Boys, a splinter group of the AFRC formed after the signing of the Agreement. An unknown number of abducted girls and women still remain under the control of their rebel “husbands” who did not want or feel able to relinquish the “families” they had founded in the bush; in many cases the abductees’ own families would not have welcomed them back.

Sexual violence peaked during the rebels’ military operations, which occurred countrywide as the rebels sought to capture more territory. After capturing a town or a village, the combatants rewarded themselves by looting and by raping women and girls, many of whom they later abducted. Crimes of sexual violence committed during and following military operations, such as “Operation No Living Thing” and “Operation Pay Yourself”

¹⁰¹ Ibid., pp. 3-4. PHR’s calculation is not inclusive of all categories of victim: to the IDP women reporting conflict-related sexual violence, PHR added non-conflict-related sexual violence among non-displaced women, assuming a prevalence rate of 9 percent.

¹⁰² Human Rights Watch interview, Foriah, March 6, 2002.

¹⁰³ Human Rights Watch interview, Bo, February 9, 2000.

that took place in 1998, have been documented by Human Rights Watch.¹⁰⁴ Human Rights Watch has also extensively documented the January 1999 invasion of Freetown by the RUF/AFRC, during which sexual violence was systematically committed against women and girls on a massive scale. The sexual violence committed during January 1999 serves as an illustration of the widespread nature of sexual violence committed by the rebel forces. Among the perpetrators were child combatants, and many of the victims were also children. Members of the Small Boys Units (SBUs) within the rebel forces were known to be particularly cruel and committed egregious human rights abuses.

Although there are no exact figures for the number of women and girls subjected to sexual violence during the January 1999 invasion, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) and the Sierra Leone chapter of the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE Sierra Leone), a nongovernmental organization that has been treating survivors of sexual violence since 1999, provided medical treatment and counseling to 1,862 female survivors of sexual violence who had been raped and/or abducted during the invasion. According to MSF, 55 percent of these survivors reported having been gang raped and 200 had become pregnant.¹⁰⁵

As the RUF/AFRC rebels controlled most of the countryside apart from pockets of government-controlled areas in the south and some key towns, including Bumbuna and Freetown, at different times throughout the war, women and girls living in these rebel-held areas were also subjected to sexual violence when the rebels went on patrol or simply sought to assert their domination over the population. Women and girls in government-controlled areas also lived in fear of rebel hit-and-run attacks, during which many women and girls were subjected to sexual violence and abducted. Women and girls residing in Freetown were “spared” until the January 1999 invasion by the RUF/AFRC.

Pro-Government Forces

Human Rights Watch has not documented any cases of sexual violence by the Sierra Leone Army (SLA) prior to the time of the 1997 AFRC coup. According to the survey conducted by Physicians for Human Rights, of seventy-five women and girls who reported having been raped and identified the rapists’ affiliation, only three said they were raped by SLA soldiers.¹⁰⁶ This may in part be due to the fact that survivors would have often found it difficult to distinguish between the rebel factions and the SLA. With the “sobel” phenomenon, the SLA soldiers would disguise themselves as rebels (the rebels were also known to disguise themselves as members of the SLA or the ECOMOG peacekeeping force).

Human Rights Watch has documented only a few cases of sexual violence committed by the pro-government Civil Defence Forces (CDF). The CDF movement consists of groups of traditional hunters and young men organized into militia. They were initially only deployed by the government in their own chiefdoms, in order to ensure their loyalty and discipline and make the best use of their superior bush knowledge.¹⁰⁷ The government provided training, weapons and food to the units. The relatively small number of identified cases of sexual violence perpetrated by the CDF may be related to the CDF’s internal rules that stipulate that warriors cannot have sexual intercourse before going to battle, as they would lose some of their protective powers that are bestowed on them during their initiation ceremonies. These powers are meant to make the fighters invincible and immortal. During the initiation ceremonies, the fighters are also instructed not to harm civilians, and required to take an oath to that effect. Thus, it is likely that the pro-government forces did not actually commit sexual violence on a widespread and systematic basis; however, the low number of identified cases may also be partially due to Human Rights Watch’s human resource constraints, faced with the overwhelming number of abuses committed by the rebel forces. Research on the CDF was mainly conducted in the south where the Kamajors, the

¹⁰⁴ See Human Rights Watch, “Sowing Terror: Atrocities against Civilians in Sierra Leone,” *A Human Rights Watch Report*, July 1998.

¹⁰⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with MSF, Freetown, March, 2000.

¹⁰⁶ PHR report, p. 48. and Table 5 on p. 52. See also Binta Mansaray, “The Invisible Human Rights Abuses in Sierra Leone: Conflict-related Rape, Sexual Slavery and Other Forms of Sexual Violence,” June 2001. On file with UNAMSIL human rights section.

¹⁰⁷ The Kamajors operate predominately in the south and east, the Tamaboros in the far north, the Gbettis in the north and the Donzos in the far east. See also “Background” section.

largest and most powerful group of the CDF, are based. In recent years, as the Kamajors have been moved away from their villages of origin and the influence of their traditional chiefs, they have become increasingly undisciplined and cases of rape by Kamajors have become more common.

Peacekeeping Forces

Human Rights Watch has documented several cases of sexual violence by UNAMSIL peacekeepers, including the rape of a twelve-year-old girl in Bo by a soldier of the Guinean peacekeeping contingent in March 2001 and the gang rape of a woman by two Ukrainian peacekeepers in April 2002 near Kenema (see below). There appears to be reluctance on the part of UNAMSIL to investigate and take disciplinary measures against the perpetrators. Reports of rape by ECOMOG peacekeepers, the majority of whom were Nigerian, were rare.

Both ECOMOG and UNAMSIL peacekeepers have sexually exploited women and solicited child prostitutes.

Sexual Violence Committed by the Rebel Forces

“Virgination”—Targeting Young Girls

The rebel forces subjected women and girls of all ages, ethnic groups, and socioeconomic classes to individual and gang rape. Although the rebel forces raped indiscriminately irrespective of age, the rebels favored girls and young women whom they believed to be virgins. This was evident not only by their actions, but was also explicitly stated by them as they chose their victims. As in many countries, Sierra Leonean society places a high value on virginity. Girls who have been “virginated” and are therefore no longer virgins, are considered less eligible for marriage. M.B., a fifteen-year-old girl from Freetown, described how RUF/AFRC rebels deliberately sought out virgins for violation during the January 1999 invasion of Freetown:

We were hiding in the mosque when two rebels dressed in civilian [clothing] entered. It was dark but they shone their flashlights looking for girls and said, “We are coming for young girls ... for virgins, even if they tie their heads like old grandmothers, we will find them.” They also said that if the people did not hand over the young girls, they would open fire on all of us.¹⁰⁸

Some victims explained that female rebels physically checked girls to see whether they were virgins.¹⁰⁹ M.W., a thirty-eight-year old nurse who was captured by the RUF/AFRC during the January 1999 invasion of Freetown and forced to treat wounded rebels and civilians, said that the youngest rape victim she treated was “a little nine-year-old from Calaba Town [an area of Freetown]. Her perineum was bleeding and had been badly torn. Every day we gave her sit baths and she eventually recovered.”¹¹⁰ The consequences of sexual violence for virgins can be particularly severe as these testimonies highlight, although mature women also reported experiencing similar consequences.¹¹¹

R.T. was about sixteen when she was brutally raped vaginally and anally by ten RUF rebels in the forest near Koidu in Kono district in January 1997. R.T. developed vasico-vaginal fistula (VVF) and vasico-rectal fistula (VRF) from her brutal gang rape:

I was hiding in the bush with my parents and two older women when the RUF found our hiding place. I was the only young woman and the RUF accused me of having an SLA husband. I was still a virgin. I had only just started my periods and recently gone through secret society. There were ten rebels, including four child soldiers, armed with two RPGs [rocket propelled grenades] and AK-47s. The rebels did not use their real names and wore ski masks so only their eyes were

¹⁰⁸ Human Rights Watch interview, Freetown, May 1, 1999.

¹⁰⁹ It should be noted that virginity can not be medically proven.

¹¹⁰ Human Rights Watch interview, Freetown, October 21, 1999. The victim probably suffered from vasico-rectal fistula (a tear or opening in the tissue between the rectum and the vagina, usually resembling an open blood vessel), which would have left her incontinent.

¹¹¹ International humanitarian law prohibits all rape and other acts of sexual violence, of course irrespective of whether the victim was a virgin or not.

visible. The rebels said that they wanted to take me away. My mother pleaded with them, saying that I was her only child and to leave me with her. The rebels said that “If we do not take your daughter, we will either rape or kill her.” The rebels ordered my parents and the two other women to move away. Then they told me to undress. I was raped by the ten rebels, one after the other. They lined up, waiting for their turn and watched while I was being raped vaginally and in my anus. One of the child combatants was about twelve years. The three other child soldiers were about fifteen. The rebels threatened to kill me if I cried.

My parents, who could hear what was happening, cried but could do nothing to protect me. I was bleeding a lot from my vagina and anus and was in so much pain. My mother washed me in warm water and salt but I bled for three days. I can no longer control my bladder or bowels as I was torn below. We stayed in the bush until ECOMOG took over Koidu. When we came out of the bush, even adults would run away from me and refused to eat with me because I smelled so badly. I had an operation in 2000 but it did not work. Before I got a catheter in 2001, I had no friends, as I smelled too bad. I am still in pain and have a problem with vaginal discharge. I also have nightmares and feel discouraged.¹¹²

This extreme sexual violence is illustrated also by the following testimony by F.B., who describes the resultant deaths of eight young girls in one Liberian refugee camp alone (no doubt many others died from similar treatment during the war). F.B.’s testimony also illustrates the RUF’s connection to Liberia and the role of Liberian mercenaries in the RUF movement. F.B. was a ten-year-old girl living in Mano village in Kailahun district near the Liberian border when the RUF accused civilians in her village of helping the SLA. Her family decided to flee to Liberia in November 1991, but was fired upon by the rebels as they fled. At least fifteen civilians were killed, including her father and several women with babies on their backs:

Only six of my family survived; my mother, one brother, two sisters, one uncle, and me. After hiding and fleeing through the bush for three days, Mohammed, my uncle, found someone with a boat to help us cross over to Liberia. We crossed into Vahun where there was a sort of refugee camp. We were there for two weeks and terrible things happened. We thought we had escaped from the rebels but we found many of them there. They controlled the camp. Even though food was being air dropped, the rebels took it all. They took everything we had, our money, salt, and all our food. The rebels were mixed Sierra Leoneans and Liberians.

About a week after arriving, the rebels came into our house in the evening and took my fifteen-year-old sister away. My mother stayed up the whole night. The next day my uncle went from hut to hut looking for her. He called her name and heard her groaning inside a hut. He picked her up and carried her home. When my mom saw her she burst out crying. I was only ten and didn’t know anything about man business. My sister was crying all the time and couldn’t walk. She cried, “Oh mother, I’m going to die.” My mother just held her and told her it would be O.K. My uncle exchanged five gallons of palm oil so we could get some salt, which my mother later mixed with water and had my sister sit in. She was bleeding a lot. She told me they had tied her mouth and raped her many times, but I didn’t know what rape was.

After that my uncle shaved my head, gave me trousers and made me look like a boy. When I was walking around a camp I saw a few girls aged under twelve years old, lying on the ground with their legs spread open and blood coming out between their legs. Some had their dresses pulled up and others had cloth stuffed in their mouths. During the two weeks I was in Vahun I saw eight girls like this. Sometimes their family would come and wrap them in white so I knew they had

¹¹² Human Rights Watch interview, IDP camp called “Lebanese Camp,” March 2, 2002. Women and girls with obstetric fistulae suffer from a constant wetness that results in genital ulcerations, frequent infections and a terrible odor. These fistulae generally require surgery although occasionally they spontaneously heal.

died. Other times no one picked them up and they stayed there for days until someone buried them. There were so many girls who had lost their parents and were there alone, so no one would come for them.

I saw the rebels catching young and even older women. Once they caught an old woman. She said, “No, leave me. I’m too old for this business.” But they made fun of her saying, “Oh look, we have caught a young *Bundu* [initiate into secret society] girl here.” Other times I heard women screaming in the middle of the night. Everyday people were dying—from hunger, illness, and this rape. After that I had dreams about a dead person coming to hurt me.

The only reason we stayed that long was because people were still moving across the border and we figured things were even worse in Sierra Leone. Besides, the rebels stopped us from going back home, and we did not know anyone in Liberia so we would have died of hunger.¹¹³

M.M. was only eleven when she was abducted, together with her aunt and her aunt’s four children, when Koidu was attacked during the dry season¹¹⁴ in 1994. M.M. had not yet experienced her first period or been initiated into secret society:

I was raped by seven child combatants, who were aged between fifteen and sixteen years old, on the way to Kailahun. I was raped in my vagina and anally. Other rebels and also civilians saw me being raped but the civilians were too afraid to protect me. My aunt put native herbs on my genital area but I bled for five days. The RUF had medicine but would not give it to us civilians. My aunt carried me on her back, as I could not walk because of the pain. It took us five days to reach Kailahun. A rebel commander wanted my aunt to be his wife but she refused so he killed her. In Kailahun, I was not raped again. Since my rape, I have only experienced irregular periods and my belly is always swollen like I am pregnant.¹¹⁵

M.F. was abducted from Koinadugu town in Koinadugu district in September 1998 when the RUF/AFRC attacked the town. She was only thirteen at the time and was brutally raped both vaginally and anally by five RUF rebels. During the same attack, the RUF killed over thirty older women:

I was only thirteen and a virgin. They forced me to go down on my hands and knees with my bottom in the air and raped me both vaginally and anally. Five rebels raped me on that first day. My clothes were bloodied and it hurt to urinate and defecate afterwards. The rebels who raped me promised to take me to Freetown and give me money and dresses. They gave me nothing after they used me. I was given to one of them, Mohammed, as his wife. We stayed in Koinadugu town for four days. I was with my parents but could not tell them about the rapes although my mother heard me being raped.

The RUF said they came to kill civilians who were ungrateful and talked bad about the RUF. The RUF cut my grandmother with a knife and beat her with a pestle. She died. The RUF told the older women to go to the mosque to attend a ceremony. More than thirty women, some of whom had children, went to the mosque. The RUF set fire to the mosque. Another old woman was rolled into a mat and the mat was set on fire.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Human Rights Watch interview, Bo, February 9, 2000. *Bundu* is one of the secret societies that initiate girls and perform female genital cutting.

¹¹⁴ The dry season in Sierra Leone is approximately between November and May.

¹¹⁵ Human Rights Watch interview, Lebanese Camp, March 2, 2002.

¹¹⁶ Human Rights Watch interview, Kabala, March 7, 2002.

Rape Victims Subjected to Multiple Human Rights Abuses

Rapes were often preceded by or followed by other human rights abuses against the victim, her family members and/or her community. Hardly any family was unscathed by abuse during the war. The PHR report highlighted that 94 percent of the 991 female-headed households surveyed had experienced at least one serious human rights abuse during the ten-year period.¹¹⁷ M.P., who was twenty-four years old when the RUF attacked Jaiweii village in Kailahun district in May 1991, testified:

I was captured together with my husband, my three young children and other civilians as we were fleeing from the RUF when they entered Jaiweii. Two rebels asked to have sex with me but when I refused, they beat me with the butt of their guns. My legs were bruised and I lost my three front teeth. Then the two rebels raped me in front of my children and other civilians. Many other women were raped in public places. I also heard of a woman from Kalu village near Jaiweii being raped only one week after having given birth. The RUF stayed in Jaiweii village for four months and I was raped by three other wicked rebels throughout this period.

The rebels, who spoke Liberian English, said they were fighting for the SLPP to be in power. When the RUF first entered Jaiweii, they accused my husband of giving information to the SLA, so they tied his hands behind his back and beat him mercilessly. They kept him tied up and continued to beat him. After six days, he died and they threatened to kill me if I cried. The RUF also shot three other men whom they accused of giving information to the SLA. My three children all died because they became sick and there was no medicine. The older one who was five years died one week before the two younger ones who died on the same day. They were only three and seventeen months old.¹¹⁸

M.P. added that the RUF had said that they could do whatever they want with women whom they “owned.” A.J., a fourteen-year-old student, was abducted by the RUF from Pujehun and was held by them from February to May 1994. She was first tortured, caged, and then brutally raped:

On February 3, 1994 at around 8:00 p.m., the RUF attacked Pujehun. There was lots of firing because the SLA was deployed here. As we were fleeing, we ran straight into a group of over one hundred RUF. They were dressed in civilian clothes and nearly all had guns. Among those rebels was one named Maliki, who was actually from Pujehun. RUF Commander Bai Bureh started to select several people from our group. As he was doing the selecting, Maliki told him to choose me because if they let me go, I would go back to Pujehun and tell the SLA that he was there. They chose eight of us, four young men and four young women, including three of my cousins. They told the rest of the civilians to go back into the bush and said that if they found them the next day they would be killed. We were taken to their camp.

Two weeks later, the four young men managed to escape. When the rebels found out, they blamed us for what happened. They said the boys were really SLA soldiers that were there to get information on the RUF. I was then tortured by a Liberian RUF commander named C.O. Rackin. He said I was “bright and bold” and must have known how they escaped. He interrogated me, asking me if the boys were SLA’s. During the interrogation he cut me in twenty-one places with a knife including a deep cut on my left breast. He drew a small, small circle in the dirt and told me to step inside and walk around in it. Any part of my body left outside he stabbed with a knife.

Then a commander called Momoh Rogers, who was the battalion commander, ordered that my cousin and I be put in a wooden cage smaller than one square meter. He said that if our brothers

¹¹⁷ PHR gave the following examples of serious human rights abuses: beating, bodily injury, amputation, torture, killing, forced labor, captured for less than one day, sexual assault without rape, rape, abduction, burned dwelling, looting. PHR report, pp. 45-47.

¹¹⁸ Human Rights Watch interview, Lebanese IDP Camp, March 2, 2002.

who had gone to tell the SLA came to attack, it would be very easy for them to kill us. The cage was what the village people used to store their husk rice in and it had almost no ventilation. We were only let out to defecate. They told me I had to pee on myself in the box. They poured water into the cracks but it was never enough and was dirty. Sometimes they dropped cassava and boiled bananas into the cage, feeding us like we were animals. The stab wounds I had got infected and I got sores all over my body. They were painful and smelled very badly.

After about two weeks in the cage, one of Patrick's bodyguards took me to C.O. Patrick's house. When I saw him, I told him about the sores on my feet and breasts. I told him I was in pain and asked for treatment. C.O. Patrick told me to shut up and ordered me to go into the house. He turned to his bodyguard and said that if I refused, I was to be taken behind the house and executed. When we got inside, Patrick told me to lie down on the floor. Then he forced himself upon me. I was a virgin. He was violent and rough. Then he told me to turn over and give him my behind. But I told him I could not lie down because my breast was so swollen. So he brought a chair and told me to stand up and lean onto the chair. Then he stood behind me and tried to shove his penis into my vagina. The first time he did this I fell over onto my chest, which was so painful. I started bleeding from my chest wound. Then he told me to get up and said if I did not hold the chair firmly he was going to kill me. He took a long time doing that thing to me. I was crying from the pain of my breast and because it was painful, being the first time. He told me to shut up. As he was sexing me he accused my brothers of being spies and said he was going to kill me and that he was only waiting for the others to come from the frontline to do it.

C.O. Patrick asked if I had done sex before and I told him "No, I am a school-going girl." Then he said, "Well, tonight you are going to have sex, because you are going to be killed and you should do it before you die." I was terrified. I started crying. All I could think of was my death and all that guy could do was do that thing to me. After he was satisfied, I was taken back to the cage.¹¹⁹

A.M. was eighteen when she fled Freetown with her two children, two sisters, and brother after the 1997 AFRC coup. Not only was she first forced to watch the execution of three male civilians by Nigerian ECOMOG soldiers in Fadugu, Koinadugu district, but also the rebel execution of her brother and sister. The RUF tried to get her to eat her brother's liver and heart. Her sister's head was also placed on her legs:

After the rebels were driven out of Kabala by ECOMOG, the rebels spread to different towns, including Mongo, Badela, and Dankawali. One day I went with my brother to wash in the stream, as I was afraid to go by myself. We heard shots, which my brother thought must have come from ECOMOG soldiers. I was afraid. We met three rebels with guns who accused my brother of being a SLA soldier. "Superman" was the commander. They beat my brother with their gun butts and took off his clothes. "Superman" forced my brother to go down on his hands and knees and made me sit beside him. They cut his neck from the back and then took an axe and cut his back. They removed his heart and liver and put them on my hands. The heart had more shape and the liver was flat. They tried to force me to eat them but I refused to. Another rebel, Colonel Titus, a mercenary who spoke Liberian English, arrived and told the others not to force me to eat my brother's heart and liver. He said he would show me how they will deal with me. He said they should abduct me. They took me back into the village of Dankawali where we met my grandmother on her veranda. She was tied up and she said that another rebel commander, Hakim, had carried my two children and small sister away in the first group.

