

SIERRA LEONE: THE ELECTION OPPORTUNITY

Africa Report N°129 – 12 July 2007

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS	i
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. ELECTORAL FEARS AND HOPES	2
A. NEW DYNAMICS AND OLD PARTY POLITICS	2
B. NEW FAULT LINES IN THE SOUTHERN AND EASTERN PROVINCES.....	4
C. THE NEC’S GOOD PERFORMANCE – SO FAR.....	6
III. LIMITED IMPROVEMENTS IN GOVERNANCE	8
A. WIDESPREAD CORRUPTION	8
1. The unreliable bureaucracy	9
2. Diamond industry transparency	9
3. Security risks	10
B. ENTRENCHED DOMINATION BY THE CHIEFTAINCY	11
C. SUSTAINABILITY OF SECURITY SECTOR REFORM	12
1. Army loyalty	12
2. Police capacity	13
D. POLITICISATION OF THE JUDICIARY	13
E. RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE MEDIA.....	15
F. UN SUPPORT FOR PEACEBUILDING	15
IV. CONCLUSION	16
APPENDICES	
A. MAP OF SIERRA LEONE	18

SIERRA LEONE: THE ELECTION OPPORTUNITY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Sierra Leone holds presidential and legislative elections in August 2007. President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah, who won a landslide victory in 2002 at the end of the civil war, split the ruling Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) by anointing a successor, Vice President Solomon Berewa. When Charles Margai formed the People's Movement for Democratic Change (PMDC), the break-up rejuvenated politics but also heightened tension in SLPP strongholds. The All People's Congress (APC), which gained in 2004 local elections, may be able to exploit this division. Return to a constituency-based voting system for parliament has reinforced the leverage of traditional chiefs in national politics and produced potentially vicious competition. Sierra Leone is still a fragile state in which peace will not be consolidated until two things happen. The elections must be violence-free and fair for results to be respected. Then the new authorities must deal with sources of discontent such as corruption, chiefs' abuse of power and youth unemployment, lest they threaten stability.

The completely new National Electoral Commission (NEC) has started well and broadly inspires confidence. It has completed voter registration and has one month after nominations close to produce and distribute ballot papers. The choice of 11 August, the height of the rainy season, as polling day will not make the task any easier. National and international observers have a critical responsibility but it is also essential that allegations of fraud or malpractice be adjudicated promptly and fairly.

An escalating spate of house burnings, which started in Pujehun District in January, indicated tension between the SLPP and the breakaway PMDC. No one has claimed responsibility or been convicted, a lack of clarity which is reminiscent of the war years and undermines confidence in the re-establishment of rule of law. Although the police seem to have calmed the situation, more accountability is essential if recourse to violence is to become less attractive.

All parties are vying for the youth vote. Reconstruction efforts have done little to address the marginalisation of young people, and the next government must find a new approach to boosting economic growth and increasing income-generating opportunities. A robust attack on

economic mismanagement is needed to rescue Sierra Leone's reputation as a poor place for investment, but each of the major presidential candidates is burdened by history. Vice President Berewa is fully implicated in the current system. Margai was part of the administration until 2005. Ernest Koroma of the APC has not held office himself but his party's long-serving president, Siaka Stevens, was an autocrat who introduced a one-party state.

If the elections go smoothly and the new administration starts with a strong reform program, Sierra Leone can profit from remaining international goodwill, exemplified by the commitment of the UN Peacebuilding Commission as well as of the UK and other partners, to achieve its potential. If not, a return to conflict would again be a real possibility. In any event, the population's tolerance of bad governance and lack of economic development is unlikely to last much longer.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To All Political Parties:

1. Respect the voluntary Code of Conduct and, in particular, instruct all officials and supporters that violence, or calls to violence, will be swiftly investigated and punished in accordance with law.
2. Deploy witnesses to voting stations all over the country to strengthen transparency of the polls.
3. Commit to a comprehensive post-election reform program to tackle the popular discontent generated by corruption, chiefs' abuse of their powers and politicisation of the security forces and judiciary.

To the National Electoral Commission (NEC):

4. Develop a proactive communication strategy on shortcomings in administration of the elections and challenge the government to maintain a free, secure and fair environment throughout the electoral period.
5. Establish decentralised coordination with the national police designed to produce quick reaction to security incidents.

6. Support civil society in conducting a dialogue to sensitise chiefs on the need for them to act impartially throughout the electoral process.