The rebels had abducted another group of twenty-five persons and held them by the cotton tree. My big sister was under the cotton tree. I told her that the rebels killed our brother. Colonel Titus slapped my sister and told her not to cry. They killed my sister and two other women and placed

¹¹⁹ Human Rights Watch interview, Pujehun, February 12, 2002.

their cut off heads on my legs. The rebels also locked some villagers in the houses and set all houses on fire.¹²⁰

H.K., a sixteen-year-old student, was abducted from Freetown during the January 1999 invasion. She was taken to Makeni where she was “virginated” and forced to be the wife of Colonel “Jaja,” a twenty-two-year-old half-Liberian who threatened to kill her entire family if she escaped. H.K. was brutally tortured after Colonel “Jaja” accused her of stealing his money, which was in fact taken at gunpoint from her by “Superman,” a notorious rebel commander and his bodyguard called “Yellowman.” She described what happened afterwards:

Then the rebels took me into a stream and tied me to a tree in the water. They told people to beat me. I was in water up to my head. “Jaja” said the boys should cut down the tree and let me drown. I was there for several days, maybe up to a week or so. Once a water snake swam by and ate my foot in the water. When I was tied there, Jaja cut my neck and put cocaine into my body. He also gave me marijuana cigarettes to smoke. Finally he untied me and put me in an old container where I stayed for several days. While in the guardroom Jaja and Alhaji “Cold Boots” came several times to give me drugs.¹²¹

The rebels often used psychological torture against civilians by, for example, making them clap or sing in praise while watching family and friends being killed, raped or mutilated. They further exerted their domination over civilians by not allowing them to show any emotion, and threatening to kill anyone who did. In 1997, when K.M. was abducted by the RUF from Kabala in Koinadugu district, her brother was shot in front of her. The RUF accused him of planning to escape. She was not allowed to show any emotion and was forced to throw his body in the river. In 1999, K.M.’s husband was killed in front of her by RUF Captain Solvelar in Yomandu in Tonkolili district, when a child combatant accused her husband of not doing his job properly. As Captain Solvelar shot K.M.’s husband, he warned her not to cry otherwise she would be killed. Later in the same year, K.M.’s baby was killed in front of her in Kambia district by a rebel captain who wanted to rape her:

Captain “Danger” pulled my baby from my back and before I could do anything, he sliced my child in two. I was told not to cry as otherwise I would be killed as well.¹²²

Rape with Objects and Other Sexual Torture, including Sexual Mutilation

The rebels frequently used objects, including weapons, burning wood, and hot oil, to rape or otherwise torture (including sexually torture) women and girls, sometimes resulting in their death. In 1994, J.M., an elderly man from Giehun village in Kailahun district, witnessed the killing of nine civilians accused of plotting to set Foday Sankoh up for a government ambush. One of those civilians, a woman named Janneh, was alleged to have been one of Sankoh’s “wives.” J.M. described how rebels brought her into the village square, forced her to lie down and then poured boiling palm oil into her vagina and ears:

The RUF rounded up about seventy of us civilians, including Abi and Janneh, and accused us of making a plot to arrest Sankoh. The commander said we were to be killed but that first he would do an investigation. First he called upon Abi who accused Janneh of calling people in Freetown to arrange something against Sankoh. So Janneh was the first to be killed. The rebels grabbed her, stripped her and threw her down in front of the whole village. Several of them pulled her legs apart and held her tightly. They poured a pan of boiling palm oil into her vagina and then into her ears. This terrified us. She started shaking all over and was bleeding from the nostrils and mouth. While on the ground they struck her with a gun and danced around her saying, “When you were loving with the old man [Sankoh], you didn’t show us any respect, but now your time for punishment has come.” She died about an hour later. The rebels said they were sent by Sankoh who was living in Kailahun about seven miles. Nothing small or big happened without his

¹²⁰ Human Rights Watch interview, Kabala, March 9, 2002.

¹²¹ Human Rights Watch interview, Freetown, October 12, 1999.

¹²² Human Rights Watch interview, Kabala, March 7 and 9, 2002.

knowledge. After killing Janneh they poured hot oil in the mouths, eyes and noses of three other villagers, and then shot five others. I guess Janneh must have known all of Sankoh's secrets.¹²³

M.F., the thirteen-year-old who was raped by five rebels (see above, p. 30), witnessed how her stepmother's mother was beaten by the RUF with a long pestle in Momoria village in Koinadugu district in 1998. The rebels then shoved the pestle into her anus. M.F. said that her stepmother's mother was still alive when they left her with the pestle in her anus, which was bleeding.¹²⁴ One woman also reportedly had pepper put in her vagina as the RUF suspected her of being the wife of a SLA soldier. Rebels inserted burning firewood into the vagina of twenty-five-year-old F.T. and another woman during the January 1999 invasion of Freetown:

On 21 January 1999, I went to a neighbor's house to buy rice, as I had not eaten for over two days. The rebels had been in the area and as I bought two cups from my neighbor, we heard the rebels coming again. My neighbor told me to leave quickly so that he could lock up his house. When I left with another woman and a man, we met a group of ten rebels who surrounded us. They were dressed in full combat [uniform] and asked us where we were going in Krio.

The rebels asked us what we could give them, so the man took out all his money and gave it to them. He was then allowed to go. As the other woman and I did not have any money, they told us to take off our clothes at gunpoint. We begged them not to harm us. The rebels then told us to lie on the dirt ground and open our legs. They put their guns to our throats and stomachs to make sure that we followed their order. Once we were on the ground all the rebels surrounded us, and a tall rebel well over six feet went to the kitchen of Parliament House and took a piece of burning firewood from the fire. He then squatted down and with his two hands inserted it into my vagina. Then he returned to the fire and got another piece and then a third. I felt like I was being stabbed inside.

He did the same to the other woman. While they did this to us, I heard them say "This is the way we are going to fuck you. We are not able to do to you half of the things we do to people in the provinces. You bastard civilians, you hypocrites; as soon as you see ECOMOG, you start to point fingers at us."

They left shortly afterwards and I managed to drag myself to a nearby house with blood gushing from my vagina. I went to a clinic where the doctor removed bits of firewood from my vagina. I feel so unhappy and fear my husband will find another wife to satisfy his sexual desire. The treatment is very slow and I do not have money for treatment. There are sores inside me. I can not sleep at night or walk more than one hundred yards.¹²⁵

H.K., the sixteen-year-old Freetown student forced to be the wife of Colonel "Jaja," had an umbrella shoved up her vagina as part of the torture that followed her being accused by "Jaja" of stealing his money:

When Jaja came home, I told him what happened and instead of believing me, he blamed me and accused me of having stolen the money. He dragged me out of the house into the street and started beating me. He caused a great scene. He stripped me, tied me up and hit me again and again with a stick. He also beat with the butt of his gun. Then he took an umbrella and pushed it up inside me two times—he shoved it up into my privates—hard. Many people were standing around watching and even some of the other rebels told him to leave me. He went crazy. He started shooting up in the air. I lay there for a few days, naked and bleeding. I was three months pregnant but after this I aborted. I bled for over a month. Once a boy named Junior came by and put his hand inside my vagina. He brought out his hand, which was all bloody and said, "Look at

¹²³ Human Rights Watch interview, Freetown, November 11, 1999.

¹²⁴ Human Rights Watch interview, Kabala, March 7, 2002.

¹²⁵ Human Rights Watch interview, Freetown, May 21, 1999.

your blood, you're sick." All the civilians seeing this felt sorry for me, but of course they couldn't say anything.

Rebel forces were known for mutilating pregnant mothers to find out the sex of the unborn child. According to witnesses, they would bet large sums of money, and the rebel who had rightly guessed the sex of the unborn child after the women's belly had been cut open would keep the money. Some women were cut open alive, but sometimes the women were killed before the rebels cut their abdomens open. K.M. who was abducted during the 1997 attack on Kabala, witnessed the killing and sexual mutilation of a pregnant woman near Kono in Kono district (see above):

They captured a Koranko woman who was pregnant. Two RUF, Captain "Danger" and C.O. "Cut Hand" argued about the sex of the child. They bet 100,000 leones [approximately U.S.\$50] on the sex of the child. Then they shot the woman dead and opened her belly. The RUF held up the baby with the placenta, which they shook in the air. The baby cried and then died. I wanted to run away but my husband said that the civilians would think that I was a rebel and that they would kill me.¹²⁶

Fifteen-year-old F.K. was raped by the RUF in Lunsar in Port Loko district in May 2000 and witnessed the sexual mutilation of a pregnant woman as well as the killing of her three male relatives, and six amputations:

I was raped when the RUF attacked Lunsar in May 2000 by four rebels including one man called "Put Fire," who had made me his rebel wife from 1997 to 2000. One of the other rebels was called "Kill Man No Blood." While I was being raped, the rebels found my three male relatives who were hiding under their beds. They stabbed them with their bayonets and then shot them. They raped me in my bedroom and then brought me into the living room. Three men and three women were also brought into the room. They were put in line and then the rebels gave them the choice between their life or their money. The rebels strip searched each one and then killed them on the spot. The group was forced to watch as each was killed.

One of the women was six months pregnant and slightly disabled. She was last in the row. When it was her turn, she was stabbed in the neck and fell down. The rebels started to discuss whether she was carrying a boy or a girl. They bet on the sex of the baby so they decided to check it. Kill Man No Blood split open her belly. It was a boy. One of the other rebels took the baby out and showed everyone that it was a boy. The baby was still alive when he threw it on the ground next to the woman but died shortly after. As the rebels took me away, I saw six men who had just been amputated. Some had an arm cut off below the elbow, others above the elbow. They were screaming, "Please kill us, don't leave us this way."¹²⁷

Sexual Violence with the Added Element of Violating Cultural Norms

The rebel forces have used sexual violence as a weapon to terrorize, humiliate and punish, and to force the civilian population into submission. The rebels sought complete domination by doing whatever they wanted with women, including sexual acts that, by having the additional element of assailing cultural norms, violated not only the victim but also her family or the wider society. The rebels have forced civilians to commit incest, one of the biggest taboos in any society. One survivor witnessed the RUF trying to force a brother to rape his sister in Sambanya village in Koinadugu district. When the brother refused to do so, the rebels shot him.¹²⁸ Fathers were forced to rape their daughters. Fathers were forced to dance naked in front of their daughters and vice versa. In Sierra Leone, postmenopausal and breastfeeding women are presumed not to be sexually active, but rebels violated this cultural norm by raping old women and breastfeeding mothers. Child combatants also raped women who could have been their mothers or in some instances even their grandmothers. Many rapes were committed in

¹²⁶ Human Rights Watch interview, March 7 and 9, 2002.

¹²⁷ Human Rights Watch interview, Freetown, May 25, 2000.

¹²⁸ Human Rights Watch interview, Kabala, March 9, 2002.

full view of other rebels and civilians. Victims were also raped in mosques, churches, and sacred places of initiation.

During the January 1999 invasion of Freetown, A.C. was forced to watch the rape of his daughter by RUF/AFRC rebels:

The rebel in charge was a thirty-year-old ex-SLA known as “Amos.” I knew him from before. He had plasters on his face. The others were called “Junior” and “Blood,” who did most of the talking. They gathered five young girls together, including my fifteen-year-old daughter, and put them in the back room. They asked us for five million leones [approximately U.S. \$2,500] otherwise they threatened our girls would be killed. We managed to collect 350,000 leones [approximately U.S. \$175], which we gave to them.

Then they brought out the girls. They pushed my daughter and a seventeen-year-old on the bed in the parlor and started tearing off their clothes. I peeked through a crack in the door and could see them fighting with my daughter. They put clothes in her mouth so she would not scream. The rebels punched, slapped her and knocked her head with the butt of their rifle. Then one of them opened the door and asked who the fathers of the girls were. One of them took us and lined us up right in front of the bed and said, “Don’t you want to see what we do to your daughters?” We begged them to leave them alone but they said, “If you continue to talk, we will burn this house and kill everyone of you.” A rebel had his gun pointed at us the whole time and there were two more at the door. Amos raped my daughter and Blood raped another girl. Then the rebel with the gun and the one guarding took their turns. My daughter was crying but they covered her mouth and told her to shut up. Blood then told the girls to get dressed and they took them away.¹²⁹

S.G., a fifty-year-old widow, was raped by a teenage rebel called Commander “Don’t Blame God” and subsequently had both arms amputated in Matru village in Bo district prior to the 1996 elections:

I pleaded but Commander Don’t Blame God said he was going to kill me if I didn’t lie down. I told him it had been such a long, long time since I had sex. During the rape I was pleading with him saying, “Don’t kill me, please don’t kill me.” He was so rough with me. Then he took me up a big dune above Matru village. As we were walking, he said he was going to kill me. I pleaded with him and he then said, “I’ve changed my mind, I’m going to give you a letter.” Once we got there I saw many more rebels, about twenty. I was stripped naked down to my underwear. It was humiliating. Then they asked me to sit down and wait. Commander Don’t Blame God said: “I have a letter for you but wait for the cutlass man to come.” Then the one with the machete came and told me to put out my left arm. It took them three chops with the cutlass to cut off my arm. After this I begged them not to cut my other arm but they struggled with me and a rebel held it down and cut it off. The cutlass man said, “We belong to Foday Sankoh’s group.” Then one of them took my left arm and put it under my vagina and kicked me twice in the vagina ... very, very hard.¹³⁰

D.T. was gang raped by a child combatant and three other RUF rebels in the rainy season in 2000 near Foriah village in Koinadugu district:

I was hiding in the bush from the rebels with about fifteen other villagers when the rebels found us. The rebels separated me from the others because my nine-month-old son was crying. A child combatant ordered me at gunpoint to put my son down. He then raped me. I do not know how young he was but he had not yet been circumcised. He was maybe as young as twelve. Then three other rebel men raped me. When I was being raped, I made no movement as they might think that

¹²⁹ Human Rights Watch interview, Freetown, May 3, 1999.

¹³⁰ Human Rights Watch interview, Bo, March 2, 2000.

I was trying to resist. I was bleeding after being raped by four males. After being raped, the rebels forced me to carry a heavy load and walk to Kania town. I escaped the same day and returned to the farm. I explained to my husband that I had been raped but he was happy to accept me back.¹³¹

R.F., a thirty-three-year-old farmer, explained how she felt after she was gang raped by West Side Boys, including four child combatants, at Petifu village in Port Loko district in November 1999:

Four children between ten and twelve years used me. They were so small I could barely feel them inside me. The small ones tried to imitate the older ones and one of them kept saying, "I'm trying it, I'm trying it." It was the war that brought that humiliation. I kept comparing them to my own children; my first-born son is ten. I forgave them because they are children. It was not of their own making. They must have been drugged.¹³²

In December 1994, thirty-year-old A.B. was abducted with six other women from Yonibani in Tonkolili district by the RUF when they launched a surprise attack with the collusion of the SLA. The RUF made the women carry looted items to their camp, where A.B. stayed for a week before escaping. She herself was repeatedly raped by two rebels, including one Liberian, and witnessed the rape of an old woman with gray hair:

At least four of the women I had been abducted with were raped. Before they raped me, the rebels went for an old woman with white hair. When she realized what they wanted, she took off her headscarf to show her white hair and said, "I'm old, I have stopped having sex." At first the commander said the rebels should not touch her because she was old. But the other rebels got annoyed and started insulting the commander saying, "Fine, you can fuck any woman you want, anytime you want, but now that we have one we want, you say no." The commander finally said that they could go ahead so all five rebels, including a small boy of fifteen years raped her. One was on his knees with his trousers down while the others stood around watching.

When I saw that I felt sick. When I saw a young boy and that old woman, I realized they could do anything and that they were going to do the same thing to me. But I guess I was lucky as only two did it to me.¹³³

S.J., a wealthy forty-five-year-old woman, was raped by RUF rebels, including a child combatant, and then burnt in late January 1999 in Manjoro village in Bombali district:

Thirty rebels attacked our village. The rebels said that we, the civilians don't want peace. I saw them kill three people and were it not for God, I would have been the fourth. Then they burned thirteen houses and looted all our things. I ran with my four children to the house in the bush where we tend to the cows. We slept there with the cows for a few days but then seven rebels surprised us there. The commander of this group was called C.O. Caca Scatter. He was a Mende. Others were speaking Mandingo and Temne.

They started stealing what few possessions I had and then C.O. Caca Scatter said that I should be raped. When I heard that order I pleaded, "Please, don't do that one to me." But they said they would do whatever they wanted. Four raped me and the last one to rape me was a fifteen-year-old. I could have given birth to him, he was so young. He put a knife to my throat and said he was going to kill me but the C.O. said I shouldn't be killed.

Then they tied my hands behind me and C.O. Caca Scatter burnt me. He scooped up hot charcoal from the fire we had been cooking with and tried to burn my face with it. I struggled and turned

¹³¹ Human Rights Watch interview, Foriah, March 6, 2002. The rainy season starts in May and ends in October.

¹³² Human Rights Watch interview, Port Loko, November 27, 1999.

¹³³ Human Rights Watch interview, Bo, February 9, 2000.

my face so he burned my chest instead. He did this four times on my front and seven times on my back. Each time they picked up the charcoal and held it on my body until it burned deep into my skin. They left me with my skin burning but I could not roll on the ground for fear it would catch fire and burn me even more. When they started to burn me I pleaded for them to kill me. I started screaming and my children came around to try and save me. They took two of my children, gave them looted property to carry and took them away. That is the last I have heard of them.¹³⁴

T.B., a fifty-year-old woman was abducted from Freetown during the January 1999 invasion and made to walk to Magburaka in Bombali district. There, a RUF/AFRC rebel raped her until she developed an abscess in her vagina:

In Magburaka, I was first raped by three rebels. While doing it they called me a bastard child and that civilians wanted to burn them all alive. After that I was taken as a wife by a commander called “Bird Bod” who was in his thirties. He raped me every day. They were always on drugs. He said he didn’t have a wife so I cooked and washed for him. He roughed and beat me and used to put his fingers violently up inside me. He would get an erection while he was doing this and would sometimes rape me afterwards. I think this is how I started to get boils—I had five or six of them. It started to create an ulcer. Over the two months I was with them it got worse and worse. It was terribly painful but Commander Bird still raped me and put his fingers up me even though I had this problem. I don’t know why the RUF would treat an old woman like me in such a way.

The abscess got very swollen and started to hang down between my thighs. I could barely walk. It started to smell very bad and it was then that the commander finally drove me away. I walked for two to three weeks through the bush going from village to village until I got to Masiaka. In every village I went, the women felt for me and would give me food and make a bath of herbs and salt for me to soak in. Then when I felt strong enough, I would walk to the next village. When I reached Freetown, I received medical treatment. My husband has accepted me back and feels sorry for me.¹³⁵

Breastfeeding mothers were also not spared by the rebel factions even though in Sierra Leonean culture, women are not supposed to have sexual intercourse until their children have been weaned and can walk, which can take up to three years.¹³⁶ Sierra Leoneans believe that doing so will weaken the breast milk and the ability of the child to fend off infection. Women whose infants died from malnutrition after they—the mothers—had been raped frequently attributed the death of their child to the fact that they had been raped. It is also a specific crime for a man to commit adultery with another man’s wife while she is breastfeeding. Traditionally, the guilty spouses are thought to be under a curse and will suffer misfortune.¹³⁷ A.B., who was raped by two rebels and witnessed the rape of an old woman, tried at first to dissuade the first rebel from raping her by telling him that she was a breastfeeding mother with full breasts, but the rebel said he did not care.¹³⁸ M.C. was breastfeeding her two-week-old baby when she was brutally gang raped by RUF/AFRC rebels in early January 1999 near Mabang in Tonkolili district; she breastfed her baby while being raped. She suffered a prolapsed uterus¹³⁹ as a consequence of the rape:

At the time of the January 1999 offensive, my husband who is a policeman was based in Mile 91. I became very worried about him and decided to travel to find him. I left Bo on January 8. I had just given birth to a baby girl two weeks before so was still feeling very weak but I desperately wanted to find my man.

¹³⁴ Human Rights Watch interview, Freetown, September 17, 1999.

¹³⁵ Human Rights Watch interview, Freetown, July 8, 1999.

¹³⁶ Mariane C. Ferme, *The Underneath of Things: Violence, History, and the Everyday in Sierra Leone* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2001), p. 131.

¹³⁷ Joko Smart, *Sierra Leone Customary Law*, pp. 127-8 and 131.

¹³⁸ Human Rights Watch interview, Bo, March 2, 2000.

¹³⁹ A prolapsed uterus is a condition in which the uterus drops from its normal position. In severe cases, such as those that may be associated with injury from sexual violence, the cervix and uterus may protrude beyond the vaginal opening.

I arrived late in the evening. Then all of a sudden we heard firing. There was confusion and armed rebels captured me. They took me to their bush camp in a place called Mabang. They started sexing me two days later. I tried to fight and told them to leave me, but several times they put a pistol into my vagina. I gave myself up to God and asked that he save me. The first day, about ten sexed me. After the first day there were fewer men, between three and six a day. Every day they came and stood in line waiting to rape me. All together there were over thirty different men. They were aged between seventeen and twenty-five years old. The younger ones were rough and most of them seemed to be on drugs. I think these were RUF people. Most of them seemed to be Mendes. I saw many young girls in their camp. I guess the lucky ones only had one rebel. But I'm from Bo and wouldn't allow myself to be together with one of them. I told them I wasn't a Kamajor and that my husband was a policeman and they said, "Oh policemen are our enemies ... we've killed them all. Forget about your husband."

Sometimes they tied my legs to my arms with my legs spread and raped me one after the other. They said since I was from Bo and I was a Kamajor's wife that they were going to rape me to death. [Sometimes] I held my baby Hawanatu in my arms while they were raping me. When she cried they said they wanted to shoot her so I gave her the breast.