To the Government of Sierra Leone:

7. Take all necessary steps, including approaches to Paramount Chiefs and security officials, to ensure even-handed policing and a level field for all parties and candidates during the campaign.
8. Ensure that government funds are not misused to support the ruling party's campaign and that state-run media cover the election impartially.

To Donors:

9. Maintain oversight and offer technical and logistical support during the election period with the overriding aim of minimising risk of conflict.
10. Immediately engage with the new administration to make clear that a break with past failure to tackle corruption is a prerequisite for long-term support.
11. Supplement the funds given through the UN's Peacebuilding Fund so as to ensure sustained support for projects to create youth employment, good governance, justice and a capable public service.

To the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission:

12. Strengthen local outreach strategies to emphasise the independent and apolitical nature of its funding under the Peacebuilding Fund.

Dakar/Brussels, 12 July 2007

SIERRA LEONE: THE ELECTION OPPORTUNITY

I. INTRODUCTION

Since the civil war officially ended in 2002, Sierra Leone has made significant progress in consolidating peace and rebuilding basic government institutions.¹ The state now has reasonable monopoly over the use of force. There is a functioning government, with an elected president and legislature, as well as a justice system which works, even if slow and flawed. The army and police, with substantial support from the UK and others, have been rebuilt. Since the UN peacekeeping force (UNAMSIL) withdrew in December 2005, no security incident has required outside intervention. Youth unemployment and disillusionment remain serious threats and core state institutions are still untested, but Sierra Leone is no longer a failed state.²

There have been two successful, nationwide elections since the war. The first, in March 2002, which President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah and his Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) won in a landslide, was followed in 2004 by local government elections – a pillar of the decentralisation process – in which the opposition All People's Congress (APC) made significant gains, including winning the capital, Freetown.

August 2007 presents the next electoral challenge. Presidential elections, without the incumbent, and parliamentary elections will take place on the same day and without the presence of UN peacekeepers. There have

been isolated acts of violence since the beginning of the year, and tension is increasing, especially between the ruling party and the breakaway People's Movement for Democratic Change (PMDC). With a return to a constituency-based system, the outcome is difficult to predict. A proposed referendum on constitutional reform, including such sensitive issues as a second legislative chamber and citizenship, has been shelved, and the new National Electoral Commission (NEC) has corrected fundamental irregularities identified in the previous elections. But police capability to contain violence will be under a spotlight, and the elections will be a good test of how far Sierra Leone has actually come.

Most of the problems that existed before the war remain.³ Although efforts have been made by the international community and civil society to control and make transparent the exploitation of diamonds – one of the key resources that helped fuel the conflict – significant official corruption and meddling still impede development of a rational and transparent industry.⁴ This is extremely dangerous, as impoverished diamond diggers were among the most enthusiastic recruits for the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) during the war.⁵

¹ For more on the war, see extensive Crisis Group analysis of Sierra Leone since 2001, including Africa Reports N°28, *Sierra Leone: Time for a New Military and Political Strategy*, 11 April 2001; N°49, *After Elections: Politics as Usual?*, 15 July 2002; and N°87, *Liberia and Sierra Leone: Rebuilding Failed States*, 8 December 2004. See also "Witness to Truth", Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2004; Lansana Gberie, *A Dirty War in West Africa: The RUF and the Destruction of Sierra Leone* (Indiana University Press, 2006); and P. Richards, *Fighting for the Rainforest: War, Youth & Resources in Sierra Leone* (Oxford, 1996).

² Failed or dysfunctional states can be described as those that "cannot guarantee law and order throughout their territory, and...cannot fulfil certain critical international obligations". Stephen Ellis, "How to Rebuild Africa", *Foreign Affairs*, September–October 2005; see also Crisis Group Report, *Liberia and Sierra Leone: Rebuilding Failed States*, op. cit.

³ The 2004 Truth and Reconciliation Commission report (op. cit.) lucidly analysed these problems, including bad governance; endemic corruption and poverty; disenchanted youth; a repressive political system that closed legitimate avenues of expression; legacies of the divide-and-rule policy of the former colonial administration, including seriously uneven development that left much of the interior a backwater; persistence of capital punishment; a sclerotic elite; autocratic chiefs; a largely elderly ruling class that looked down on youth; and a patrimonial political system, which excluded the majority of citizens.