They raped me for two or three weeks and then in early February, my vagina came out [i.e. she suffered a prolapsed uterus]. It was so, so painful. I can't tell you how much it hurt. When this happened, I thought I was going to die. In order to get it to go back in I had to lie down and push it back in. To urinate, I had to lie down. They provoked me and made fun of me. They said now my Kamajor husband will not be able to have sex with me. A wife of one of the commanders told a villager to help me escape which they did. He took me to a nice woman in another village away from the rebel area and after explaining my problem, she helped me so much. She gave me herbs and tried to cure me and my baby who by that time was vomiting and very sick. It's only God that helped keep my little Hawanatu alive. He decided that this little child is mine to keep. Later, when I was stronger, I made it to Freetown and had an operation for my prolapsed uterus. I feel much better now.¹⁴⁰

Rebels also raped pregnant women. In polygynous marriages, pregnant women generally stop having sexual intercourse with their husbands once their pregnancy has been confirmed, to protect the fetus. R.F, the thirty-three-year-old farmer gang raped by West Side Boys at Petifu, Port Loko, in November 1999 (see above, p. 39), was six months pregnant at the time. As the result of the gang rape she delivered prematurely, causing the baby's death:

I went with Isatu, her husband and my five-year-old son to harvest rice in Isatu's village, Petifu. We traveled by boat and at night to avoid the rebels. When we were resting having worked all the next day, we heard the rebels. They were all over the village and told us to give them our rice and palm oil. Several of them started hitting me on the head with their guns. Three were wearing uniform, the others wore civilian clothes. They spoke all different languages.

One of them tied a rope around my waist like a goat and pushed me out of the door screaming, "Show me where your people are." My little boy was left sleeping on the bed. Seven of the rebels then led me about a mile out of the village, screaming at me to tell them where we had hidden the rice and palm oil. I told them I was a stranger there but they did not believe me. They took me into a small farmhouse where they all used me. This went on for a few hours until the cloth I was lying on was soaked. I could barely walk. Then they ordered me to get up and dragged me like a sheep back to the village.

¹⁴⁰ Human Rights Watch interview, Freetown, September 5, 1999.

Once back in the village, they put me in a house and more of them started raping me. I was used by at least twenty rebels. I think the whole unit raped me throughout the night. The only one who did not use me was the commander. He kept coming in and saying, "Have you had your turn?" He was the one they kept calling "Commander."

When one of the Temne speaking rebels was raping me I said, "Please brother, talk to these people and ask them to leave me." But he said he could not do anything. Another rebel pulled out a knife when he was on top of me and said if I said anything he would kill me. I told them I was pregnant and said, "Can't you see? I have a six month belly." But they said, "We do not care. We see your belly but so what." Two of them told me to stoop down, but I couldn't and they just pushed me down and used me. After many had used me one of them said, "Oh, there is no more sweetness there," so they turned me over and did it to me from behind. Three of them did it to me like that, and now when I go to the toilet it is so painful; I am still bleeding and it feels like my insides are coming out. One rebel had sex with me several times. He said he was punishing me for not having shown him where the rice and palm oil was hidden. I yelled for the commander and complained, saying, "He wants to kill me, tell him to leave me!" but he said, "We have killed others that are better than you." I did not complain after that. They kept saying they were about to stop fighting—that they really want peace and that after peace comes, they won't do these things any more.

In the early hours of the morning, they finally left. They wanted me to carry their looted items but I could not walk. They took other people whom they used to carry the looted goods. At one point I tried to get up but could not, I slipped and fell down to earth. By this time I had started bleeding. I felt my baby trembling in my belly. A few hours later the water broke and then I started to have contractions. I have five children and had never even had a miscarriage. I had about three hours of labor before giving birth. The little thing shook for a minute or so and then it died. It was so beautiful; it had fine hair and the face was so pretty. I wrapped it with a cloth. I could not bear to look whether it was a boy or a girl. I was gushing out blood and shortly after I delivered the placenta. I felt dizzy. I was barely able to walk.

Later when I had a little more strength I covered my baby and threw it in a pit latrine. I felt so bad for throwing it away like that but I did not have the strength to bury it properly. After thinking everything over, I am only angry at this war and thankful that I still have my life and that the life of my child [her five-year-old] was spared. It's only God that saved him. He was lying on the bed the whole time.¹⁴¹

Forced Pregnancies

Many women and girls became pregnant as the result of the rape(s) they were subjected to. Although some women were reportedly able to abort without the knowledge of the rebels using traditional herbal treatments, the majority had no choice but to carry the child to full term. M.W., the abducted nurse already quoted above (see p. 28), said that many girls who had been raped had miscarriages that might have been self-induced with herbs. I.S., a twenty-seven-year-old student who was abducted by the AFRC during the January 1999 invasion, tried to abort, but was unsuccessful:

When I got pregnant I didn't tell my rebel husband for months. I asked a woman who knows about medicine to give me herbs to abort the baby, but it never worked and after my belly started to swell, he found out. He warned me that if I tried to flush the baby out, he'd kill me. He said he wanted the baby and that he hoped it would be a boy.¹⁴²

M.W., the abducted nurse, also mentioned that medical personnel were instructed by a rebel doctor, Dr.

¹⁴¹ Human Rights Watch interview, Port Loko, November 27, 1999.

¹⁴² Human Rights Watch interview, Freetown, September 17, 1999.

Lahai, not to perform abortions, give birth control, or advise that traditional herbal treatments be taken, as the rebels felt that too many people had died and they needed to increase the population.¹⁴³ Many women did have miscarriages because of the brutal rapes and trauma they were subjected to by the rebels, as well as the difficult conditions in the bush.

Forced Abortion by West Side Boys

Human Rights Watch has documented one case of forced abortion by the West Side Boys, the splinter group of the AFRC that took power in the 1997 coup. Twenty-year-old M.K. was abducted from Magbele village in Port Loko district in July 2000, when she was four months pregnant. She was raped by four West Side Boys and was made the wife of a rebel who forced her to abort:

I was abducted with two other civilians, including my brother-in-law, by the West Side Boys. They were all wearing uniforms; some uniforms were new, and others wore old ones. We were taken to their base in Magbele Junction where there were many other abductees. At nighttime one of the rebels called Umaro Kamara came to me and said he wanted to have sex with me. He spoke nicely with me and said that he wanted to take me to Makeni and make me his wife. He raped me that day. The rebels saw that I was pregnant and said to Umaro, "We are not going to work along with any pregnant woman, we should kill her." Umaro said that he wanted to take me as his wife and that I should be given an injection instead. Umaro called me and tried to convince me to get rid of the baby. He said, "They will kill you if you do not agree so you better have the injection." I was taken to the doctor who gave me an injection and some pills. Two days later I started bleeding. I felt weak and had pain all over my body. Then I lost the baby.

When Umaro was on patrol, three other rebels raped me. When we moved out to go to another base, I saw the body of my brother-in-law. After one day I started bleeding again so Umaro took me to the doctor who gave me another injection. When we reached Lunsar, Umaro wanted to make me his wife. Even while I was bleeding, Umaro used me. He told me to wash myself before raping me.¹⁴⁴

Rape by Female Combatant

Human Rights Watch has documented a case of a female rebel manually raping female abductees. The virginity checks performed by female rebels on abductees prior to their "virgination" by male rebels, noted above, also constitute rape given that penetration occurred without the consent of the victim. More of such abuses may have been committed but not reported due to shame, as expressed in the testimony below. The rebels captured sixteen-year-old F.P. on January 7, 1999 when—as she was fleeing the fighting in central Freetown with two other girls—she ran into a patrol of five heavily armed rebels, including one female rebel. They knew the female rebel from before as Aminata; she had lived in their neighborhood before the 1997 AFRC coup. She had joined the rebels at that time and had not been seen since the AFRC was driven out of Freetown in February 1998. F.P. remembered having had an argument with her several years ago. The rebels called her "C.O. Sally." F.P. was taken with her sister and another girl whom she did not know to a rebel base. Her friend was raped by five men, which she was made to watch. F.P. was also "virginated" by male rebels and sexually molested by "C.O. Sally," along with another girl, also called Sally:

C.O. Sally came into the room where we were kept and said, "Why are you hollering? These are my boys, why are you refusing them?" Since we knew C.O. Sally, we asked her to help us get away, so finally on January 10 she took us at gunpoint to another house. She made us cook and wash for her. Once she told us to go into a room and take off our clothes. She had an RPG [rocket propelled grenade] on the ground as well as a gun. We took off our clothes and then she took two long sticks and tied our hands to them straight out from our shoulders. She stood us in front of her and asked if we remembered her to which I answered, "No." Then she said that she remembered

¹⁴³ Human Rights Watch interview, Freetown, October 21, 1999.

¹⁴⁴ Human Rights Watch interview, Port Loko IDP camp, July 13, 2000.

me and that we had fought last time we had met each other. She made me put one leg up on a drum and then she fingered me with two fingers. I was so embarrassed and ashamed. I asked her why she was doing this but she screamed at me to shut up. She did not touch herself or say anything, but kept on fingering me. Then she called Sally and did the same thing to her. When she was finished, she left us standing there with our arms tied. A little later she fingered us again. It did not seem sexual to me and I do not know why she did it. An hour later a young rebel came and said he thought he was hearing gunshots from ECOMOG. C.O. Sally ordered the boy to untie us as “I have punished these people already.”¹⁴⁵

Rape and Other Sexual Violence against Boys and Men by Male and Female Rebels

According to FAWE Sierra Leone, boys and men were also raped by male rebels. FAWE Sierra Leone treated fourteen boys aged between nine and fifteen years old who had been raped, but suspects that there are more cases. Due to the stigma attached to homosexuality in Sierra Leone, male victims of rape feared they would be perceived as homosexuals and therefore few boys were willing to report it. Human Rights Watch has not documented any of these crimes of sexual violence, which were apparently committed on a much smaller scale than sexual violence committed against women and girls. FAWE Sierra Leone did not want Human Rights Watch to interview the boys they had treated as they feared that interviewing them would re-traumatize them.¹⁴⁶

Human Rights Watch documented two cases in which female rebels forced men to have sexual intercourse at gunpoint. One case involved a female rebel forcing a male civilian to have sex during the January 1999 invasion of Freetown, and the second involved a RUF female training commander and male conscripts in Kono. Cases of these crimes of sexual violence were also reported by FAWE Sierra Leone. It is impossible to determine the prevalence of this type of sexual violence, but—given the general level of violence within the rebel forces and the power that female combatants had over civilians—Human Rights Watch believes that such incidents did happen more often than has been reported, albeit again on a much reduced scale compared to male combatants raping female civilians.

Abduction, Sexual Slavery, Forced Labor, and Conscripting

Abduction

The rebel forces used abduction as their primary method for recruitment. During an attack on a town or village, rebels typically rounded up civilians as they tried to flee or were found hiding. Men were abducted to carry the looted items as well as being forcibly conscripted. The abducted children were also given military training and forcibly conscripted.

In thousands of cases, women and girls were abducted after being subjected to sexual violence. The rebels often killed family members who tried to protect their women and girls. Abducted women and girls described being “given” to a combatant who then took them as their “wives” (see also “Sexual slavery” section, below).¹⁴⁷ Abduction of civilians continued for the duration of the armed conflict. In the early years of the conflict, the RUF went on hit-and-run raids, returning to their base camps with looted items and abducted civilians. As the RUF took over more territory, an increasing number of civilians were abducted. As their ranks increased with more men and boys being forcibly conscripted, so did their abduction of women and girls. The AFRC and West Side Boys used the same tactics. Some women had the extreme misfortune of escaping from one rebel faction, or unit, only to be abducted by another. One such victim, thirteen-year-old M.F. (see above, p. 34), who was first

¹⁴⁵ Human Rights Watch interview, Freetown, May 18, 1999.

¹⁴⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Christiana Thorpe (founding Chairperson of FAWE Sierra Leone Chapter), Freetown, March 22, 2002.

¹⁴⁷ The PHR report found that 9 percent of women reporting having themselves experienced sexual violence had been forced to “marry” their rebel “husband.” PHR report, p. 2. These types of marriage are similar to marriages by capture, which were common at the turn of the nineteenth to twentieth centuries. In tribal wars, the conquerors would kill the male inhabitants of the vanquished village and capture the women who subsequently became the wives of the conquerors. The “marriage” was validated by the captor’s public declaration of his intention to cohabit with his captive. Such a wife was regarded as a slave and her children could not inherit from their father. Joko Smart, *Sierra Leone Customary Family Law*, p. 29.

abducted from Koinadugu by the RUF/AFRC and gang raped, was driven out of Makeni in October 1999 when it came under attack by the RUF. She was subsequently abducted by the West Side Boys and raped by two child combatants.¹⁴⁸

Sexual Slavery and Forced Labor

Women and girls were primarily abducted to be the sex slaves of the rebels and to perform slave labor. The survey conducted by Physicians for Human Rights found that 33 percent of the interviewees reporting war-related sexual violence had been abducted and 15 percent had been subjected to sexual slavery. Consistent with fairly common practice among the Sierra Leonean male population at large, many rebels had polygynous “marriages,” including with abducted women whom they had forced to “marry” them. Rebels also changed “wives” frequently when they tired of them or when their “wives” were too ill to perform their tasks (a consequence of the brutality that they were often subjected to). Victims interviewed by Human Rights Watch reported attaching themselves to one rebel to avoid gang rape and be given a degree of protection. The more highly ranked the commander, the more protection a woman had. Women and girls, however, remained vulnerable to sexual violence by other rebels. M.F., the thirteen-year-old who was gang raped by the RUF/AFRC in Koinadugu was raped by two other commanders when her “husband” Mohammed was out on patrol.

Women who were “married” to high-ranking rebels benefited not only from “protection” but also were able to exert power over others. The women and girls often benefited from the looted items that their rebel “husbands” gave them, and took part themselves in looting raids to steal clothes, shoes, and jewelry. Not all were abductees: some women and girls voluntarily joined the rebel forces and sought to benefit from their relationship with the rebels, i.e. from the looted goods or escaping from their parents (some girls would use a relationship with a rebel boyfriend to gain freedom from parental control, by threatening to involve the boyfriend in their dispute over parental restrictions). Such women consenting to marry a rebel were probably still vulnerable to sexual violence from other rebels.

Numerous victims described being subjected to abuse or forced to work by commanders’ wives. FAWE Sierra Leone also reported that female combatants “married” to rebels killed new abductees if their “husbands” showed a preference for them. A.J., the fourteen-year-old student who was abducted in Pujehun and tortured by the RUF from February to May 1994 (see above, p. 31) is an example of how some “wives” were treated by other female abductees or combatants:

I was put under the control of Commander Patrick, a Liberian. He was married to a woman called Neneh who was very jealous of me. Once, after the commanders had gone to the war front, Neneh told one of our guards to open up the cage where I was being held and take me out. She said, “My husband is interested in you. If you accept him to have sex with you, I’ll kill you, so be forewarned.” Neneh and Patrick have one child. She told me she’d joined the rebels voluntarily. She said, “You are just a captive. Do you think I was abducted? I was not abducted. I joined voluntarily. So you have no right to fall in love with my husband.”¹⁴⁹

A few victims also described how some of these women, usually the wives of commanders, used their power to try and protect, and at times facilitate the escape, of other abductees. For example, M.C., who was brutally raped by rebels in early 1999 in Mabang and suffered a prolapsed uterus (see above, p. 38) was helped to escape by a commander’s wife who felt sorry for her.¹⁵⁰

Abducted women were made to carry out forced labor during their captivity, including cooking, cleaning, washing clothes, and carrying heavy loads of ammunition and looted items. In many instances, women—intimidated by their captors and the situation they were in—felt powerless to escape their lives of sexual slavery, and were advised by other female captives to tolerate the abuses, “as it was war.” The rebels often deliberately

¹⁴⁸ Human Rights Watch interview, Kabala, 7 March 2002.

¹⁴⁹ Human Rights Watch interview, Pujehun, February 12, 2000.

¹⁵⁰ Human Rights Watch interview, Freetown, September 5, 1999.

marked abducted civilians with the letters “RUF” or “AFRC” carved mainly onto their chests. This made escape more difficult because, were they to be caught by government forces, they would likely be suspected of being rebels and killed. Some women used traditional herbal remedies to remove their markings, and international organizations have also performed surgery on these victims to remove the scars.

Relationships between Rebels and Abductees

The relationships that developed between the abductees and rebels were very complex and varied. Most relationships were obviously very volatile, as described by I.S., the twenty-seven-year-old student who was abducted by the AFRC in the January 1999 invasion (see above, p. 40). She stayed with the AFRC/West Side Boys until August 1999 when she was able to escape:

We stayed there for months and they were always going on attacks in the Port Loko area. Occasionally C.O. Blood was nice to me and I had to kiss him and play love with him. But I could never tell him what was really in my heart; that I missed my family and wanted to escape. Other days he would beat me for nothing. He did the same thing to his other “wife.” Neither of us could complain.¹⁵¹

H.K. was assigned as the wife of “Jaja” and was so badly treated by him that even the other rebels sometimes tried to prevail on him to be less violent:

Jaja was already “married” to another abductee, and when she saw what he had done to me, she escaped. He always beat both of us. He used to sex me twice every night. He made me take his penis in my mouth. I tried to refuse him but he always threatened to kill me. He was actually an SLA soldier but had joined the RUF. His C.O. was Colonel Stagger, who used to criticize him for how he treated us. Colonel Stagger used to say, “Look, when we take these kids, we should take care of them and now you beat her for nothing.” Jaja used to say it was not Stagger’s business. Stagger’s own abductees were treated pretty well. He never beat them.¹⁵²

Some women fled at the first opportunity. Other women, especially those who had children with the rebels, found it difficult to leave these abusive relationships. Many women and girls experienced their first sexual relationship with their rebel “husband” and may have developed aspects of the “Stockholm Syndrome,” whereby the hostage identifies with the hostage-taker. They adjusted to the level of violence with the rebels, which over time became “normal,” in order to survive.¹⁵³ Others feared that their “husband” might seek revenge if they escaped and returned to their family. The rebels instilled fear in their “wives” by telling them that their families would not accept them back. The abductees also feared to some extent that they would be blamed for what happened to them. For some women who had lost their families, the rebels became a surrogate family. As many rebels had themselves lost their families or could not return to their villages of origin, given that they had in some cases committed human rights abuses in their communities, they did not want to relinquish their surrogate families or their slave labor.

As the women and girls were never registered in the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) program and there was insufficient documentation of this large category of victims throughout the armed conflict, it is unclear how many girls and women were abducted. It is now impossible to establish how many remain under the control of their rebel “husband” or have returned to their village of origin.

The ones who have remained involuntarily will only re-examine their situation when alternatives become available. Women who wish to sever links with ex-combatants have few alternative economic or social options. They are a very vulnerable group that has little or no means of support. They are often not able to return to their

¹⁵¹ Human Rights Watch interview, Freetown, September 17, 1999.

¹⁵² Human Rights Watch interview, Freetown, October 12, 1999.

¹⁵³ A group of female ex-combatants and abducted women, for example, defined to Human Rights Watch domestic violence as “wounding or losing consciousness.”

villages out of fear, lack of funds and social stigma, especially if they have given birth to children fathered by rebels. The women are therefore often forced to remain in situations in which they are vulnerable to continuing abuse. Numerous victims end up being commercial sex workers, selling their body for as little as U.S.50¢. Exploited girls and women can end up abandoned with several children to raise by themselves by the time they are in their early twenties.

Rebel Control over Abductees

Life with the rebels was very tough. Civilian abductees, in particular, were treated ruthlessly. The RUF established a military police system and courthouses to administer a form of justice to those who contravened RUF rules of behavior. Some of the RUF rules were written, but the rules, trial and punishment were to a large extent arbitrary, dependent on the particular commander. Interviewees reported that severe punishment was meted out for small incidents such as spilling water on a commander's shoes (one week in a cell with daily beatings) or not lodging complaints through the official channels (imprisonment in a dungeon). "Courthouses" were established to try both combatants and the civilians.¹⁵⁴ A rebel was expected to provide for his "wives" and children during their captivity even if he had taken on another "wife" or "wives." If a rebel reneged on his responsibility, then he could be put in a cell and beaten to death. Civilian women who were tried by the court were raped and beaten if they did not have a commander to stand up for them. According to K.M., who was abducted by the RUF from Kabala, Koinadugu, the three male rebels who presided over the courthouse in Burkina, a training camp in Kailahun, would arrange amongst themselves who could rape the women. She also said that one woman was raped to death by six rebels.¹⁵⁵

Forced Conscription: Female Combatants

Women and girls were also forcibly conscripted into the rebel fighting forces. The RUF established military training camps for women. During active fighting, female combatants were sent into battle after the men and the Small Boys Units (SBUs). There were only very few high-ranking female commanders in the rebel forces and a much smaller number of female combatants than adult men or boys. Female combatants had more power than female civilians: combatants, including female combatants, who had received military training, had substantial power to do whatever they wanted to civilians. Within the rebel forces, however, women still held much lower status: female combatants were assigned "husbands."

Forcibly conscripted female combatants were in many ways as vulnerable as civilian abductees, and may have decided to stay with their rebel "husbands" for the same reasons as their civilian counterparts i.e. shame, lack of alternative options, and economic dependence on their "husbands."