⁴ Historically, diamonds provided important clandestine means for the enrichment of politicians and a handful of business cronies amid poverty and the collapse of the formal economy. Through shadowy networks – William Reno called it the "shadow state" – politicians controlled the lucrative underground trade, resisted pressure for reform and state capacity building, and were able to maintain political authority despite the withering of state infrastructure. William Reno, *Corruption and State Politics in Sierra Leone* (Cambridge, 1995).

⁵ In 2006, diamonds, mostly mined by artisans earning less than a dollar a day, produced 70 per cent of the country's exports and employed about 10 per cent of the total work force. But the diamonds, mostly alluvial, are easy to mine, requiring little

Free and fair elections would strengthen government legitimacy, make more change possible and so help prevent a return to conflict, but high expectations must be managed to avoid post-electoral instability. If the results are contested or the new administration does not address the underlying causes of the conflict, troubles will quickly resurface. This report examines the tensions on the eve of voting and evaluates the contribution a successful election needs to make towards consolidating the state's fragile stability.

II. ELECTORAL FEARS AND HOPES

The emergence of a new party has rejuvenated the political scene, providing hope for change. However, the dominance of regional party politics and informal yet strong links between traditional chiefs and the ruling party mean the pace of change may still frustrate those who have recent experience of resorting to violence. Rivalry between the SLPP and PMDC, especially in the Southern and Eastern Provinces where tension is rising and both sides are mobilising youths, is a potential flashpoint.

A. NEW DYNAMICS AND OLD PARTY POLITICS

Before independence in 1961, Sierra Leone was physically and politically divided between the Colony (Freetown and the peninsula area, dominated by Westernised Creoles)⁶ and the rest of the country (the Protectorate or Provinces, dominated by indigenous inhabitants). Since independence the separation has diminished, replaced by a split between Northern Province (Temne-dominated) and the Southern and Eastern Provinces (Mende-dominated). The two ethnic groups each are about 30 per cent of the population and have remained the main power brokers. The Mende generally support the SLPP, the Temne the APC.

The third major party, the PMDC, is in effect a breakaway faction of the SLPP formed by Charles Margai, a member of the establishment, after he lost the party leadership contest in 2005 to Solomon Berewa, Kabbah's anointed successor.⁷ It could change the dynamics of the SLPP-APC rivalry, which dates back to the first decade of independence.

In 2002, Kabbah won enough votes in the Northern Province to challenge the once easy assumption that it would automatically vote APC. The APC ruled Sierra Leone from 1968 until its overthrow by young military officers in 1992. During its repressive rule, opposition

capital and manpower. As a result, they attract large numbers of people, and diamond areas are generally poorer and less developed. The key district, Kono, is far poorer than largely agricultural Pujehun. See "Sierra Leone: Adding Value through Trade for Poverty Reduction, a Diagnostic Study", World Bank/International Monetary Fund (IMF), October 2006.

⁶ The 2004 census put the Creole population at only slightly more than 1 per cent. It is less than 6 per cent in Freetown and the peninsula area, its traditional home.

⁷ Its origins and the fact that PMDC gains likely mean SLPP losses partly explain why the APC has been enthusiastic about the new party. When Margai returned from a trip abroad to a rousing welcome, the APC paper *We Yone* led with the headline: "SLPP Gone!" It claimed that "over 70% of the hundreds of people who turned up to welcome [Margai] were originally SLPP members and supporters....[T]he PMDC support base is in the Southern and Eastern Regions which used to be the exclusive reserve of the SLPP. Now...SLPP has no strong support base". "SLPP Gone!", *We Yone*, 18 December 2006.

parties were crushed, the economy collapsed, and the country imploded into civil war in 1991.

The parties do not show many policy differences but the major presidential candidates – two Mende, one Temne, all Christian – offer contrasts.⁸ Berewa, a Mende and devout Catholic, is by far the best known, also internationally. He was a distinguished lawyer before becoming attorney general and justice minister in 1996 and vice-president in 2002. That year, Kabbah named him his successor, thus making himself a lame duck. Since then, Berewa has been virtual head of state and constantly campaigning. Among donors, he has a reputation for thoroughness and more decisiveness than the dilatory Kabbah but he bears major responsibility for lack of progress in restoring delivery of services and in rebuilding core state institutions. He has been the key interlocutor for donors and has virtually controlled post-war reconstruction. Opponents consider him ruthless and manipulative. He has pledged policy continuity, though it is expected he would name new ministers.