RUF Officers' Responsibility for Sexual Violence

In addition to their individual criminal responsibility, rebel commanders can bear direct command responsibility for crimes of sexual violence and sexual slavery, for ordering the rape and abduction of women and girls (see below, p. 60, for a discussion of the principle of command responsibility in international law). C.O. Caca Scatter, for example, ordered the gang rape of S.J., the wealthy forty-five-year-old woman (see above, p. 37). A.J., the fourteen-year-old student, was tortured, caged and brutally raped by C.O. Patrick (see above, p. 43). S.G., the fifty-year-old widow was raped and had both arms amputated by Commander "Don't Blame God" (see above, p. 36).¹⁵⁶ Indeed, the organized way in which victims frequently describe being rounded up and taken, as well as the number of rebels involved in these abductions and the number of victims abducted, suggests an element of premeditation and planning on the part of the RUF, AFRC and West Side Boys command. Victims also frequently described being specifically selected to be given to a commander or being sexually abused in the presence of commanders, which again suggest that sexual violence was committed under the direction of and with the consent of members of the rebels' hierarchy. I.S., the twenty-seven-year-old student who was abducted and

¹⁵⁴ Abdullah and Muana, "The Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone," p. 189.

¹⁵⁵ Human Rights Watch interview, Kabala, March 7 and 9, 2002.

¹⁵⁶ Human Rights Watch interview, Freetown, May 3, 1999. Under Article 6 (1), persons are held individually responsible for the planning, instigating, ordering, committing or otherwise aiding and abetting in the planning, preparation or execution of a crime referred to in articles 2 to 4 of the statute.

gang raped by the West Side Boys from January to August 1999 explained how Commander “Blood” had initiated the “wife” selection process:

One of the commanders said he was going to amputate all of us too. But another commander, C.O. Blood, said, “Don’t kill them, let’s chose them as wives.” Then we were divided up. The one who seemed to be in charge, C.O. Blood, chose me. When he looked at me I was frightened. His pupils were huge—he was high on drugs. He took me to a house and told me to lie down on the ground. He said if I did not allow him to have sex, he would kill me. He took out a knife and said he would not even waste his ammunition on me. He would just chop me to pieces. I knew he meant what he said. He forced my clothes off and used me twice. He was rough and after the second time I begged him to leave me, but he said he did not care. My insides hurt so much. Then he used me from behind. Other women were being raped in the same room. They [the West Side Boys] did not care.¹⁵⁷

According to the survey conducted by Physicians for Human Rights, thirty-four of the ninety-four survivors directly reporting sexual violence believed that their attackers’ commander was aware of the attack.¹⁵⁸ While it is difficult to generalize from this figure, it does tend to confirm the findings of Human Rights Watch that sexual violence and slavery, which were committed on a widespread and systematic nature, were part of the rebel forces’ military strategy to dominate, humiliate and punish the civilian population.

The RUF has made occasional efforts to declare rape a crime within certain areas under their control and disciplined ordinary soldiers accused of raping. The disciplinary measures included summary trials followed by execution. These efforts failed to prevent sexual violence in practice. One commander, for example, prevented at least temporarily the rape of an eight-year-old girl who was abducted by a ten-year-old child combatant by ordering the child combatant to only use the young girl “for cleaning and cooking for now.”¹⁵⁹ A.B. witnessed the gang rape of an old woman, which the commander had originally tried to stop but then allowed to happen (see above, p. 37).

Senior male and female figures in the RUF interviewed by Human Rights Watch mainly denied that sexual violence had happened, explaining that the women joined the RUF movement voluntarily and fell in love with their rebel “husbands.”¹⁶⁰ A key figure in the AFRC admitted that he had heard of cases of sexual violence and blamed it on the breakdown of law and order.¹⁶¹ He also said that none of his men had expressed any remorse for the human rights abuses they committed. In the vast majority of the cases documented by Human Rights Watch, those who committed rape were not disciplined or punished in any way

Sexual Violence Committed by the CDF

As already noted, there are relatively few reported cases of rape committed by the CDF. The CDF were reasonably disciplined during the war, although their discipline deteriorated when they were deployed in chiefdoms outside their own native areas. Sexual intercourse is believed to act against the protection bestowed on the fighters during their initiation ceremonies. However, Human Rights Watch has documented several crimes of sexual violence by the Kamajors, the CDF based in the Southern Province.

In March 1998, a forty-five-year-old Temne man, M.B., witnessed the rape of a young Temne woman called Jeneba by the Kamajors in Kenema town. The Kamajors also mutilated and killed Jeneba. M.B. explained that during the ECOMOG intervention to restore the democratically elected government in 1998, Kamajors accused members of the Temne and Limba ethnic groups of being RUF/AFRC supporters and persecuted them. According to M.B., the Kamajors identified Temnes and Limbas as such by their last names and publicly beheaded or

¹⁵⁷ Human Rights Watch interview, Freetown, September 17, 1999.

¹⁵⁸ PHR report, p. 54.

¹⁵⁹ Human Rights Watch interview, Freetown, June 16, 1999.

¹⁶⁰ Human Rights Watch interviews, Freetown and Makeni, April 1999 to May 2002.

¹⁶¹ Human Rights Watch interview, Freetown, April 26, 2002.

stabbed to death numerous alleged rebels. The Kamajors also ate some of their victims, believing that this would bestow additional powers to them. The accused had no means to defend themselves, as ECOMOG initially backed the Kamajors and did not realize until later that the killings were carried out along tribal lines. After receiving death threats, M.B. sought refuge in the house of a chief who was Temne and the father of Jeneba. A group of about eight Kamajors came to the house, looking for Jeneba, and accused her of having a sexual relationship with an AFRC fighter:

I saw Jeneba being raped by one Kamajor, while the others were standing around watching. Then the Kamajors threatened to kill us if we did not stop looking at them, so we went into other houses to hide. From there we could not see what was going on but heard Jeneba screaming at the top of her voice, and when the Kamajors had gone we came outside and found Jeneba dead. She was naked and her hands and feet had been mutilated by a machete.¹⁶²

On February 17, 1999, J.K., a thirty-one-year-old woman was raped by two Kamajors in a small village in Bonthe district. A group of Kamajors entered J.K.'s house looking for her brother, who had not been home for the past three years:

One of the Kamajors called Kinie said that they had been told that my brother was in the village and was planning to attack them. I assured them no one knew where he was. During this argument, the other civilians in village became afraid and fled into the bush. As soon as the Kamajors forced their way into my bedroom, I followed them to check up on what they were doing. Kinie and another Kamajor whose name I did not know pushed me to the ground, tearing off my clothes. I screamed for help but no one came to my rescue. Even my father who was in the house was unable to help me. They both raped me while the others stood around laughing. When they left the village, they looted some goats and chickens. There was no one to report the incident to and I had no money to pay for a hospital visit. I decided to leave everything to the Almighty God.¹⁶³

In another incident, at least three female civilians were raped, including by a Kamajor commander. In July 2000, M.S. and twenty-five other passengers were taken off a bus at Bauya in Moyamba district, beaten, and accused of being RUF rebels. All their possessions were taken off the bus and inspected by the Kamajors but they did not find any incriminating goods. Their possessions were stolen by the CDF. In the evening, M.S. was locked in the guardroom at the CDF office with nine other women and her young child:

Twenty CDF came to the guardroom and told us, the women that we could choose between [being] raped or killed. I was raped by a young CDF on the ground of the guardroom. I told him that I was a suckling mother but he did not care. My baby was in the room when he raped me. He made me stoop like an animal. He said, "I am a government man so no one will ask me anything about this." My breast milk has gone bad now. I could hear another woman who initially refused to be raped being beaten with the torch. She was raped by two CDF called Mohammed and Ahmed.¹⁶⁴

In the same incident, an older high-ranking CDF commander raped a thirty-five-year-old trader, R.K.:

Mr. S. raped me all night. He raped me five times. I cried as I was not used to doing that even with my husband. He was rough and did it from behind like an animal in a bad way. He accused me of being a RUF commander's wife. I told him my husband is a Gbetti [part of the CDF].¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² Human Rights Watch interview, Kenema, August 12, 2002.

¹⁶³ Human Rights Watch interview, Bonthe district, July 8, 2002.

¹⁶⁴ Human Rights Watch interview, Freetown, August 21, 2000.

¹⁶⁵ Human Rights Watch interview, Freetown, August 21, 2000.

Human Rights Watch also interviewed B.R., a Kamajor fighter who reported witnessing the rape of two civilians that took place in 1997 and 1998. He also witnessed the killing of a captured RUF female combatant, who died after being raped with a stick. B.R. explained that the rape that took place in 1997 happened when a patrol of six Kamajors, including B.R., met a group of female civilians in the bush:

Some of the women started talking bad things about the Kamajors and said that we were taking food off people. Then one Kamajors went for this woman. I saw him raping her. He had stripped her naked and she was screaming. I did not want to see it or be a witness but I had to rush there. At one point I thought he was killing her.¹⁶⁶

The incident was reported to the high priest, one of the main Kamajor initiators who decided that the offender had to be punished. B.R. explained that the punishment was called “walking the highway,” which entailed the offender being made to walk slowly through fifty Kamajors lined up on two sides, with the Kamajors flogging him with canes. B.R. said that the victim would have reported the rape to the Kamajor high priest, but that he and the others on patrol decided to report it first, otherwise it would have made them equally guilty of the crime. The rape committed in 1998 involved a young Kamajor raping a twenty-year-old woman. B.R. explained that the offender was given a trial, during which he admitted to having committed the crime. He was subsequently locked up in prison (probably a local prison).

In another instance, B.R. explained how a twenty-five-year-old female RUF combatant captured in Tongo in Kono district was brutally killed by the insertion of a long stick in her vagina after the Kamajors had cut off her ears and nose and gouged her eyes out with a machete. The Kamajor commander allegedly wanted to teach the woman a lesson and said that: “This stick is your husband and is screwing you. Are you enjoying it? Just say your last prayers, as you are going to die bit by bit.”¹⁶⁷

Sexual Violence Committed by International Peacekeeping Forces

Human Rights Watch has documented several cases of rape by the international peacekeeping forces. Human Rights Watch was informed of a rape committed by a Guinean peacekeeper, Sgt. Ballah, by two reliable sources, including the Sierra Leone Police (SLP), who had interviewed the twelve-year-old victim. The victim was raped on March 26, 2001 when she asked for Sgt. Ballah’s assistance in securing a ride to Freetown at the checkpoint that he was manning. The rape was perpetrated in Bo, the area of deployment of the Guinean peacekeeping contingent. Sgt. Ballah was charged to court on the same day. Unfortunately, the SLP dropped the case and the offender was sent back to Guinea. Human Rights Watch was not able to locate the victim.

In February 2001, a Nigerian peacekeeper reportedly raped a sixteen-year-old girl in Freetown. When Human Rights Watch investigated the case, the SLP claimed they had not been able to trace the perpetrator for questioning. UNAMSIL claimed that the Nigerian contingent and UNAMSIL Civilian Police Section had investigated the matter and that the plaintiff had subsequently dropped the charge.

Human Rights Watch interviewed a witness to an alleged rape by two Ukrainian peacekeepers that took place on April 3, 2002 in the village of Joru in Kenema district. K.S., a fifty-five-year-old female farmer testified that she as well as others in her village had witnessed the gang rape:

Late at night I came out of my house to ease myself [urinate]. Maybe I had been woken up by a big white truck that had stopped about fifty meters away from my house. I hid and watched what was happening; there were people inside. I noticed two white men and one black lady inside the truck. Clearly there was a struggle going on. I could hear her yelling at them to “leave me alone” in what sounded like a Liberian accent, but I can not be sure. The door was open and one of them was on top of her. The lady was really struggling. I saw that one of them was holding her down while the other was raping her. I was able to see because in the process the men had opened the

¹⁶⁶ Human Rights Watch interview, Freetown, July 31, 2000.

¹⁶⁷ Human Rights Watch interview, July 31, 2000. The CDF generally killed any RUF that they had captured.

door to the car and the light had come on. I am sure they were raping her and she was fighting with them to stop it. I stayed and watched this go on for several minutes. I later learned a few more people were also watching what was going on. In fact we talked about it the next morning.

Then, perhaps afraid of being watched, the two whites moved their truck further down the road ... past my house, further down the road going out of town. Maybe they thought that because there were no houses around, we would not see what they were up to. They stayed another thirty or so minutes in this second location. I saw both of them have their turn on her, but I did not see any guns. After they were finished, I saw one of them drag her out of the cabin and put her in the back of the big truck. I can not remember if one of them got in the back with her but I think so. Then they drove off.

The next morning when I went out to go to the mosque, we found one of her black shoes that she must have kicked off while struggling with those men. The shoe was near the first place they had stopped. We took it to the police but they never came to ask us any questions. We are all a bit frightened of those UNAMSIL people now. We tell our girls never to get in a truck with them or the same thing might happen to them.¹⁶⁸

Neither the SLP in Joru or UNAMSIL in Kenema conducted a proper investigation into this alleged gang rape, both claiming that the absence of the victim prevented them from conducting their investigation. The UNAMSIL human rights section was not aware of this alleged gang rape until Human Rights Watch informed them, and to date has also not conducted a thorough investigation.

On June 22, 2002, a fourteen-year-old boy was allegedly raped by a Bangladeshi peacekeeper near the Jui transit camp for Sierra Leonean returnees located outside of Freetown in the Western Area. The rape occurred when the victim and his friends were fishing with several Bangladeshi peacekeepers near the camp. The offender was reported to have taken the boy away from the others in the group before raping him. The victim's friends reported that the boy looked disheveled after rejoining the group and immediately told them what had happened. The offender gave the victim the equivalent of U.S \$0.25 to silence him. The boy reported the rape to the SLP on June 24 and a medical exam carried out on the same day confirmed penetration had taken place.

The SLP were involved in the case for ten days, until the UNAMSIL provost marshal took it over. The provost marshal concluded that there was no conclusive evidence to link the crime to the perpetrator. After reviewing the case, the UNAMSIL force commander concluded that while the evidence was inconclusive, the circumstantial evidence was strong enough to conclude that the peacekeeper had violated military discipline, and as such issued an order of repatriation. It is not clear to Human Rights Watch whether this violation will be recorded on the offender's file. According to a reliable source, the investigation by the police and UNAMSIL was conducted in an insensitive manner and members of the Bangladeshi contingent spoke with the victim while the UNAMSIL investigation was ongoing, even though they should not have had access to him. Nor did UNAMSIL follow up with the victim or his family to apologize, provide compensation, and explain the outcome of the investigation.¹⁶⁹

UNAMSIL investigations into allegations of sexual violence by peacekeepers indicate a lack of appreciation for the seriousness of the problem of sexual violence. Human Rights Watch urges UNAMSIL to fully investigate any allegations of sexual violence committed by UNAMSIL military or civilian personnel. The human rights section should systematically monitor and report on sexual violence, including cases involving UNAMSIL personnel. UNAMSIL should establish a mechanism with the SLP whereby allegations of sexual violence by persons employed or affiliated with UNAMSIL reported to the police are immediately reported to the relevant UNAMSIL staff members, including the provost marshal and the gender specialist in the human rights section. UNAMSIL should reciprocate by reporting cases known to it to the SLP. UNAMSIL should ensure that states

¹⁶⁸ Human Rights Watch interview, Joru, May 28, 2002. Other villagers did not want to be interviewed.

¹⁶⁹ Human Rights Watch interview, Freetown, September 15, 2002

report within the prescribed six months on follow up to cases involving military personnel that have resulted in the alleged perpetrator being repatriated to his country of origin, in order to ensure that states prosecute the accused. This will serve to actually enforce a stated “zero tolerance” for sexual exploitation by UNAMSIL staff and persons affiliated with UNAMSIL, which to date has had no teeth and therefore no impact on changing behavior. Civilian staff who commit sexual violence should be fired and their misconduct properly recorded in their personnel file to ensure that they are not rehired in another U.N. mission.

The UNAMSIL human rights section should also provide in-depth gender sensitization training to military and civilian staff. The training should ensure that the peacekeepers understand the code of conduct and the consequences if they do not adhere to it. The U.N. Code of Conduct for peacekeepers and the Military Observer Handbook need to be revised to ensure that the zero tolerance policy for sexual exploitation by persons employed or affiliated with U.N. missions and the consequences of such acts are clearly stated in these guidelines. Similar guidelines for civilian staff need to be widely disseminated to all U.N. missions.

Both ECOMOG and UNAMSIL peacekeepers have sexually exploited women and solicited child prostitutes.

VI. EFFECTS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Health

Sexual violence often continues to impact the physical and mental well-being of survivors long after the abuses were committed. In addition to the reluctance of some survivors to seek medical treatment, the lack of health facilities, especially in the provinces, as well as the survivors’ lack of money for transport, medical treatment and drugs has meant that the health status of survivors is poor.¹⁷⁰ Survivors also were often only able to seek medical treatment months after the abuse had happened, for example when they managed to escape rebel captors and make their way to a health center.

The probability of transmission of HIV and certain other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) is greatly increased in violent sex and any sex where a woman or girl is injured. Doctors and other health personnel interviewed by Human Rights Watch reported a high prevalence of STDs amongst victims, as the armed conflict in Sierra Leone, like other armed conflicts, served as a vector for sexually transmitted diseases.¹⁷¹

A World Health Organization (WHO) report found an alarmingly high prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS amongst Sierra Leone Army soldiers. According to the report, the SLA tested 176 soldiers and eighty-two civilians working for the army who had prolonged diarrhea, tuberculosis, weight loss or pneumonia, and found a HIV-positive rate of 41.9 percent (or 108 persons). Among the group tested were eighty female soldiers of whom thirty tested positive (37.5 percent). As many SLA soldiers defected to the rebel factions, it is likely that victims of sexual violence by them have been infected with the virus.¹⁷² A U.N. report on the impact of conflict on children states that rates of sexually transmitted diseases among soldiers are two to five times higher than those of civilian populations, and that during armed conflict the rate of infection can be up to fifty times higher.¹⁷³ Commercial sexual exploitation of women by soldiers, including peacekeepers, also contributes to the spread of

¹⁷⁰ PHR report, p. 45.

¹⁷¹ Human Rights Watch interviews with Dr. Olayinka Koso-Thomas, Freetown, February 25, 2002; Dr. Noah Conteh, Freetown, March 1, 2002 and Dr. Bernard Fraser, Freetown, March 3, 2002.

¹⁷² World Health Organization, *HIV/AIDS in Sierra Leone: The Future at Stake—The Strategic and Organizational Context and Recommendations for Action* (Freetown, 2000), p. 3.

¹⁷³ See United Nations Security Council resolution 1308 on the responsibility of the Security Council in the maintenance of international peace and security: HIV/AIDS and international peacekeeping operations, July 17, 2000; and Graça Machel, “The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children: A critical review of progress made and obstacles encountered in increasing protection for war-affected children,” report prepared for and presented at the International Conference on War-Affected Children, September 2000, Winnipeg, Canada, p. 12, at <http://www.waraffectedchildren.gc.ca/machel-e.asp>.

STDs, including HIV/AIDS.¹⁷⁴ In 1997, tests showed that 70.6 percent of commercial sex workers in Freetown were HIV positive compared to 26.7 percent in 1995.¹⁷⁵

The 2002 report by the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) on the global AIDS epidemic estimated that by the end of 2001 there were 170,000 persons aged between fifteen and forty-nine living with HIV/AIDS in Sierra Leone. UNAIDS estimates that more than 50 percent of this figure (90,000) are women and girls.¹⁷⁶ More accurate figures on HIV/AIDS prevalence in Sierra Leone, as opposed to estimates, should be known when the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) publish their report based on a nationwide HIV/AIDS prevalence survey conducted in May 2002.¹⁷⁷ The government of Sierra Leone should ensure that future information campaigns on HIV/AIDS are designed both to impart basic information and to help reduce stigma, especially in light of the large number of survivors of sexual violence who may have been infected with HIV.

Other health problems are vasico-vaginal and vasico-rectal fistulas (VVF and VRF), as a result of the rape(s) especially of young girls but also of mature women; complications when giving birth; prolapsed uterus; trauma; and unwanted pregnancies. Health professionals have noted high rates of pregnancies amongst young girls with likely resultant illness, injury, and even death, due to pregnancy-related complications. These girls are likely to experience future complications including uterine problems and scarring, reducing their ability to have a normal sex life or to conceive or carry a child to full term in the future. The health of children born to abducted girls is also likely to suffer as the girls often have no one to teach them motherhood skills, contributing to high rates of infant mortality. The health risks are further exacerbated by various factors that impede safe sex, including lack of information about HIV/AIDS, as well as cultural practices and beliefs that undermine the use of reproductive health services and contraception.¹⁷⁸ The lack of attention paid until recently to conflict-related sexual violence has meant that the health needs of women and girls have not received as much attention or funding as required to adequately address the scale of the problem. In general the Sierra Leonean health services lack trained and motivated personnel, medical equipment and supplies, drugs, and blood for transfusion. The reproductive health infrastructure, which was poor before 1991, virtually collapsed during the war.¹⁷⁹ There are only six specialist obstetricians and gynecologists in Sierra Leone.¹⁸⁰ Treatment for sexually transmitted diseases is limited to the main towns and outreach by mobile clinics in some chiefdoms.

Mental health services for survivors of sexual violence are inadequate and as of 2002 there was only one qualified psychiatrist in the country. FAWE Sierra Leone, which has substantial expertise in treating survivors of

¹⁷⁴ Human Rights Watch interview, UNAMSIL medical personnel, Freetown, April 30, 2002.

¹⁷⁵ Ministry of Health and Sanitation, *National AIDS/STD Control Programme Annual Report for 1998* (Freetown, Ministry of Health and Sanitation, 1998), p. 3.

¹⁷⁶ UNAIDS, *Report on the Global HIV/AIDS Epidemic 2002* at <http://www.unaids.org/>, p. 190. This figure is based on a total population of 4,587,000.

¹⁷⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Dr. Joaquim Saweka (WHO Sierra Leone Representative), Freetown, May 3, 2002. The preliminary results of the CDC showed a prevalence rate of 4.9 percent.

¹⁷⁸ Only 297 of 4,923 women (or 6 percent) surveyed by the government in 2000 reported that they used contraceptives. This low prevalence of contraception use is due to lack of access to family planning services within the communities, inadequate health facilities, especially in the provinces, lack of disposable income to pay for these services, and the low education of women. Only 3 percent of women with no education used contraception compared to 8 percent of women with primary education and 14 percent of women with secondary or higher education. Another worrying factor is the unwillingness of partners to use condoms, which does not bode well given the high prevalence of HIV/AIDS and other STDs. See Government of Sierra Leone, *The Status of Women and Children in Sierra Leone*, pp. 55-58.

¹⁷⁹ UNDP, *Human Development Report 2001*, p. 198.

¹⁸⁰ WHO and the Ministry of Health and Sanitation, *Assessment of District Hospitals in Sierra Leone for the Delivery of Safe Motherhood and Reproductive Health Services* (Freetown: 2002), p. 10. The Assessment also found that physicians attended only 3 percent of births whereas traditional birth attendants assisted in 38 percent of births nationally. Ibid. pp. 56-57. Only 10 percent of 4,923 women surveyed by the government in 2000 reported that they received antenatal care from a physician. See Government of Sierra Leone, *The Status of Women and Children in Sierra Leone*, p. 10.

sexual violence, believes that counseling on a massive scale is needed to ensure that the women and girls can face the future.¹⁸¹

Stigmatization and Shame of Survivors

The rebels frequently committed crimes of sexual violence in public places. A.M., a twenty-year-old male, reported that when he was held in captivity in State House in Freetown from January 8, 1999 for three days, he saw from his cell window RUF/AFRC combatants raping about twenty to twenty-five girls each night on the grounds.¹⁸² Given that rape has been committed on such a systematic and widespread scale and was witnessed by many people, it seems that rape survivors, particularly in urban centers, are generally not stigmatized by society. Survivors interviewed have expressed fear of rejection by their families and communities, but in practice it seems that their fears are unfounded. Most survivors are accepted back into their communities, with their families simply overjoyed to find that they are still alive.

Nevertheless, some women, like R.K. who was raped by the CDF (see above, p. 48), have been rejected by their husbands:

I told my husband what happened. He cried and rejected me. He said he will find another wife. My family has begged him to accept me as it was not my fault. He does not love me anymore. I am annoyed because I was the senior wife and now he does not treat me well.¹⁸³

Girls and women who voluntarily joined the rebel forces are less likely to be welcomed back.

The survey conducted by Physicians for Human Rights gives an indication of survival strategies employed by women who had been raped: of the ninety-four interviewees reporting having themselves experienced sexual violence, sixty-one (or 65 percent) told someone about their case(s) of sexual violence. The majority of these survivors (fifty women and girls or 53 percent) reported their experience to a health care provider in a hospital, health care center or to a traditional healer, albeit on average five months after the incident(s) occurred. Among those not reporting these incidents and who stated a reason (twenty-eight out of thirty-three), the reasons given were feelings of shame or social stigma (eighteen women and girls or 64 percent), fear of being stigmatized or rejected (eight women and girls or 28 percent) and not having trust in anyone (six women and girls or 21 percent). Eighteen women and girls (19 percent) reported that discussions with family members helped them to try to forget about the incident(s). Other survivors reported that what helped most was to try and forget about the incident (46 percent), support of family (35 percent), a health care provider (33 percent) and traditional medicine (32 percent).¹⁸⁴

Human Rights Watch also found that many survivors feel intense personal shame that the rebels have defiled them, and therefore often do not report the crime or seek medical attention. S.G., the fifty-year-old widow who had both arms amputated after being raped (see above p. 36), described the shame and anger she felt after her ordeal:

I didn't even tell my people about the rape. It's such a shameful act. Not just because of the rebel's age, but also because never in my life have I had sex with someone besides my husband. I was a good woman. Can you imagine how I felt when this young boy raped me, kicked me and then told me to get out of his sight after doing this to me? And without my arms, how can I as a woman even clean myself, let alone take care of my affairs. We're farmers and how am I to farm now? Both the rape and amputation are awful ... but later when thinking about what happened, I was even angrier about the rape than the amputation because for him to have done that to me was

¹⁸¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Christiana Thorpe (founding chairperson of FAWE Sierra Leone Chapter), Freetown, March 22, 2002.

¹⁸² Human Rights Watch interview, Freetown, April 12, 1999.

¹⁸³ Human Rights Watch interview, Freetown, August 21, 2000.

¹⁸⁴ PHR report, p. 51 and Table 6 on p. 54. Women could select more than one of the choices given.

like killing me inside because of the shame. Sex is something you should enjoy together with your man. But to do it like that, to handle me like that, to torture me like that and then kick me and leave me like that ... it's too much. But I guess I was somehow lucky. There could have been ten people doing that to me.¹⁸⁵

P.S. twenty-five, who was abducted and gang raped by the West Side Boys in January 2000, explained why she had not reported her rapes:

I didn't want to tell anyone what happened. I was ashamed because it is bad enough being done like this, but having a rebel do it is even worse. I felt so bad because I wanted to save myself for someone special. I went to secret society and they instructed us not to be involved in sex until we were ready to marry. And now I'm afraid because of AIDS. When I think of them I feel so angry.¹⁸⁶

VII. INTERNATIONAL LEGAL PROTECTIONS AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Introduction¹⁸⁷

Women and girls have, since time immemorial, been subjected to sexual and gender-based violence, including rape and sexual slavery, during armed conflict. Mass rape of women and girls was documented during the Second World War as well as in more recent conflicts in such diverse countries as the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo.¹⁸⁸ Sexual violence has traditionally been considered as the inevitable by-product of armed conflict and has been mischaracterized by military and political leaders as a private crime or the unfortunate behavior of renegade soldiers. The use of rape as a weapon of war, however, means that rape is not a private or incidental crime. Rape as a weapon of war serves a strategic function and acts as an integral tool for achieving military objectives.

Conflict-related rape is an act of violence that targets sexuality, but it is also a military and political tool. It functions to subjugate and humiliate both the women and men within the targeted community. Furthermore, rape is generally not committed in isolation and victims are often subjected to multiple human rights abuses, which serve to further traumatize the survivor. In conflicts in which civilians are the principal targets, sexual violence has become an even more deliberate and insidious weapon of war. In the former Yugoslavia, for example, rape and other grave abuses committed by Serb forces were with the intent to drive the non-Serb population from their homes and communities.

¹⁸⁵ Human Rights Watch interview, Bo, March 2, 2000.

¹⁸⁶ Human Rights Watch interview, Freetown, February 8, 2000.

¹⁸⁷ Some of the information in this section was published previously in Human Rights Watch Women's Rights Project, *The Global Report on Women's Human Rights* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1995); and Dorothy Q. Thomas and Regan E. Ralph, "Rape in War: Challenging The Tradition of Impunity," *SAIS Review* (Washington D.C.: John Hopkins University Press, Winter-Spring 1994).

¹⁸⁸ See for example Human Rights Watch, *War Crimes in Bosnia-Herzegovina: U.N. Cease-Fire Won't Help Banja Luka* Volume 6, Issue 8, June 1994, <http://www.hrw.org/reports/1994/bosnia2/>; Human Rights Watch, *Bosnia-Herzegovina: The Fall of Srebrenica and the Failure of U.N. Peacekeeping*, Vol. 7, No. 13, October 1995, <http://www.hrw.org/summaries/s.bosnia9510.html>; Human Rights Watch, *Bosnia and Herzegovina, A Closed, Dark Place: Past and Present Human Rights Abuses in Foca*, Vol. 10, No. 6 (D), July 1998, <http://www.hrw.org/reports98/foca/>; Human Rights Watch/Africa, Human Rights Watch Women's Rights Project, Fédération Internationale des Ligues des Droits de l'Homme, Human Rights Watch, *Shattered Lives: Sexual Violence during the Rwandan Genocide and its Aftermath*, September 1996, <http://www.hrw.org/reports/1996/Rwanda.htm>; Human Rights Watch, *The War Within the War: Sexual Violence Against Women and Girls in Eastern Congo*, June 2002, <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2002/drc/>; Human Rights Watch, *Democratic Republic of Congo, War Crimes in Kisangani: The Response of Rwandan-backed Rebels to the May 2002 Mutiny*, Vol. 14, No 6 (A), August 2002, <http://hrw.org/reports/2002/drc2/>; United Nations, *Preliminary report submitted by the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, in accordance with Commission on Human Rights resolution 1994/45, E/CN.4/1995/42* (United Nations, 1994), p. 64.

The ten-year internal armed conflict in Sierra Leone has been characterized by egregious human rights abuses against the civilian population, including the use of sexual violence to achieve military aims.¹⁸⁹ From the testimonies in this report, it is clear that the rebels waged a war through attacking civilians. Sexual violence was therefore used as part of the rebels' military and political strategy, with victims often being used to bring messages to their enemies, including President Kabbah, ECOMOG, the SLA or the CDF. RUF rebels told an older woman whom they first raped and then subjected to amputation that: "There should be peace before the elections. Now you can go and vote. You have got to take a letter to Bo and those hands are the letters."¹⁹⁰ The testimonies also reveal how the rebels sought complete domination over girls and women by doing whatever they wanted to, including breaking numerous cultural taboos, such as raping lactating mothers or elderly women.

Despite being commonplace during armed conflict, rape "remains the least condemned war crime," according to the U.N. special rapporteur on violence against women.¹⁹¹ It is only in recent years that it has been exposed and condemned alongside other human rights abuses and international humanitarian law violations. Sexual violence remains insufficiently reported, condemned, and prosecuted as war crimes or crimes against humanity. This differential treatment of sexual violence highlights the international community's willingness to tolerate sexual violence against women notwithstanding its obligations under international law.

International law has prohibited rape and other forms of sexual violence against women during armed conflict for over a century.¹⁹² Perpetrators can be held accountable for rape and other forms of sexual violence as war crimes, crimes against humanity, and as acts of genocide.¹⁹³ International human rights law, which remains applicable in times of armed conflict, also prohibits sexual violence and sexual slavery.

International Humanitarian Law

International humanitarian law, also known as the laws of war, sets out protections for civilians, prisoners of war and other non-combatants during international and internal armed conflicts.¹⁹⁴ The four Geneva Conventions¹⁹⁵ and their two Additional Protocols¹⁹⁶ implicitly and explicitly condemn rape and other forms of

¹⁸⁹ United Nations, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, submitted in accordance with Commission on Human Rights resolution 2001/49, Addendum, Mission to Sierra Leone, E/CN.4/2002/83/Add.2* (United Nations, 2002).

¹⁹⁰ Human Rights Watch interview, Bo, March 2, 2000.

¹⁹¹ United Nations, *Preliminary report submitted by the Special Rapporteur on violence against women*, E/CN.4/1995/42, p. 64.

¹⁹² Some examples of how the law prohibiting war-related rape developed include the Italian lawyer Lucas de Penna advocating in the thirteenth century for the punishment of wartime rape just as severely as rape committed in peacetime, and Hugo Grotius stating in the sixteenth century that sexual violence committed in wartime was a punishable crime. Articles 44 and 47 of the 1863 Lieber Code, which served as the basis for subsequent war codes, also lists rape by a belligerent as a war crime punishable by death. See the Lieber Code of 1863, Correspondence, Orders, Reports, and Returns of the Union Authorities, From January 1 to December 31, 1863.--#7, O.R.--Series III—Volume III [S# 124], General Orders No. 100., War Dept., *Adj. General's Office, Washington*, April 24, 1863. Article 4 of the Hague Convention (1907) provides a general prohibition of torture and abuses against combatants and non-combatants. Article 46 of the same convention prescribes that "[f]amily honour and rights...must be respected," which can be interpreted to cover rape. See Convention Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land, with annexed Regulations (Hague Convention IV) of October 18, 1907, 36 Stat. 2277, T.S. No. 539 (entered into force January 26, 1910). Kelly D. Askin and Doreen M. Koenig (eds.), *Women and International Human Rights Law* (Ardsley, NY: Transnational Publishers, Inc., 1999), Volume 1, p. 50. See also Kelly D. Askin, *War Crimes Against Women: Prosecution in International War Crimes Tribunals* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Law International, 1997), pp. 18-36.

¹⁹³ Although genocide did not occur in Sierra Leone, rape and other forms of sexual violence can be defined as constituent elements of genocide. Genocide is defined under the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide as "acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group." Genocide has attained *jus cogens* status (a norm that preempts other norms) and is prohibited both in its own right and as a crime against humanity.

¹⁹⁴ See the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the two 1977 Protocols Additional to the Geneva Conventions. Other sources of international humanitarian law are the 1907 Hague Convention and Regulations, decisions of international tribunals and customary law.

¹⁹⁵ Sierra Leone became a party to the four Geneva Conventions on June 10, 1965.

sexual violence as serious violations of humanitarian law in both international and internal conflicts. In international armed conflicts, such crimes are grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions and are considered war crimes. Violations involving direct attacks on civilians during internal armed conflicts are increasingly recognized as war crimes.

Under international humanitarian law, the civil war in Sierra Leone was an internal armed conflict.¹⁹⁷ Common Article 3 to the Geneva Conventions applies to all parties in an internal armed conflict, including armed opposition groups. Through its prohibition of “outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment,” Common Article 3 implicitly condemns sexual violence.

The Fourth Geneva Convention on the protection of civilians in international armed conflicts provides a basis for defining the protections provided under Common Article 3. Article 27 on the treatment of protected persons states that “women shall be especially protected against any attack on their honour, in particular against rape, enforced prostitution, or any form of indecent assault.”¹⁹⁸ Article 147 specifies that “torture or inhuman treatment” and “willfully causing great suffering or serious injury to body or health” are grave breaches of the conventions.¹⁹⁹ According to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), rape and other forms of sexual violence are considered to be grave breaches and even a single act of sexual violence can constitute a war crime.²⁰⁰

Article 4 of Protocol II, which governs internal armed conflicts and applied to the conflict in Sierra Leone, expressly forbids “violence to life, health and physical or mental well-being of persons, in particular murder as well as cruel treatment, such as torture, mutilation or any form of corporal punishment” and “outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment, rape and enforced prostitution and any form of indecent assault” as well as “slavery and the slave trade in all their forms.”²⁰¹ According to the ICRC Commentary, this provision “reaffirms and supplements Common Article 3 ... [because] it became clear that it was necessary to strengthen ... the protection of women ... who may also be the victims of rape, enforced prostitution or indecent assault.”²⁰²

As the above language highlights, crimes of sexual violence under international humanitarian law have been mischaracterized as attacks against the honor of women or an outrage on personal dignity—as opposed to attacks on physical integrity. This mischaracterization diminishes the serious nature of the crime and contributes to the widespread misperception of rape as an attack on honor that is an “incidental” or “lesser” crime relative to crimes such as torture or enslavement.²⁰³ Whilst it is true that rape is an assault on human dignity, rape should primarily be viewed as a violent assault on bodily integrity as well as one that dishonors the perpetrator and not the victim.

Sexual Violence as a Crime against Humanity

Acts of sexual violence committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack against civilians in Sierra Leone can be classified as crimes against humanity and prosecuted as such. There is no single international treaty that provides an authoritative definition of crimes against humanity, but such crimes are generally considered to

¹⁹⁶ Sierra Leone ratified the Additional Protocols on October 21, 1986.

¹⁹⁷ The fighting in 1997-98 between West African ECOWAS forces and the RUF/AFRC government may have met the criteria for an international armed conflict.

¹⁹⁸ Geneva Convention IV, Article 27 (2). Article 76 of Protocol I extends this protection of protected persons to all women. Protocol I, Article 76.

¹⁹⁹ Geneva Convention IV, Article 147.

²⁰⁰ Theodor Meron, “Rape as a Crime Under International Humanitarian Law,” *American Journal of International Law* (Washington D.C.: American Society of International Law, 1993), vol. 87, p. 426, citing the International Committee of the Red Cross, Aide Mémoire, December 3, 1992.

²⁰¹ Protocol II, Article 4 (2) (a), (e) and (f).

²⁰² Yves Sandoz, Christophe Swinarski, Bruno Zimmerman (eds.), *ICRC Commentary on the Additional Protocols of June 1977 to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949* (Geneva: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987), p. 1375, para. 4539.

²⁰³ See Catherine N. Niarchos, “Women, War and Rape: Challenges facing the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia,” *Human Rights Quarterly* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1995), vol. 17, pp. 672, 674.

be serious and inhumane acts committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack against the civilian population, during peacetime or war, and that result from the persecution of a specific group.²⁰⁴

The charter establishing the Nuremberg tribunal after the Second World War did not specify rape under crimes against humanity or list gender as one of the grounds of persecution; the inclusion of rape could however be derived from the charter's general prohibition against "other inhumane acts."²⁰⁵ Resolving this ambiguity, rape (as well as torture) was included in the specific list of crimes constituting crimes against humanity in the statutes of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY)²⁰⁶ and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR).²⁰⁷

The statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) expands on this by including gender as one of the grounds of persecution, as well as adding rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization, or any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity.²⁰⁸ This definition of gender-based crimes against humanity, which appropriately makes no reference to the outdated notion of "crimes against honor," has been taken up in the Statute of the Special Court for Sierra Leone (see below for a discussion of the Special Court).

Under the evolving case law on crimes against humanity, formal proof of policy, plan or design is no longer an essential element for the prosecution of crimes against humanity. Both the ICTY and the ICTR have found that the existence of a plan or policy is sufficient: the policy need not be formalized and may be deduced from the way in which the acts occur.²⁰⁹ The failure to take action to address widespread or systematic attacks against the civilian population can also be considered sufficient to determine the requisite element of policy, plan or design. Both state and non-state actors can be held accountable for crimes against humanity.

An individual case of serious sexual violence can be prosecuted as a crime against humanity if the prosecution can make the link between the single violation and other violations of basic human rights or international humanitarian law that have been committed as a widespread or systematic attack against the civilian population.²¹⁰ Each enumerated type of act, such as murder, torture, or rape, does not need to be committed on a

²⁰⁴ See, e.g. "Report of the Secretary-General Pursuant to Paragraph 2 of Security Council Resolution 808," 32 I.L.M. at 1159 (1993), para. 48.

²⁰⁵ The Nuremberg Charter, as amended by the Berlin Protocol, 59 Stat. 1546, 1547 (1945), E.A.S. NO. 472, 82 U.N.T.S. 284. Under article 6(c) of the Nuremberg Charter, crimes against humanity included, but were not limited to the following atrocities: "[m]urder, extermination, enslavement, deportation, and other inhumane acts committed against any civilian population, before or during war, or persecutions on political, racial or religious grounds."

²⁰⁶ Article 5 of the Statute of the ICTY names rape as a crime against humanity. See Statute of the ICTY (adopted 25/5/93) at <http://www.un.org/icty/basic/statut/statute-con.htm>.

²⁰⁷ Article 3 of the Statute of the ICTR names rape as a crime against humanity. See Statute of the ICTR (adopted 8/11/94) at <http://www.icttr.org>.

²⁰⁸ Article 7 of the Statute of the ICC enumerates crimes against humanity as "any of the following acts when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, with knowledge of the attack: (a) Murder; (b) Extermination; (c) Enslavement; (d) Deportation; (e) Imprisonment or other severe deprivation of physical liberty in violation of fundamental rules of international law; (f) Torture; (g) Rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization, or any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity; (h) Persecution against any identifiable group or collectivity on political, racial, national, ethnic, cultural, religious, gender as defined in paragraph 3, or other grounds that are universally recognized as impermissible under international law, in connection with any act referred to in this paragraph or any crime within the jurisdiction of the Court; (i) Enforced disappearance of persons; (j) The crime of apartheid; (k) Other inhumane acts of a similar character intentionally causing great suffering, or serious injury to body or to mental or physical health." Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, opened for signature July 17, 1998, Article 7, reprinted in 37 I.L.M. 999 (1998). Sierra Leone signed and ratified the Rome Statute on October 17, 1998 and September 15, 2000 respectively.

²⁰⁹ *Kunarac* Trial Chamber Judgement, para. 432.

²¹⁰ "It is sufficient to show that the act took place in the context of an accumulation of acts of violence which, individually, may vary greatly in nature and gravity." *Kunarac* Trial Chamber Judgement, para. 419.

widespread or systematic basis—it is the attack that must be widespread or systematic.²¹¹

Human Rights Law

Sierra Leone is party to international human rights instruments that provide safeguards for women and girls at all times, including during armed conflict. These include protection from rape as torture and other mistreatment; slavery and forced prostitution; and discrimination based on sex. Armed opposition groups, particularly those in control of territory, have increasingly been under an obligation to respect international human rights standards.²¹²

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT)²¹³ prohibit torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment by officials or persons acting in an official capacity. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) provides for the right to freedom from torture, sexual exploitation and abuse as well as liberty and security of person.²¹⁴ The 1991 constitution of Sierra Leone also prohibits “any form of torture or any punishment or other treatment which is inhuman or degrading.”²¹⁵

The United Nations special rapporteur on torture has recognized that rape can constitute torture: “[R]ape is a traumatic form of torture for the victim.”²¹⁶ The ICTY in the *Furundzija* case noted that “[i]n certain circumstances ... rape can amount to torture and has been found by international judicial bodies to constitute a violation of the norm prohibiting torture.”²¹⁷ The ICTR in the *Akayesu* case stated that “Like torture, rape is used for such purposes as intimidation, degradation, humiliation, discrimination, punishment, control or destruction of a person. Like torture, rape is a violation of personal dignity, and rape in fact constitutes torture when it is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity.”²¹⁸

Sexual violence generally violates women’s rights to be free from discrimination based on sex as provided for under the ICCPR.²¹⁹ Under Article 1 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW),²²⁰ the definition of discrimination is considered to include “gender-based violence precisely because gender-based violence has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the enjoyment by women of human rights” on a basis of equality with men.²²¹ The CEDAW Committee enumerated a wide range of obligations for states related to ending sexual violence, including ensuring appropriate treatment for victims in the justice system, counseling and support services, and medical and psychological assistance to victims.²²² In a 1993

²¹¹ *Prosecutor v. Kupreškic*, Judgement, IT-95-16-T, 14 January 2000 (*Kupreškic* Trial Chamber Judgement), para. 550.