Ernest Koroma, a Temne and leader of the APC, is the least politically experienced, so would start with a cleaner slate. He was an insurance executive before becoming party leader and presidential candidate in 2002, when he ran a good campaign but lost decisively to Kabbah.⁹ Since then, his leadership has been much contested in the party, and until March 2007 he faced a legal challenge from aspirants to his position.¹⁰ He has been accused of abandoning the party after the 1992 coup, which overthrew the APC administration of Joseph Saidu Momoh. However, he is generally regarded as a decent and honest leader, above the highly partisan and divisive nature of Sierra Leone's politics.

Charles Margai, a Mende, is a fixture of the political scene, having first stood for parliament under the SLPP in 1973 (he was disqualified then by the autocratic APC president, Siaka Stevens). He is the son of Sierra Leone's second prime minister (Albert) and nephew of the first (Milton), both SLPP. After his failed bid for parliament, he continued as an SLPP official until Siaka Stevens

introduced a one-party state in 1978. He then retired to private legal practice in Bo. When multiparty politics were reintroduced in 1996, he vied for the SLPP leadership but lost to Kabbah. He joined the unsuccessful National Unity Party (NUP), was later appointed to the cabinet by Kabbah and lost the SLPP leadership contest in 2005 to Berewa. Not alone in claiming that contest was rigged, he left the party to form the PMDC. More outspoken than Koroma, he sometimes sounds facile and glib. He has openly said he has no faith in the electoral institutions, including the NEC, and has spoken, without offering evidence, of plans to rig the elections.¹¹

One positive result of the emergence of the PMDC is that it has forced the SLPP and APC to appeal to a wider constituency of younger people. Though Margai is in his late 60s, the initial PMDC base was young, educated people from the Southern and Eastern Provinces who felt largely disenfranchised by an SLPP leadership dominated by the old elite with strong links to traditional rulers. Margai also claims support among ex-combatants, both RUF and Civil Defence Forces (CDF), since the PMDC calls for the sort of "just society" they are demanding.¹²

To prevent massive defections from the SLPP, Berewa has started to modernise its structures and encourage active participation of young people at the highest levels. The secretary-general is in his late 30s, and some candidates in key constituencies in the south and east are similarly young professionals. The SLPP has also introduced a much more inclusive selection process for its parliamentary candidates. In Bo District, seven of the nine candidates it has proposed have not previously held office. Through the efforts of the secretary-general, the SLPP recently created the "Reform Group Sierra Leone", an organisation of young professionals who support party reform. Although less conspicuously, the APC is also courting the youth vote.

Running mates will be an important factor in the presidential election. If Berewa, 69, wins the presidency, as most observers anticipate, he is expected to serve only one term, with the likelihood that his vice-president would succeed him. Berewa is from the Southern Province, so needed a Temne from the north as a complement. He chose Kabbah's preference, Foreign Minister Momodu Koroma, who is eighteen years younger, has a reputation for competence and has strong support within the party, but is not necessarily regarded as true northerner since he was born in the south, went to school in Bo and speaks Mende as well Temne.

⁸ President Kabbah is a Muslim.

⁹ Koroma won 22.3 per cent of the votes in the 2002 presidential elections.

¹⁰ The legal challenge was launched by five former party heavyweights: Edward Turay (former secretary-general), Abdul Karim Koroma (foreign minister under Siaka Stevens), Jengo Stevens (a son of ex-President Stevens), A. F. Serry (a well known barrister) and Moses Sesay (another party grandee). See "History of the Conflict in the APC", *We Yone*, 18 December 2006. The case boiled over into physical confrontation between supporters of the plaintiffs and of Koroma, colourfully reported by an SLPP paper under the headline "APC Unleashes Terror Against", *Unity Now*, 18 December 2006.

¹¹ He made these comments at a meeting of the All Political Parties Association on 5 January 2006. Crisis Group was present.

¹² Crisis Group interview, Charles Margai, Freetown, 6 June 2007.

The PMDC's Margai has chosen as running mate Dr Ibrahim Tejan Jalloh, a Fula and a northerner. Margai said he wanted an experienced elder who would be prepared to challenge his decisions and could contribute to north-south reconciliation.¹³ The selection has caused a public split within the Jalloh family – traditionally an SLPP bulwark.¹⁴ The APC's Koroma chose little known Samuel Sam-Sumana, a Kono, which indicates that he does not expect to compete seriously against the SLPP and PMDC in the Mende-dominated areas of the south and east.