²¹² Nigel S. Rodley, “Can Armed Opposition Groups Violate Human Rights?” in P. Mahoney and K. Mahoney (eds.) *Human Rights in the 21st Century: A Global Challenge* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1993), pp. 297-318, and International Council on Human Rights Policy, “Hard Cases: Bringing Human Rights Violators to Justice Abroad—A Guide to Universal Jurisdiction,” (Geneva: International Council on Human Rights Policy, 1999), p. 6.

²¹³ Sierra Leone ratified the CAT on March 1, 2001.

²¹⁴ Sierra Leone ratified the CRC on June 18, 1990. Article 34 protects the child from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. Article 37 provides for the freedom from torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment as well as liberty and security of person.

²¹⁵ Constitution of Sierra Leone (1991), Chapter III – The Recognition and Protection of Fundamental Human Rights and Freedoms of the Individual, s. 20(1).

²¹⁶ United Nations, *Report of the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Torture, Mr. Nigel S. Rodley, submitted pursuant to the Commission on Human Rights Resolution 1992/32, E/CN.4/1995/34*, Paragraph 19, January 12, 1995.

²¹⁷ *Prosecutor v. Anto Furundžija*, Judgement, IT-95-17/1-T, December 10, 1998, para. 171.

²¹⁸ *Prosecutor v. Jean-Paul Akayesu*, Judgement, ICTR-96-4-T, September 2, 1998 (the *Akayesu* Trial Chamber Judgement), para. 687.

²¹⁹ See ICCPR, Articles 2 (1) and 26.

²²⁰ Sierra Leone ratified this treaty on November 11, 1988.

²²¹ Women, Law and Development International, *Gender Violence: The Hidden War Crimes* (Washington D.C.: Women, Law and Development International, 1998), p. 37.

²²² Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, “Violence Against Women,” General Recommendation no. 19 (eleventh session, 1992), U.N. Document CEDAW/C/1992/L.1/Add.15.

resolution, the U.N. General Assembly declared that prohibiting gender discrimination includes eliminating gender-based violence and that states “should pursue by all appropriate means and without delay a policy of eliminating violence against women.”²²³

The CRC also provides for freedom from discrimination on the basis of gender (Article 2), and the right to enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health (Article 24). Under Article 39, states shall take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social integration of a child victim of any form of neglect, exploitation, or abuse; torture or any other form of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; or armed conflicts. The CRC also calls upon states to provide special protection and assistance to a child “temporarily or permanently deprived of his or her family environment.”²²⁴ A child’s right to “such measures of protection as are required by his status as a minor” is also guaranteed by the ICCPR.²²⁵

Under both the ICCPR and CEDAW, slavery and forced prostitution in times of armed conflict constitute a basic violation of the right to liberty and security of person.²²⁶ Furthermore, slavery, which is a *jus cogens* norm from which no derogation is permitted, is prohibited under Article 8 of the ICCPR, which also prohibits forced labor, and by the 1926 Slavery Convention.²²⁷ The right to freedom from slavery is also provided under the constitution of Sierra Leone.²²⁸

The African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, to which Sierra Leone is a party, guarantees the “[e]limination of every discrimination against women ... and protection of the rights of the woman and the child”²²⁹ as well as the right to integrity of one’s person, and the right to be free of “... [a]ll forms of exploitation and degradation ..., particularly slavery, slave trade, torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment and treatment.”²³⁰

Gender Jurisprudence for Crimes of Sexual Violence

Despite the widespread practice of sexual violence during the Second World War, rape did not figure prominently in the prosecutions brought by the two major tribunals established after the war. Rape was not prosecuted at any of the Nuremberg trials notwithstanding the evidence of sexual violence presented. Rape charges were brought in a few cases before the International Military Tribunal in the Far East (the Tokyo Tribunal),²³¹ and several accused were convicted of crimes including sexual violence. The Tokyo tribunal was responsible for bringing international attention to atrocities, including sexual violence, committed during the

²²³ United Nations General Assembly, “Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women,” A/RES/48/104, December 20, 1993 (issued on February 23, 1994). See Article 4, in particular.

²²⁴ Article 20 (1) of the CRC.

²²⁵ Although the masculine pronoun is used, the ICCPR is applicable without any discrimination to sex as stated in Article 24 (1).

²²⁶ Article 9 of the ICCPR provides for the freedom from arbitrary arrest, detention or exile, whilst Article 23 prohibits forced marriage. Under Article 6 of CEDAW, states are required to take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to suppress all forms of traffic in women and exploitation of prostitution of women.

²²⁷ Slavery Convention, United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 212, p. 17., July 7, 1955.

²²⁸ Constitution of Sierra Leone (1991), Chapter III – The Recognition and Protection of Fundamental Human Rights and Freedoms of the Individual, s. 19 (1).

²²⁹ Article 3 of the African [Banjul] Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, adopted June 27, 1981, Organization of African Unity Doc. CAB/LEG/67/3 rev. 5, 21 I.L.M. 58, 1982. Sierra Leone signed and ratified this treaty on August 27, 1981 and September 21, 1993 respectively.

²³⁰ Articles 4 and 5 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights.

²³¹ The Indictment for the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (IMTFE) included rape within the crimes charged generally. IMTFE Indictment, p. 31, reproduced in the IMTFE Docs., vol., 20, Annex A-6; See also Appendix D, attached to the Indictment, which provides more detail on the charges. The Indictment stated that the accused were responsible for “mass murder, rape, pillage, brigandage, torture, and other barbaric cruelties upon the helpless civilian population of the overrun countries.” Appendix D alleged responsibility for “inhumane treatment” and “mistreatment” when “civilian internees were murdered, beaten, tortured, and otherwise ill-treated, and female prisoners were raped by members of the Japanese forces” and “female nurses were raped, murdered and ill-treated,” and “large numbers of the inhabitants” were also murdered, tortured, raped, and otherwise mistreated.

“Rape of Nanking.” The Tokyo tribunal failed, however, to prosecute members of the Japanese government and military for the 200,000 “comfort women” forced into sexual slavery during the war.²³²

Widespread reports of sexual violence in the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda were instrumental in the U.N. Security Council decisions authorizing the establishment of the ICTY and the ICTR. As noted, the statutes of both the ICTY and ICTR make explicit mention of rape as a crime against humanity.²³³ The ICTY also has implicit jurisdiction to prosecute crimes of sexual violence as grave breaches of international humanitarian law, as violations of the laws and customs of war and genocide.²³⁴ The ICTR is explicitly empowered to prosecute rape as a serious violation of Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions and can prosecute crimes of sexual violence when they constitute torture or genocide.²³⁵

Both tribunals have played a critical role in setting precedents in the prosecution of conflict-related sexual violence, including articulating definitions and elements of many gender-related crimes.²³⁶ As noted at this report’s opening (see “Definition of Sexual Violence, Rape and Sexual Slavery,” p. 2), both the ICTR (in the 1998 *Akayesu* judgment) and the ICTY (in the 2002 *Foca* judgment) defined rape, of which there is no commonly accepted definition in international law, albeit the definition from the *Akayesu* judgment has been criticized as too broad. The *Akayesu* judgment also provided a legal definition of sexual violence: any act of a sexual nature, including rape, committed on a person under coercive circumstances, but which need not include a physical invasion of the body or even contact.²³⁷ The ICTY has found that sexual violence not only constitutes crimes against humanity, war crimes and grave breaches, but can also constitute torture, enslavement, serious bodily injury and other relevant acts as long as the elements constituting these crimes are present in the act of sexual violence.

In general, however, both tribunals have had an inconsistent record on investigating and prosecuting crimes of sexual violence. The ICTR continues to lack a comprehensive approach to the inclusion of sexual violence charges and has failed to include these charges or seek amendments in the original indictments where the Office of the Prosecutor has witness testimony or evidence of sexual violence.²³⁸

²³² See the Appendix entitled “An Analysis of the Legal Liability of the Government of Japan for “Comfort Women Stations” Established During the Second World War” to the United Nations, *Contemporary Forms of Slavery: Systematic Rape, Sexual Slavery and Slavery-like Practices during Armed Conflict*, pp. 38-55.

²³³ Article 5 of the Statute of the ICTY names rape as a crime against humanity. See Statute of the ICTY (adopted 25/5/93) at <http://www.un.org/icty/basic/statut/statute-con.htm>. Article 3 of the Statute of the ICTR names rape as a crime against humanity. See Statute of the ICTR (adopted 8/11/94) at <http://www.ictor.org>.

²³⁴ Articles 2, 3 and 4 of the Statute of the ICTY respectively.

²³⁵ Articles 4, Article 3 (f) and Article 2 respectively of the ICTR Statute.

²³⁶ *Akayesu* Trial Chamber Judgment; *Prosecutor v. Tadic*; *Prosecutor v. Delalic, et al.*, IT-96-21-A, November 16, 1998; *Prosecutor v. Anto Furundzija* Judgment, December 10, 1998; *Prosecutor v. Blaskic*, IT-95-14, Judgement, March 3, 2000; *Prosecutor v. Kvočka et al.*, Judgement, IT-98-30-T, November 2, 2001. *Prosecutor v. Dragoljub Kunarac, Radomir Kovac and Zoran Vukovic* (Foca case), Appeals Chamber Judgement, June 12, 2002, IT-96-23 and IT-96-23/1.

²³⁷ *Akayesu* Trial Chamber Judgement, para. 688. The ICTR stated: “The Tribunal defines rape as a physical invasion of a sexual nature, committed on a person under circumstances which are coercive. The Tribunal considers sexual violence, which includes rape, as any act of a sexual nature which is committed on a person under circumstances which are coercive. Sexual violence is not limited to physical invasion of the human body and may include acts which do not involve penetration or even physical contact. The incident described by Witness KK in which the Accused ordered the Interahamwe [Hutu militia] to undress a student and force her to do gymnastics naked in the public courtyard of the bureau communal, in front of a crowd, constitutes sexual violence. The Tribunal notes in this context that coercive circumstances need not be evidenced by a show of physical force. Threats, intimidation, extortion and other forms of duress which prey on fear or desperation may constitute coercion, and coercion may be inherent in certain circumstances, such as armed conflict or the military presence of Interahamwe among refugee Tutsi women at the bureau communal.”

²³⁸ See Human Rights Watch press release “Bosnia: Landmark Verdicts for Rape, Torture, and Sexual Enslavement,” February 22, 2001, at <http://www.hrw.org/press/2001/02/serbia0222.htm>. These facts were reconfirmed from a reliable source from the ICTR, Human Rights Watch interview, Freetown, November 8, 2002.

Command Responsibility²³⁹

The culpability of superior officers for atrocities that their subordinates commit is commonly known as command responsibility. Although the concept originated in military law, it now also embraces the responsibility of civil authorities for the abuses committed by persons under their direct authority.²⁴⁰

Commanders of armed rebel groups, such as in Sierra Leone, are subject to command responsibility. While Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions and Protocol II on internal armed conflicts do not explicitly mention command responsibility, the application of Protocol II depends on there being organized armed groups “under responsible command.”²⁴¹ Command responsibility is now part of customary international law, that is, a universally recognized precept of international criminal law. It is also an explicit feature of many treaties, including the statutes of the ICC, the ad hoc tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, and of the Special Court for Sierra Leone (see below, p. 63).

There are two forms of command responsibility. The first is direct responsibility for orders that are unlawful. When an official authorizes or orders rapes, massacres, or other grave abuses, that individual is criminally responsible for these acts, whether the superior who initiated or conveyed the order also carries out the atrocity or has subordinates perform it. The other form of command responsibility is an imputed responsibility for the crimes of subordinates where those crimes are not based on direct orders. In this case, responsibility is determined on the basis of whether the superior knew or should have known of the abuses committed by subordinates.

Knowledge of the abuses may be actual, either by the army officer or rebel commander witnessing the crimes or being informed of them shortly thereafter. It may also be constructive, where the abuses were so numerous or notorious that a reasonable person could come to no other conclusion than that the superior must have known of their commission or of the existence of an understood and acknowledged routine for their commission. Another basis of constructive notice is that the officer should have known of the offenses, but displayed such serious personal dereliction as to constitute willful and wanton disregard of the possible consequences, which is an extreme form of negligence. The failure of the commander to take appropriate measures to control the subordinates under his or her command and prevent atrocities, and the failure to punish offenders, are further elements in showing command responsibility.

An individual found to have command responsibility for the crime committed by a subordinate is deemed culpable to the same degree as the subordinate. A commander will therefore be found guilty of murder if he or she stood by while the subordinate committed murder.

With regard to the crime of rape, some courts have been reluctant to impute command responsibility for what is seen as random and a private crime.²⁴² However, the requirements of command responsibility do not vary according to the particular crime; the commander is no more permitted to stand by while rape is committed than to stand by while murder is. If a superior had reason to know that subordinates under his or her command committed rape (such as news reports, or widespread commission of this abuse), and failed to use all feasible means under his or her command to prevent and punish this abuse, he or she may also be found guilty of rape.

²³⁹ The legal analysis in this section was previously published in Human Rights Watch, *Milosevic and the Chain of Command in Kosovo*, July 7, 2001, <http://www.hrw.org/press/2001/07/chain-of-command.htm>.

²⁴⁰ Geoffrey Robertson, *Crimes against Humanity: The Struggle for Global Justice* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1999), p. 206-7.

²⁴¹ Article 1 (1), Protocol II.

²⁴² See generally Patricia Viseur Sellers and Kaoru Okuizumi, “Prosecuting International Crimes: An Inside View: Intentional Prosecution of Sexual Assaults,” *Transnational Law & Contemporary Problems* Volume 7, Number 1 (Spring 1997), p. 45.

VIII. TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE MECHANISMS FOR SIERRA LEONE

Two transitional justice mechanisms are currently underway to address the cycle of impunity in Sierra Leone: a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and a Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL). Both bodies became operational in the third quarter of 2002.

The Lomé Amnesty

The Lomé Peace Agreement of July 7, 1999, controversially provided for amnesty for combatants in the civil war. Under Article 9 (1), Sankoh was granted an absolute and free pardon (he had been convicted and sentenced to death for his involvement in the 1997 coup); and under Article 9 (3) the government was required to ensure that “no official or judicial action is taken against any member of the RUF/SL, ex-AFRC, ex-SLA or CDF in respect to anything done by them in pursuit of their objectives as members of those organizations, since March 1991, up to the time of signing of the present Agreement....”²⁴³ At the last minute, the U.N. secretary-general’s special representative attending the talks added a hand-written caveat that the U.N. held the understanding that the amnesty and pardon provided for in Article 9 did not apply to international crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and other serious violations of international humanitarian law.

Under international law, states have an *erga omnes* obligation—in other words a duty owed to the whole international community—to investigate and prosecute crimes against humanity, genocide and torture even if this means that amnesty laws are in effect annulled. This means that Sierra Leone therefore has an obligation under international law to prosecute those who committed crimes against humanity and torture, irrespective of the Lomé Amnesty and the setting up of the SCSL. Other states also have an obligation to prosecute these crimes based on the principle of universal jurisdiction (see below at p. 66 for a discussion on this principle). Crimes committed in the post-Lomé period fall outside the amnesty and can be prosecuted under domestic law.

The granting of an amnesty may also be challenged under the Sierra Leonean constitution and international law, as being against the fundamental legal principle of the state’s duty to provide an effective remedy against official violation of guaranteed rights. The U.N. Human Rights Commission has ruled that “States may not deprive individuals of the right to an effective remedy, including compensation and such rehabilitation as may be possible.”²⁴⁴ A duty to revoke the amnesty retroactively may even arise under international law. Several Sierra Leonean lawyers have discussed the issue of the amnesty’s constitutionality and whether to challenge it in court.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission

The 1999 Lomé Peace Agreement provides for the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which was conceived by nongovernmental organizations attending the peace talks as a counterbalance to the amnesty granted to all parties. Under the peace agreement, the TRC was to be established to “address impunity, break the cycle of violence, provide a forum for both the victims and perpetrators of human rights violations to tell their story, [and] get a clear picture of the past in order to facilitate genuine healing and reconciliation....”²⁴⁵

The commission should have been established within ninety days after the signing of the peace agreement, but the Sierra Leonean Parliament did not pass the Truth and Reconciliation Act establishing the TRC until February 2000. Its establishment was further delayed due to the renewed outbreak of fighting in May 2000, and lack of political will of both the government and the international community. As the selection process for the commissioners took longer than planned, the government also decided to delay the commencement of the TRC until after the May 2002 elections to ensure that the TRC would not be politicized by the elections. The activities of the TRC may well be further hampered by funding shortfalls. Only U.S. \$1.5 million had been pledged as of June 2002, partially because the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) did not

²⁴³ Article 9 of the 1999 Lomé Peace Agreement.

²⁴⁴ Robertson, *Crimes against Humanity: The Struggle for Global Justice*, p. 260.

²⁴⁵ Article 26 (1) of the 1999 Lomé Peace Agreement.

launch the funding appeal until January 25, 2002. Its total planned budget was reduced from almost U.S. \$10 million to U.S. \$6,276,440 in August 2002 and has remained unchanged since then.²⁴⁶

On May 13, 2002, President Kabbah announced the seven commissioners. The four Sierra Leoneans are: Rt. Rev. Dr. Joseph C. Humper; Justice Laura A. E. Marcus-Jones; Prof. John A. Kamara; and Mr. Sylvanus Torto. The three international commissioners are: Madam Ajaaratai Satang Jow (Gambia); Ms. Yasmin L. Sooka (South Africa); and Professor William Schabas (Canada). The commission had a three-month preparatory phase, which started in July 2002, and must wrap up its activities and submit a report within twelve months of the start of hearings, which as of this writing have not yet begun.²⁴⁷ An interim executive secretariat headed by the Sierra Leonean lawyer Yasmin Jusu-Sheriff and staffed with eight other members was established to support the work of the commissioners. The budget will be used to establish the secretariat of the commission in Freetown, which will support the seven commissioners and the office of the executive secretary. In addition, it is likely that six operational units will be established to provide support to the commissioners and the executive secretary.²⁴⁸ The establishment of regional offices is also provided for under the Act and should encourage Sierra Leonean participation and ownership of the process. These offices are expected to begin functioning in early 2003.²⁴⁹

The TRC's mandate is "to create an impartial historical record of violations and abuses of human rights and international humanitarian law related to the armed conflict in Sierra Leone, from the beginning of the armed conflict in 1991 to the signing of the Lomé Peace Agreement; to address impunity; to respond to the needs of the victims; to promote healing and reconciliation and to prevent a repetition of the violations and abuses suffered."²⁵⁰ The commission is called upon to give special attention to the subject of sexual abuse and may also implement "special procedures to address the needs of such particular victims as children or those who have suffered sexual abuse . . ."²⁵¹ Any committees formed by the commission to assist it in the performance of its functions should also take into account gender representation.²⁵²

Both the UNAMSIL human rights unit and NGOs have conducted sensitization activities, mainly in the key urban centers, to ensure Sierra Leonean awareness of the process, but at the time of writing, there was still considerable confusion about the role of the TRC, especially in relation to the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL).

Human Rights Watch believes that the work of the TRC would be greatly enhanced were the staff of the TRC to be gender-balanced with women represented at all levels and to include persons with expertise in sexual and gender-based violence. The gender adviser, expected to take up the post in January 2003, should provide gender sensitization training and ensure that the work of the TRC, including investigations and hearings, are carried out in a sensitive manner. Human Rights Watch recommends that the TRC explore the relationship between the widespread and systematic nature of conflict-related sexual violence and the low status of and discrimination against women. The final report on the findings of the TRC should highlight gender-specific abuses committed throughout the country during the armed conflict. The TRC should also make recommendations on improvements to the law and judicial system toward eliminating the discriminatory nature of customary and general law, and on legal reform and human rights training for government authorities, including members of the criminal justice system. The report should highlight the need for increased assistance (shelter, medical care, education, skills training, mental health programs, etc.) for women, as well as for strengthening existing women's groups through capacity building.

²⁴⁶ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with TRC staff, November 14, 2002.

²⁴⁷ The TRC can extend its operations for another six months provided that good cause is shown. TRC Act 2000, Section 5 (1). See <http://www.sierra-leone.org/trcact2000.html>.

²⁴⁸ The six operational units will probably be: Administration and Programming; Public Information and Education; Legal; Investigation; Research; Reconciliation and Protection.

²⁴⁹ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with TRC staff, November 14, 2002.

²⁵⁰ TRC Act 2000, Section 6 (1). See <http://www.sierra-leone.org/trcact2000.html>.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, Section 6 (2) (b) and 7 (4) respectively.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, Section 10 (2).

Special Court for Sierra Leone

Following the hostage taking of over 500 U.N. peacekeepers and the renewed outbreak of fighting between the RUF and government forces in May 2000, the government of Sierra Leone requested that the U.N. assist in establishing a court “to try and bring to credible justice those members of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and their accomplices responsible for committing crimes against the people of Sierra Leone and for the taking of U.N. peacekeepers as hostages.”²⁵³ The government expressly mentioned that the RUF, in renegeing on their obligations under the Lomé Peace Agreement, continued to subject many women and children to human rights abuses, including sexual slavery. On August 14, 2000, the U.N. Security Council passed Resolution 1315 requesting the secretary-general to negotiate with the Sierra Leonean government an agreement for the establishment of a special court.

Due to delays in funding contributions and agreement on key substantive matters, the agreement between the government and the U.N. to establish the Special Court for Sierra Leone was not signed until January 16, 2002.²⁵⁴ The total budget for the SCSL is U.S. \$56.8 million. The first year of the court has been fully funded and pledges have been received for the second year.²⁵⁵ The secretary-general appointed the prosecutor and registrar on April 19, 2002, and it is hoped that the first trials will commence in the second quarter of 2003.²⁵⁶ Given budgetary constraints, it is likely that only a limited number of persons will be tried, perhaps as few as twenty.

The SCSL differs in notable ways from the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. Firstly, it is based on an agreement between the government and the U.N. and was not established by a Security Council resolution under Chapter VII of the U.N. Charter. This means that the Special Court does not have the power to require international cooperation.²⁵⁷ Secondly, the SCSL is a hybrid court relying on both international and domestic laws. The professional and support staff of the court will be a mix of Sierra Leonean and foreign nationals.

Article 1 of the SCSL provides that the court has the competence to try “persons who bear the greatest responsibility for serious violations of international humanitarian law and Sierra Leonean law committed in the territory of Sierra Leone since 30 November 1996.”²⁵⁸

Other crimes that the court has the jurisdiction to prosecute are provided under Article 2 to Article 6. Under Article 2, which defines the crimes against humanity that the SCSL has the power to prosecute, the following crimes of sexual violence are specified: “rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy and any other form of sexual violence.”²⁵⁹ Rape, enforced prostitution and any form of indecent assault can also be prosecuted as violations of Common Article 3 to the Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocol II as stated under Article 3 of the statute. Under Article 4, specific serious violations of international humanitarian law are enumerated, including intentionally attacking civilians and the recruitment of children under fifteen years old into

²⁵³ Letter dated June 12, 2000 and addressed by the president of Sierra Leone to the U.N. secretary-general. Letter and annexed Suggested Framework for the Special Court.

²⁵⁴ Agreement between the United Nations and the Government of Sierra Leone on the Establishment of a Special Court for Sierra Leone at <http://www.un.org/Docs/sc/reports/2000/915e.pdf>.

²⁵⁵ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Robin Vincent (registrar of the SCSL), U.K., July 4, 2002.

²⁵⁶ S/2002/246, Letter dated March 6, 2002 from the secretary-general addressed to the president of the Security Council. David Crane, a prosecutor for the U.S. Department of Defence, was appointed as prosecutor and Robin Vincent of the U.K. was appointed as the registrar.

²⁵⁷ See also letter from Human Rights Watch to members of the Security Council and other interested states dated September 27, 2001. Under Chapter VII, which is entitled “Action with respect to threats to the peace, breaches of the peace, and acts of aggression,” the Security Council can decide to take non-military and/or military action against states that threaten international peace and security. Decisions taken by the Security Council under Chapter VII—which should be read in conjunction with Article 24, which confers primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security to the Security Council, and Article 25, under which U.N. member states agree to accept and carry out the decisions of the Security Council—are binding on member states.

²⁵⁸ Statute of the Special Court for Sierra Leone at <http://www.sierra-leone.org/documents-specialcourt.html>.

²⁵⁹ The other crimes against humanity are: murder; enslavement; deportation; imprisonment; torture; persecution on political, racial, ethnic or religious grounds; and other inhuman acts.

the armed forces. With the unanimous adoption by the U.N. General Assembly of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in May 2000,²⁶⁰ however, the minimum age for any conscription or forced recruitment has been raised to eighteen.²⁶¹ Under Article 5, gender-based crimes can also be prosecuted under domestic law provisions. However, as these provisions do not meet international standards in terms of definition of crimes and punishment, they should not be applied.²⁶²

In accordance with the U.N.'s statement that it did not recognize the Lomé amnesty as it purported to apply to genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and other serious violations of international humanitarian law, Article 10 of the court's statute states:

An amnesty granted to any person falling within the jurisdiction of the Special Court in respect of the crimes referred to in articles 2 to 4 of the present Statute shall not be a bar to prosecution.²⁶³

This means that those bearing the greatest responsibility for crimes against humanity (Article 2); violations of Article 3 common to the Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocol II (Article 3); and other serious violations of international humanitarian law (Article 4) can be prosecuted for their crimes.

The issue of command responsibility is of crucial import to the SCSL given that its mandate is to try "persons who bear the greatest responsibility for serious violations of international humanitarian law and Sierra Leonean law committed in the territory of Sierra Leone since 30 November 1996, including those leaders, who in committing such crimes, have threatened the establishment of and implementation of the peace process in Sierra Leone."²⁶⁴ The court therefore will only prosecute the so-called "big fish" and not the "small fry" or those persons who in many instances actually committed the violations. Article 6 of the statute of the SCSL provides that:

3. The fact that any of the acts referred to in articles 2 to 4 of the present Statute was committed by a subordinate does not relieve his or her superior of criminal responsibility if he or she knew or had reason to know that the subordinate was about to commit such acts or had done so and the superior had failed to take the necessary and reasonable measures to prevent such acts or to punish the perpetrators thereof.
4. The fact that an accused person acted pursuant to an order of a Government or of a superior shall not relieve him or her of criminal responsibility, but may be considered in mitigation of punishment if the Special Court determines that justice so requires.²⁶⁵

The failure by rebel commanders and army officers to punish combatants involved in abuses, despite documentation of and international attention to crimes of sexual violence perpetrated by rebels and pro-government forces, indicates that such persons of authority knowingly tolerated and even condoned these abuses. Commanders may also bear individual criminal responsibility for crimes of sexual violence in addition to command responsibility, as the testimonies in this report highlight.

It is highly regrettable that the court's temporal jurisdiction does not extend to the beginning of the conflict (March 23, 1991). Instead November 30, 1996, the date of the Abidjan Peace Accord, was chosen as it was felt that including the whole war would impose too great a burden on the court. The U.N. also felt that this date corresponded to a new phase in the conflict without necessarily having any political connotations, and that this

²⁶⁰ General Assembly resolution A/RES/54/263 on the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflicts, adopted May 25, 2000.

²⁶¹ Sierra Leone signed and ratified the Optional Protocol of the CRC on September 8, 2000 and on August 24, 2001 respectively. The Optional Protocol entered into force on February 12, 2002.

²⁶² Article 5 refers to the sections (6, 7 and 12) of the 1926 Prevention of Cruelty to Children Act that relate to abuses committed against girls under the age of fourteen. See above, "Rape as a crime under general law," et seq., for a discussion of these provisions.

²⁶³ Article 10 of the statute of the SCSL.

²⁶⁴ Article 1 of the statute of the SCSL.

²⁶⁵ Article 6 (3) and (4) of the statute of the SCSL.

temporal jurisdiction encompassed the most serious crimes committed by persons of all political and military groups and in all geographical areas of the country.²⁶⁶ The temporal jurisdiction is, however, open-ended as the war was still ongoing at the time of the discussions on the court's establishment. The U.N. states that the lifespan of the court will be determined by "a subsequent agreement between the parties upon completion of its judicial activities, an indication of the capacity acquired by the local courts to assume the prosecution of remaining cases, or the unavailability of funds."²⁶⁷

In terms of prosecuting crimes of sexual violence, the statute specifies that "given the nature of the crimes committed and the particular sensitivities of girls, young women and children victims of rape, sexual assault, abduction and slavery of all kinds, due consideration should be given in the appointment of staff to the employment of prosecutors and investigators experienced in gender-related crimes and juvenile justice."²⁶⁸ Likewise, Article 16 (4) specifies that personnel of the Victims and Witnesses Unit should include experts in trauma, including trauma related to crimes of sexual violence and violence against children.

As the TRC and Special Court will be functioning simultaneously, the interaction between the two bodies, whose subject matter as well as personal and temporal jurisdiction intersect, must urgently be clarified. This is crucial in terms of sharing of information, especially confidential information, but also for the sensitization efforts underway. Enabling legislation enacted in March 2002 contains a provision, criticized by many nongovernmental organizations, that establishes the primacy of the SCSL, apparently including over the TRC.²⁶⁹

Given that the SCSL will only try a limited number of alleged perpetrators, it needs to establish a clear and comprehensive prosecutorial strategy from the onset. Within the court's mandate, the prosecutor should ensure that gender-related crimes are thoroughly and sensitively investigated and rigorously prosecuted as crimes against humanity or war crimes. The two gender crimes investigators should conduct compulsory gender sensitization training for all staff, and provide more in-depth training for staff members dealing most directly with survivors of sexual violence. The gender crimes investigators should also have access to all cases under investigation, even the ones not previously identified as gender cases, to provide guidance and expertise.

Principle of Universal Jurisdiction

Given the limited number of persons that the Special Court can prosecute due to funding constraints, it is important to note that the principle of universal jurisdiction applies to war crimes, crimes against humanity, slavery,²⁷⁰ and torture.²⁷¹ A resolution passed by the U.N. Commission on Human Rights in April 1999, specifically reminded all factions and forces in Sierra Leone of this principle, stating that "in any armed conflict including an armed conflict of a non-international character, the taking of hostages, willful killing and torture or inhuman treatment of persons taking no active part in the hostilities constitute grave breaches of international humanitarian law, and that all countries are under the obligation to search for such persons alleged to have committed, or to have ordered to be committed, such grave breaches and to bring such persons, regardless of their

²⁶⁶ United Nations, *Report of the Secretary-General on the Establishment of a Special Court for Sierra Leone*, S/2000/915, October 4, 2000, para. 25-28. Other dates considered were May 25, 1997, and January 6, 1999, but the U.N. considered that these would be perceived as offering only selective justice.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, para. 28.

²⁶⁸ Article 15 (4) of the statute of the SCSL. A Woman's Task Force for the Special Court and TRC was established with the support of the International Human Rights Law Group to advocate that gender-based crimes be properly investigated by both bodies and—in terms of the Special Court—prosecuted. The Women's Task Force has also advocated for the appointment of staff who are experienced in and sensitive to cases of sexual violence, as well as for gender balance i.e. women should be well represented in positions of authority as well as in positions of support (statement takers, investigators, counselors and interpreters, etc.).

²⁶⁹ Special Court Agreement 2002 (ratification) Act 2002 (March 7, 2002). Article 21 (2) of the Act provides that: "Notwithstanding any other law, every natural person, corporation, or other body created by or under Sierra Leone law shall comply with any direction specified in an order of the Special Court."

²⁷⁰ Slavery can be prosecuted as a war crime and a crime against humanity, but also on an independent basis against both state and non-state actors during wartime and peace given its status as a peremptory norm of customary law.

²⁷¹ Draft Code of Crimes Against the Peace and Security of Mankind, Articles 8, 9, 17, 19 and 20, *Report of the International Law Commission on the Work of its Forty-eighth Session*, U.N. Doc. A/51/10, para.50 (United Nations, 1996).

nationality, before their own courts.”²⁷²

The special rapporteur for violence against women also stressed the principle of universal jurisdiction in her report on her mission to Sierra Leone:

Thus, crimes of gender based violence must be investigated and documented for possible criminal prosecution in the domestic courts of other States which may have jurisdiction ...²⁷³

IX. THE NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

National Response

Climate of Impunity

Human Rights Watch is not aware of any prosecutions in the Sierra Leonean courts of any cases of conflict-related sexual violence or other human rights abuses. The lack of both categories of prosecutions is due to a number of factors. Firstly, many survivors simply want to try to forget about the sexual violence and other human rights abuses they have been subjected to and just get on with their lives in post-conflict Sierra Leone, which for many is a daily struggle. Secondly, some women and girls fear reprisals. According to the survey conducted by Physicians for Human Rights, thirteen (or 25 percent) of the fifty-one respondents indicating that their perpetrator should not be punished, expressed this fear.²⁷⁴ Thirdly, women and girls are often ashamed of what happened to them and are therefore reluctant to present themselves in court. Fourthly, women and girls have little faith in the criminal justice system or the customary law system, which were never equipped to deal with crimes of such widespread and systematic nature. If a survivor of sexual violence does decide to prosecute, she is likely to be retraumatized by the whole experience given the very poor track record of the Sierra Leonean criminal justice system. Fifthly, many women and girls lack the financial means to access the court system. As women are generally economically dependent on men, many women who have initiated prosecution of non-conflict-related sexual violence, have dropped their cases once they realize that their husband may be sentenced to prison (dependency means that a previously abducted woman or girl who is still with her rebel “husband” is even more unlikely to bring any charges against him). Sixthly, victims are often not even aware of their rights, given high illiteracy rates, prevalent societal attitudes towards sexual violence, and women’s low status in Sierra Leonean society. Many rural women and girls, in particular, see little value in the formal court system as there is often no financial or material benefit from bringing a case. Attitudes towards sexual violence, and the subordinate status of women and girls, mean that there is considerable societal pressure for women not to bring cases before the courts that could bring shame to the extended family, such as sexual violence cases.

The climate of impunity means that violence against women and girls remains a serious problem in post-conflict Sierra Leone. Rape continues to be committed by former rebels, members of the CDF and by civilians who are used to doing what they want with women by force and with impunity. A lawyer who practices in the Eastern Province reported to Human Rights Watch that of the rape victims he was currently representing at least 50 percent had been raped by civilians and the remainder by former combatants.²⁷⁵ Girls continue to suffer the greatest number of sexual assaults: a lawyer who practices in the Freetown area reported to Human Rights Watch that of the at least fifty rape victims she represented at the time of writing, 98 percent are under fourteen years old.²⁷⁶ Although there are no reliable statistics on the incidence of sexual or domestic violence, the police doctor in Connaught Hospital in Freetown, which is the largest government-run hospital in the country, sees about thirty victims of recent rape and sexual assault per month.²⁷⁷ For the reasons enumerated above, this figure is likely to

²⁷² UN Commission on Human Rights resolution 1999/1, April 6, 1999.

²⁷³ United Nations, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women* E/CN.4/2002/83/Add. 2, 2002, para. 78.

²⁷⁴ PHR report, pp. 53-55 and Table 7 at p. 56. Women could select more than one option.

²⁷⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Abdulai Bangurah (lawyer), Freetown, March 15, 2002.

²⁷⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Claire Fatu Hanciles (lawyer), Freetown, August 9, 2002.

²⁷⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Bill Roberts and Anne Hewlett (respectively crime adviser and criminal investigation trainer with the Commonwealth Community Safety and Security Project), Freetown, May 1, 2002.

be the tip of the iceberg. Physicians for Human Rights found that 39 percent of respondents expressed concern (“quite a bit” or “extremely worried”) about future sexual violence by family members, friends or civilian strangers. Ninety-one women (or 9 percent of all respondents) had experienced sexual abuse, occurring at an average age of fifteen, from family, friends or civilians during their lifetime.²⁷⁸

Despite all these problems, seventeen out of a total of ninety-four respondents (or 18 percent) reporting sexual violence to Physicians for Human Rights supported punishment for “all those involved,” thirty women (or 32 percent) supported punishment for the perpetrators, and seventeen women (or 18 percent) supported punishment for the commanders. Thirty-three women believed that punishment of perpetrators would prevent sexual violence from happening to others.²⁷⁹

Corrupt and Ineffective Judiciary

Lack of faith in the system, as the few women who have decided to prosecute non-conflict-related rape have experienced, is fully justified. The judiciary—which, prior to the conflict, barely existed in the provinces, and in Freetown was only accessible to those who had sufficient funds—completely collapsed during the war. Many lawyers fled the conflict, and much of the infrastructure, including the law courts in Freetown, was destroyed. The low salaries of personnel working in the judiciary have meant that magistrates, lawyers, and judges are easy targets for bribery and/or intimidation. In addition to these problems, women who seek justice for crimes of sexual violence have to contend with more gender-specific problems. The judiciary is dominated by men and some of its older members, in particular, do not think rape is a serious crime and that the victims are generally to blame. The legal processes are very cumbersome and open to corruption, factors which favor the perpetrator. At the magistrates court level, it is up to the magistrate to determine whether there is sufficient evidence to submit a case to the High Court and whether to grant bail. As the court system is so overburdened this phase can take weeks or months, and it is not unusual for victims to have to appear over ten times before the case is handed on to the High Court. Magistrates have also been known to grant bail even if the offender and victim live in the same compound, which means that the victim is at risk at least of intimidation and even physical violence.²⁸⁰ Many cases die in the magistrates courts, as victims run out of money, patience, and/or time. Cases at this stage are also frequently dismissed, if, for example, the witnesses do not show in court (after three no shows, the case can be dismissed): witnesses often decide against appearing in court for reasons including intimidation, ignorance of the law, lack of transportation money, and the slow pace at which court cases proceed, or because they simply do not care. The requirement for corroborating evidence is often an obstacle to prosecution and violates international norms.

If the magistrate decides that there is sufficient evidence, the case is handed up to the High Court. Cases in the High Court can also take months especially as there are also continuous indefinite adjournments to contend with. There have been no High Court sittings in the provinces for the past six years, and cases in the provinces have therefore been on indefinite hold. One offender who sexually assaulted two young girls spent five years in pre-trial detention before being sentenced to two years for indecent assault—the five years already served in pre-trial detention were ignored by the court, thus putting the offender in detention for a total of seven years rather than two.²⁸¹

Need for Law Reform

Both general and customary law offer little protection for women and girls (see above, “Women and Girls Under Sierra Leonean Law”). The misinterpretation of the general law provisions pertaining to rape by members of the criminal justice system means that girls are offered even less protection than adults. There is an urgent need for the laws to be revised: the discriminatory provisions in both general and customary law should be removed and brought into line with international standards of human rights, including in relation to the protection of women and girls from violence. The law relating to rape, in particular, should be simplified as well as

²⁷⁸ PHR report, p. 49.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

²⁸⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with John Bosco Alieu (lawyer), Freetown, February 26, 2002.

²⁸¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Abdulai Bangurah (lawyer), Freetown, March 15, 2002.

strengthened. Specific legislation on domestic violence, which currently does not exist, should be introduced as women seeking legal redress for domestic violence generally face even more difficulty in convincing the police and members of the judiciary that their rights have been violated.²⁸² The constitution should also be amended to remove the exemption for customary law and personal law from the prohibition on discrimination. Ending discrimination under customary law in practice will require a major public education exercise, but, as a start, staff of local courts, especially those presiding over them, should be trained in relation to issues of discrimination and the rights of women under the (revised) constitution and international human rights law. The judiciary and the police force need to be trained on the new laws to ensure that they are properly applied.

The Sierra Leone Police

Prior to the civil war, the Sierra Leone Police had been used by politicians for their own purposes and had not received any substantive training for decades. The attitude of the police force to sexual and domestic violence remains insensitive. Police officers, for example, often do not take reports of rape seriously and chastise women who report domestic violence. There are many problems with police investigations of rape cases. Firstly, the police lack basic investigation skills. Secondly, victims must be examined by state-employed doctors, including police doctors, as only a state-employed doctor can present medical evidence in court. Both the police and other state-employed doctors often charge money for these examinations even though they should be free of charge. Thirdly, both the doctors and the police may be intimidated and/or bribed to drop the cases, or police may demand money from plaintiffs before interviewing witnesses and arranging their transport to court. A nationwide system of Family Support Units (FSUs) is in the process of being established with the support of the British-funded Commonwealth Community Safety and Security Project (CCSSP) to deal with cases of sexual and domestic violence.²⁸³ To date, however, only a small number of police officers (approximately sixteen) have received some training and much work remains to be done before the FSUs can deal with victims of sexual and domestic violence in an appropriate manner.

The International Response

In addition to funding UNAMSIL, the international donor community pours approximately U.S. \$70 million a year into Sierra Leone for humanitarian assistance. Within the overall humanitarian assistance program to Sierra Leone, only a small percentage of funding is targeted to gender-related programs, notwithstanding the large number of girls and women who have been affected by gender-specific abuses. This funding has also come very late: there were no services specifically for survivors of sexual violence before 1999. After the January 1999 invasion of Freetown, the international community finally took note of the scale of sexual and gender-based abuses and started funding small-scale programs in accessible areas. The Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) program consistently overlooked the assistance as well as protection needs of abducted women and girls (see below).

Donor funding has contributed to education, adult literacy, health care, trauma counseling, and skills training programs as well as credit and income-generating schemes for a limited number of survivors of sexual violence. These programs need to be expanded into all parts of Sierra Leone, so that more survivors can benefit from these programs. Long-term sexual and gender-based violence programs that aim to educate communities about sexual and domestic violence as well as provide women with health care and some legal aid on a limited scale have been established in camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the east and south. These programs have been quite successful in changing the attitudes towards sexual and domestic violence of the IDP communities these programs serviced. They have also empowered rural women to stand up for their rights.

²⁸² Charges of physical assault can be made under the 1861 Offenses Against the Person Act under sections 18 (wounding with intent to maim; causing grievous bodily harm with intent; shooting with intent to maim), 20 (unlawful wounding) and 47 (assault, battery, actual bodily harm).