The concurrent parliamentary elections revert to a constituency-based system from the Proportional Representation National List (PRNL) and District Block Representation System (DBRS) used in 2002. Proportional representation had been introduced as a temporary measure after the conflict because population displacement had made a constituency system impractical. Return to the old system has entailed drawing new constituency boundaries based on population density using the provisional results of the 2004 census; 112 constituencies, in addition to twelve mandatory seats reserved for Paramount Chiefs, were delimited.¹⁵

A constituency-based, majority system is meant to enhance parliamentarians' accountability. Reactions to the exercise, however, showed how the establishment continues to perceive the chieftaincies as key instruments for political mobilisation. The SLPP and APC were concerned about creation of constituencies that cut across long-established chieftdom boundaries, and the PMDC said it would revisit the boundaries once in office to rationalise the relationship between chieftdoms and constituencies.¹⁶

Return to the first-past-the-post British system in fact reinforces the weight of chieftaincies in the political system. Of the 112 seats to be contested (by some 1,500 candidates), 40 are in the Northern Province, 27 in the Eastern Province, 25 in the Southern Province and twenty in the Western Area (dominated by Freetown). In the PRNL and DBRS systems, party loyalty was the main consideration for securing a good position on the electoral list, and candidates of parties with strong traditional support in key districts could be reasonably assured of re-election. This time party loyalty will not be as important, and individual candidates will have to establish their personal credibility and use their own resources to win votes. This means, however, that Paramount Chiefs, who

can deliver blocs of votes, will have more leverage that they can use to further disfigure the decentralisation process. In the electoral process itself, campaigning is expected to be more personal and visceral, increasing the chances of violence.

Gender balance may have been an unintended victim of the change in systems, with parties less willing to select women to contest constituencies than they might have been to put them on electoral lists. The SLPP has endorsed only seventeen for parliament, far below its stated goal of 36 per cent; the APC has said it wants to have 37 women candidates in winnable constituencies but official figures have not yet been announced.¹⁷

B. NEW FAULT LINES IN THE SOUTHERN AND EASTERN PROVINCES

The Southern and Eastern Provinces are dominated by the Mende, whose lead the smaller ethnic groups generally follow. Traditionally the Mende support the SLPP but this is uncertain in 2007 given what many perceive as its role in the arrest and indictment of Hinga Norman, ex-head of the Kamajor militia, the core group of the CDF that fought the RUF.¹⁸ Norman was arrested by the Special Court for Sierra Leone on charges of crimes against humanity, war crimes and other violations of international humanitarian law and died in custody in March 2007. Norman, from Bo District, was a government minister when arrested.

Supporters consider him a hero who helped return the country to civilian rule and blame in particular Berewa, who was justice minister and attorney general when the Special Court was set up. Some believe he saw Norman as a rival for the party leadership and that he and Kabbah were happy to see him arrested. In prison, Norman became a rallying point for those opposed to the government and the Special Court, as well as for disillusioned Southern and Eastern Provinces youth who feel they have not benefited from peace.¹⁹

A government report notes that many of these people "tend to blame [Norman's incarceration] on the ruling SLPP" but since hardly any of them may be "inclined to vote for the APC [given their voting history], they may find

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Sayoh Kamara, "Fulas Hotly Oppose PMDC....The Tejan Jalloh Family Denounce PMDC's Running mate in Sierra Leone", *Awareness Times*, 19 April 2007.

¹⁵ See "Report On Electoral Constituency Boundaries Process", NEC, August 2006.

¹⁶ Crisis Group interview, Charles Margai, Freetown, 6 June 2007.

¹⁷ Information provided to Crisis Group by the U.S.-based National Democratic Institute (NDI) during a meeting at the offices of the UK Department for International Development (DFID) in Freetown, 7 June 2007.

¹⁸ For a description of the Kamajors, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°67, *Sierra Leone: the State of Security and Governance*, 2 September 2003, pp. 13-14.

¹⁹ "Hinga's death hits home", *Africa Confidential*, vol. 48, no. 5, 2 March 2007.

an alternative in the PMDC as a means of expressing their disgruntlement". The situation "has now rendered the South-East more prone to confrontation" during the elections.²⁰ SLPP leaders, who are campaigning frequently in the areas, dismiss the PMDC threat as exaggerated.²¹

Margai, the PMDC leader and longtime Bo resident, was lead defence counsel before the Special Court for one of Norman's fellow CDF defendants. Though his political support in the area was never significant, he gained from the report (though contested) that Norman, shortly before his death, said he would support the PMDC. After his death, Margai called for two minutes of silence at a PMDC meeting for "one of our strongest members".²² Whether his new support will hold is uncertain. Margai is seen by some as opportunistic, and many Mende are aware that taking votes from the SLPP could allow the APC, their main nemesis and a stronger force than Margai's PMDC, to return to power.²³

The incidence of political interference and intimidation during voter registration in March was higher in SLPP strongholds that are now seriously contested by the PMDC. This reflects strong anxiety in the ruling party that its hold may be slipping and underlies the fears of many, including in the security agencies, that those areas are potential flashpoints during the elections.²⁴ This is the more worrying because they are also the strongholds of the Kamajors, who, though disarmed, are probably easy to re-mobilise.