²⁸³ Human Rights Watch interview with Bill Roberts and Anne Hewlett (respectively crime adviser and criminal investigation trainer with the Commonwealth Community Safety and Security Project), Freetown, May 1, 2002.

To date, funding for the judiciary has focused on the rehabilitation of the infrastructure of the judiciary, but as the peace in Sierra Leone takes hold, donors, including the British government and the World Bank, are considering funding desperately needed judicial reform programs.

The Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration program

The extent to which sexual violence, including sexual slavery, has been ignored throughout the war and in the post-conflict phase is most evident by the lack of attention paid to the thousands of abducted women and girls and their children. The Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) process has completely overlooked the protection needs of these women and children. The lack of clear policy and procedural guidelines on these abductees has meant that the responsibility for these women and girls fell between governmental institutions and implementing agencies, resulting in an *ad hoc*, inappropriate and inadequate humanitarian response. Little to no funding was allocated to the protection needs of abducted women and children and only a small number of programs that provide education, skills training and counseling were established for them. This important human rights issue was raised on numerous occasions at different levels with the relevant government institutions, donor governments and the World Bank by UNAMSIL and nongovernmental organizations as well as by World Bank consultants in confidential reports, but did not succeed in bringing about any concrete policy decisions.

The needs of abducted girls and women should, however, be considered an inextricable part of the DDR process and a priority issue that should have been addressed during meetings between the U.N. and government officials or rebel leaders prior to the commencement of disarmament. The abducted girls and women should have been registered and interviewed at the same time that their “husbands” entered the DDR program, with the interviews conducted separately from the “husbands.” Information on alternative options could have been disseminated at the DDR camps through social workers and orientation sessions. Alternatively, if it had been possible to gain access to the abducted women and children in rebel-held areas before or during the DDR process then contact should have been established to determine total numbers and inform them of the reintegration support and alternative options available to them. Female social workers in the DDR camps could also have counseled the abductees to help them understand the implications of their decisions, and that the decision is theirs. Basic reproductive health services, including testing and treatment for sexually transmitted diseases, should also be provided at DDR camps.

Donors and the government of Sierra Leone must redress their neglect of survivors’ protection needs by drastically increasing funding for women’s programs and providing women with desperately needed assistance in terms of health, education, trauma counseling, adult literacy and skills training to promote their rehabilitation into society. In addition, donors should fund legal reform and training programs for the judiciary and police, which will contribute to increase the protection of women’s human rights. Donors should also learn from their failure in Sierra Leone and ensure that DDR programs in other countries where large numbers of women and girls have been abducted by the fighting forces, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, do integrate the protection needs of these abducted women and girls.²⁸⁴

United Kingdom

The U.K. has played a key role in restoring peace to Sierra Leone. During the May 2000 crisis, British troops deployed to Sierra Leone, and a standby force was deployed offshore ready to provide additional support to UNAMSIL and the Sierra Leone Army, if required. Since the May 2000 crisis, it has provided technical assistance to most government departments and military training to the new SLA, and has publicly committed itself to remain closely involved in Sierra Leone.

The U.K. is the biggest donor in Sierra Leone, and in 2002 contributed £100 million (approximately U.S. \$145 million) of which about £50 million (approximately U.S. \$73 million) was disbursed through its development agency, the Department for International Development (DFID). DFID-funded programs aim at

²⁸⁴ Human Rights Watch, *The War within the War: Sexual Violence against Women and Girls in Eastern Congo* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2002).

strengthening the protection and promotion of women's human rights. Since September 2001, the Commonwealth Community Safety and Security Project (CCSSP), which is funded by DFID and staffed only by British nationals, has been working to establish a nationwide system of Family Support Units (FSUs) to deal with cases of sexual and domestic violence. Under this system, only female police officers are supposed to interview female victims, while both male and female police officers are responsible for interviewing suspects and witnesses. More officers need to be trained in addition to the sixteen who have received training. As the force has few women, more females need to be recruited so only female police officers interview victims of sexual and domestic violence. The police officers in the FSUs lack strong leadership and require more training and close supervision to ensure that victims are dealt with in a professional and sensitive manner.

DFID also funds a program to promote the participation of women in politics, especially in Parliament, as well as university research into conflict-related sexual violence committed in January 1999.²⁸⁵ DFID has provided £2.5 million (about U.S. \$3.5 million) for a three year Law Development Program which aims at rehabilitating the physical infrastructure of the court system, as well as providing training to administrative staff to ensure proper record-keeping of cases. The Law Development Program is under review to determine its future strategy, in particular with relation to legal reform, including customary law. DFID is currently considering funding a three-year program that will establish sexual and physical assault referral centers across the country.

The U.K. has contributed a total of over U.S. \$500,000 to the operations of the TRC and its Interim Secretariat. The U.K. has also pledged U.S. \$9,110,000 over three years to the Special Court.

United States

In 1999, the U.S. put considerable pressure on the warring parties to seek a negotiated settlement. However, following the breakdown of the peace process in 2000, U.S. policy revolved around ending external support for the RUF, supporting British military actions and transitional justice mechanisms as well as providing humanitarian aid. From 2000 to 2002, the United States contributed a total of U.S. \$170 million to Sierra Leone, which was primarily disbursed on food-for-peace programs, the resettlement of displaced persons, and reintegration of former combatants. The U.S. has funded several women's programs, notably in the field of health, including the provision of obstetric surgery and HIV/AIDS education, a sexual and gender-based violence program, a program aimed at promoting women in politics, and micro-finance schemes for women. The Senate's Foreign Relations Committee recommended that the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) expand services to rape victims and fund a public education program on women's rights. The U.S., which is a strong supporter of the Special Court, has contributed U.S. \$5 million to this body, and pledged an additional \$10 million. The U.S. has contributed \$500,000 to the TRC.

After the May 2000 crisis, the U.S. initiated a program called Operation Focus Relief (OFR) to train and equip seven battalions of West African troops for peacekeeping with UNAMSIL. In July 2002, the U.S. pledged to help ECOWAS set up military bases for the rapid deployment of troops in conflict areas. The first steps in this assistance program include the installation of a U.S. \$5.3 million early-warning satellite communications system, which will link the ECOWAS secretariat with observation centers in four ECOWAS countries.

European Union

The E.U. did not play a key role in responding to the armed conflict and to date has not been a major donor. Since May 2000, the European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO) has disbursed approximately €30 million (roughly the same in U.S. dollars) in Sierra Leone. Few ECHO-funded programs have directly targeted women. ECHO has funded child protection programs, which have assisted child-mothers who became pregnant as the result of conflict-related sexual violence.

²⁸⁵ A survey of 226 victims, conducted by the University of Sierra Leone Gender Research and Documentation Centre in collaboration with the Sierra Leone Association of University Women (SLAUW), Médecins Sans Frontières, UNICEF and FAWE Sierra Leone.

As the situation in Sierra Leone stabilizes, the E.U. will increase its funding to Sierra Leone through the European Development Fund (EDF), which from 2000 to 2002 disbursed €38 million on activities that supported the return to democracy, rehabilitation of infrastructure and resettlement. From 2002 to 2007, a total of €144 million will be made available for disbursement through the EDF on activities that focus on the rehabilitation of rural infrastructure, good governance and institutional capacity building. An additional €76 million can be spent on activities outside of these two focal areas.

In 2002, the European Commission funded a two-year program that supports the reintegration of rape victims and other war-affected persons through the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR). Human rights-related programs funded through the EIDHR, which has €6 million for disbursement over the next three years (2002-5), should include women's rights issues, which the EIDHR seeks to mainstream in all its programs.²⁸⁶

In addition to the U.K., other member states of the E.U. have bilaterally contributed to Sierra Leone. The Netherlands, in particular, has since 1999 funded sexual and gender-based violence programs. The Dutch government has also been a strong supporter of the Special Court and has contributed U.S. \$11.4 million, which is approximately 20 percent of the total budget. A donation for the TRC is being prepared at the time of writing, but has not yet been formalized. A small budget for human rights programs was made available for 2002.

United Nations

Security Council, Secretary-General, and UNAMSIL

Secretary-General Kofi Annan and the members of the Security Council have devoted much attention to the conflict in Sierra Leone. Kofi Annan visited the country in July 1999 and December 2000. The Security Council has frequently denounced the egregious human rights abuses committed during the conflict, in particular by the rebel factions, and has stressed the importance of protecting women in armed conflict.²⁸⁷

Following the failure of the U.N. peacekeeping missions in Somalia and Rwanda, there was substantial pressure on the U.N. to ensure that the UNAMSIL peacekeeping mission would succeed when it was established in October 1999.²⁸⁸ After the slow initial deployment of peacekeepers, which led to the May 2000 crisis, the U.N. committed itself to deploy 17,500 peacekeepers in Sierra Leone: UNAMSIL is the world's largest and most expensive peacekeeping mission, costing the international community over U.S. \$700 million annually.²⁸⁹ As of March 31, 2002, there were 17,455 peacekeepers, 259 military observers, 87 civilian police officers as well as 322 international and 552 local civilian staff in Sierra Leone. The mission is now being hailed as a great success, although Human Rights Watch has criticized UNAMSIL on numerous occasions for failing to fulfill its mandate to protect the civilian population.²⁹⁰ In a June 19 report to the Security Council on UNAMSIL, the secretary-general stated that the government security apparatus was not yet capable of protecting Sierra Leone from both internal and external threats and warned that the international community must protect the major investments that had made possible the progress achieved so far.²⁹¹ On September 24, the Security Council extended UNAMSIL's mandate for a further six months, but envisaged a reduction of 4,500 troops in the peacekeeping mission within eight months. The resolution was based on the recommendation of a further report on UNAMSIL which laid out benchmarks to govern the withdrawal of the U.N. from Sierra Leone, including the ability of the police and army

²⁸⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with EIDHR representatives Andrew Kelly and Irene Corcillo and the Economic Adviser to the E.U., René Mally, Freetown, April 10, 2002.

²⁸⁷ In resolution 1370, the Security Council expressed "... its continued deep concern at the reports of human rights abuses and attacks by the RUF and the Civil Defence Forces (CDF) ... against the civilian population, in particular the widespread violation of the human rights of women and children, including sexual violence, [and] demands that these acts cease immediately..." U.N. Security Council resolution 1370, S/RES/1370 (2001), September 18, 2001, para. 4.

²⁸⁸ U.N. Security Council resolution 1270, S/RES/1270 (1999), October 22, 1999.

²⁸⁹ U.N. Security Council resolution 1346, S/RES/1346 (2001), March 30, 2001.

²⁹⁰ See Human Rights Watch letter addressed to Secretary-General Kofi Annan at <http://www.org/press/2001/11/annanltr.htm>.

²⁹¹ *Fourteenth Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone*, S/2002/679, June 19, 2002.

to maintain security, the successful re-integration of ex-combatants, and the situation in the broader sub-region. The resolution also encouraged the government of Sierra Leone to “pay special attention to the needs of women and children affected by the war,” and welcomed “the steps taken by UNAMSIL to prevent sexual abuse and exploitation of women and children,” and encouraged the mission to continue to enforce a policy of “zero tolerance” for such acts. The Security Council also called on states to bring to justice their own nationals responsible for such crimes in Sierra Leone.²⁹²

UNAMSIL was initially authorized to field fourteen human rights officers, but for the first two years of UNAMSIL’s existence, the human rights unit remained understaffed, which meant that human rights abuses were not effectively monitored. At various times during the lifespan of UNAMSIL, the gender specialist post was not filled. When UNAMSIL’s mandate was expanded to 17,500, the human rights unit was authorized to recruit six additional human rights officers and most positions are currently filled. The Physicians for Human Rights report on conflict-related sexual violence was produced in collaboration with the UNAMSIL human rights section and has contributed to focusing the attention of the international community on the issue of sexual violence.

In October 2000, the Security Council held an Open Session on Women and Armed Conflict and adopted a resolution calling for documenting the impact of armed conflict on women and the role of women in peace-building.²⁹³ Since then the U.N. Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) has undertaken a major study on the impact of armed conflict on women in more than ten countries around the world, including Sierra Leone. In January 2002, a three-woman UNIFEM team visited Sierra Leone in connection with this study.²⁹⁴ UNIFEM also recently appointed a gender and AIDS adviser in Sierra Leone, who is tasked with strengthening the gender division of the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children’s Affairs and local women’s groups as well as mainstreaming gender in the TRC and Special Court for Sierra Leone. She will also research the relationship between gender, conflict and HIV/AIDS with the aim to increase protection against HIV infection.²⁹⁵

In November 2001, a team from the Training and Evaluation Service of the U.N. Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) conducted a two-week training on gender in peacekeeping. The program involved over 1,000 UNAMSIL peacekeepers and civilian personnel from both Freetown and the provinces. Local human rights activists and women’s organizations were invited in order to contribute a domestic perspective on gender issues.

UNAMSIL has funded several women’s programs for survivors of sexual violence through various trust funds. These trust funds are normally established for quick impact programs whilst the rehabilitation and reintegration of women who have been abducted and subjected to sexual violence and sexual slavery should be seen as long-term projects.

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

The then U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson visited Sierra Leone in June 1999, while the Lomé peace negotiations were taking place. The purpose of the mission was “to support the peace process, to encourage future programmes for the promotion and protection of human rights in the country, and to draw attention to the plight of children, women and civilians bearing the brunt of the excesses in Sierra Leone.”²⁹⁶ OHCHR has provided technical assistance for the establishment of the TRC, but was very slow to issue the funding appeal for the TRC. OHCHR has also assisted in the drafting of the statute for the national human rights commission provided under the Lomé Peace Agreement, but the establishment of this body has not progressed beyond that point.

²⁹² *Fifteenth Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone*, S/2002/987, September 5, 2002; U.N. Security Council resolution 1436, S/RES/1436 (2002), September 24, 2002, paragraphs 14 and 15.

²⁹³ U.N. Security Council resolution 1325, S/RES/1325 (2000), October 31, 2000.

²⁹⁴ See the summary of the assessment’s findings at http://www.unifem.org/gov_pax_assessment.pdf.html.

²⁹⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Jebbeh Forster (Gender and AIDS advisor to UNIFEM Sierra Leone), Freetown, March 11 and April 15, 2002.

²⁹⁶ United Nations, *Sixth Report of the U.N. secretary-general on the U.N. Observer Mission in Sierra Leone (UNOMSIL)*, S/1999/645, June 4, 1999, para. 39.

The U.N. Commission on Human Rights has condemned the human rights situation in Sierra Leone on numerous occasions.²⁹⁷ In August 2001, Radhika Coomaraswamy, the commission's special rapporteur on violence against women, visited Sierra Leone to highlight the gender-specific abuses that thousands of women and girls have been subjected to. She highlighted that "systematic and widespread rape and other sexual violence has been a hallmark of the conflict in Sierra Leone" and noted that "the failure to investigate, prosecute and punish those responsible for rape and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence has contributed to an environment of impunity that perpetuates violence against women in Sierra Leone, including rape and domestic violence."²⁹⁸ She therefore stressed the need for accountability for these abuses.

World Bank

The World Bank established a multi-donor trust fund for the DDR program, which is now focused on the reintegration of ex-combatants. As discussed above, the protection needs of abducted women and girls were ignored by the DDR program even though World Bank consultants had raised this issue in their confidential reports. In 2002, the World Bank agreed in principle to allocate U.S. \$140 million to support reconstruction and development efforts in Sierra Leone and U.S. \$15 million to go towards HIV/AIDS prevention projects there.

X. CONCLUSION

The decade-long war in Sierra Leone has been characterized by egregious human rights abuses committed primarily by the rebel forces against the civilian population. Throughout the conflict, thousands of women and girls were raped and subjected to other forms of sexual violence of unimaginable brutality, including sexual slavery. The low status of women and girls in Sierra Leone by law, custom and practice remains a contributing factor to their vulnerability and may have contributed to the widespread and systematic sexual violence. In addition to the combatants' motivation to achieve their strategic military objectives through terrorizing the civilian population, the fact that sexual violence during the Sierra Leone conflict predominantly involved *men* raping *women* reveals that conflict-related rape, like most rape, reflects this dynamic of gender inequality and subordination. This assertion by men of their power over women is deeply imbedded in societal attitudes in Sierra Leone. The international community and the government therefore need to think of creative ways to change these deeply embedded attitudes.

The lack of attention paid until recently, both nationally and internationally, to the widespread and systematic acts of sexual violence, sexual slavery and their consequences means that there are few assistance programs for survivors. The international community and the government of Sierra Leone should drastically increase funding to ensure that desperately needed health care, education, adult literacy, skills training, trauma counseling, and income-generating schemes are provided. Nor have there been any prosecutions. Rape therefore continues with impunity and it is little wonder that women and girls in post-conflict Sierra Leone remain vulnerable to non-conflict-related violence, and are reluctant to seek legal redress in the domestic courts or even report the incident given the country's inefficient and corrupt criminal justice system. Although, the establishment of the Special Court for Sierra Leone and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission should help to address this climate of impunity, the domestic legal system must urgently be revised to ensure that crimes of sexual violence are prosecuted in a sensitive manner. The international community therefore needs to fund legal reform and training

²⁹⁷ The Commission on Human Rights deplored "... the ongoing atrocities committed by the rebels, including murders, rape, abductions ... calls for an end to all such acts." U.N. Commission on Human Rights resolution 2000/24, April 18, 2000, para. 4. The Commission also expressed its grave concern "...at the targeting and abuse of women and girls that have been committed in Sierra Leone by the Revolutionary United Front and others, including other armed groups, in particular murder, sexual violence, rape, including systematic rape, sexual slavery and forced marriages..." U.N. Commission on Human Rights resolution 2001/20, April 20, 2001, para. 2(b).

²⁹⁸ United Nations, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, submitted in accordance with Commission on Human Rights resolution 2001/49, Addendum, Mission to Sierra Leone, E/CN.4/2002/83/Add.2* (United Nations, 2002), p. 2.

programs for the criminal justice system as a whole, which has a key role in promoting and protecting the rights of Sierra Leonean women and girls.

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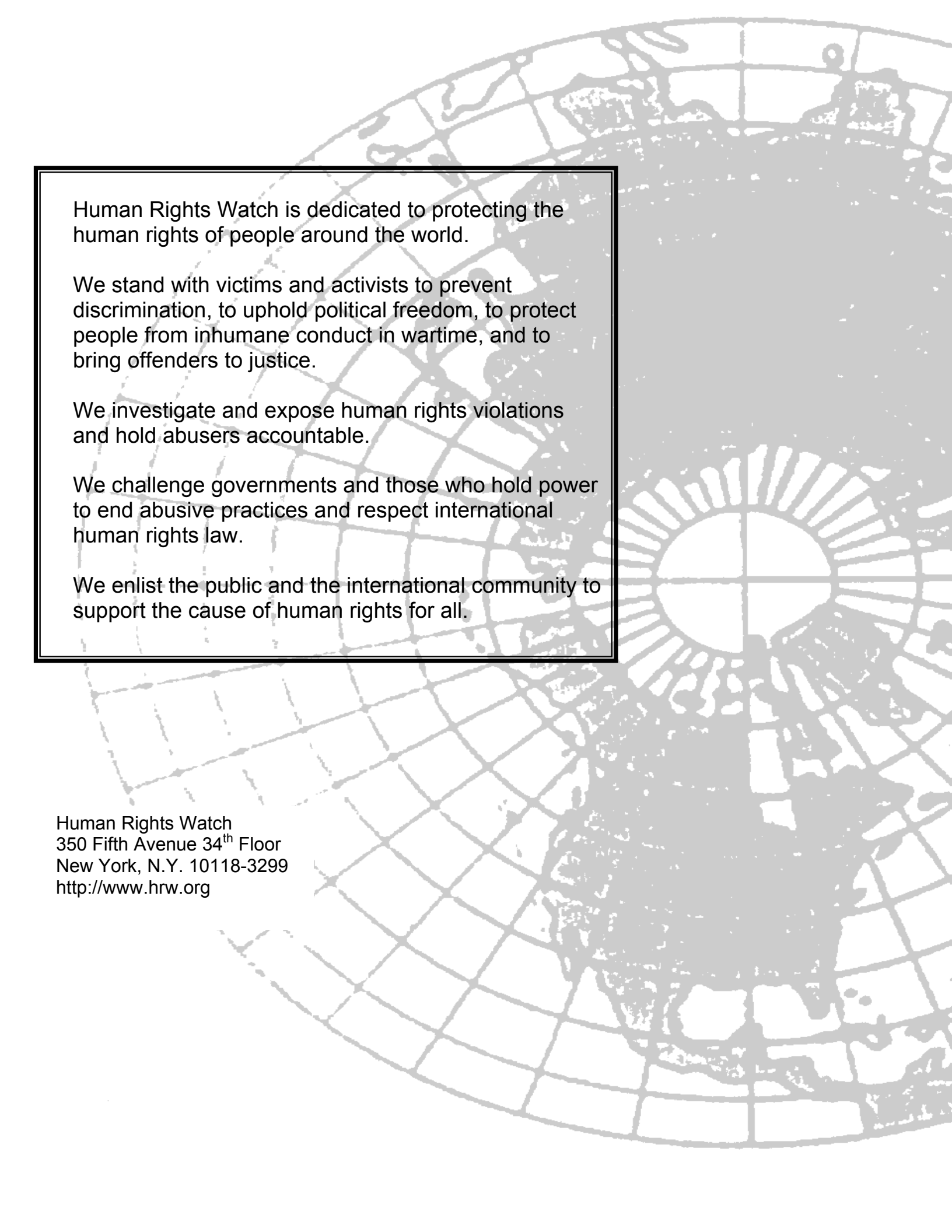
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