Bo may well become problematic during the elections. The first serious post-war confrontation happened there in November 2005, when PMDC supporters allegedly blocked Berewa's motorcade as he made his way to an event at the secondary school he and Margai had attended. Margai and some of his supporters were arrested and charged with assault, and the case is pending.

More recently, a tense confrontation between students from Christ the King College (CKC) and motorbike riders in Bo had to be contained by the police and local citizens. The latter, a close-knit local fraternity a large majority of which are ex-combatants, run a motorbike taxi service around town.²⁵ In late May 2007, a CKC student died after a taxi accident. The Bike Riders Association (BRA) paid its respects to the family and community, but a few days later, when several hundred of its members attended the burial

of one of their leaders on CKC grounds, the students asked them to leave, they refused and violence ensued. Buildings were damaged, one bike was burned and seven disappeared. The police prevented escalation by using teargas, firing shots and taking some students into safe custody. The situation remained tense and hostility erupted again. The BRA claims to be apolitical but some members have PMDC political profiles.²⁶

The police are playing down the significance of a spate of fires which started in January 2007, escalated in March and April and have destroyed around 100 homes, mostly in Southern Province, Pujehun District. Motivations are unclear but most agree they were more than the usual accidents connected to the agricultural cycle of burning and family feuds. The chief UN representative in-country attributes them to partisan politics at the local level and says the upheaval of changing political allegiances and the intensified demand for scarce resources are leading to increased tension and a settling of scores.²⁷

Pujehun, a key district, has a history of family rivalries and feuds which have fed into political rivalries and provoked intense violence. In the 1980s, during the one-party era, the brutal murder there of a supporter of a candidate out of favour with the APC hierarchy led to widespread violence and destruction as family members and others sought revenge.²⁸ This tendency also was partly behind the sustained violence in the area during the war. Though both sides deny responsibility, it is believed the recent cycle of fires began when Brima Victor Kebbie, the Paramount Chief of Malen Chiefdom and the district's SLPP parliamentarian, took exception to his brother's joining the PMDC. The PMDC is thought to have used former CDF/RUF fighters to retaliate. No one has died; several people have been arrested but their statements have not clarified responsibility. Police interventions and UN surveillance have calmed the situation but that no one is prepared to identify perpetrators means the stand-off is far from resolved.

Margai told Crisis Group he felt the SLPP was "hell-bent on rigging the elections" and while he "hoped to avoid violence, any attempt by the governing party to interfere will not be acceptable or tolerated". With reference to his claim of wide support from former RUF and CDF

²⁰ Confidential report by the Office of National Security (ONS), Freetown, November 2006, made available to Crisis Group.

²¹ Crisis Group interview, SLPP Secretary-General Jacob Jusu Saffa, Freetown, December 2006.

²² Crisis Group interview, civil society activist, Bo, 9 June 2007.

²³ Crisis Group interviews, Bo, March 2007.

²⁴ Confidential report by the ONS, op. cit.

²⁵ Crisis Group interview, ex-combatant, Bo, June 2007.

²⁶ Some civil society groups are working with bike riders and their associations in Bo and elsewhere with a view to avoiding conflict. This involves encouraging respect for rules of the road, offering support for their internal elections and trying to reduce prejudice against them. Crisis Group interviews, Bo and Freetown, June 2007.

²⁷ Crisis Group interview, Victor Angelo, Executive Representative of the UN Secretary-General, Freetown, 7 June 2007.

²⁸ The affair was known as the Ndorgborwusui crisis.

combatants, he said he “prayed the SLPP did not provoke violence, because they have no capacity to sustain it”, while his own party “has what it takes to protect its interests” in legal self-defence.²⁹

A PMDC official in Bo went further, calling the development of an SLPP “task force” – a youth group – around Kenema, in neighbouring Eastern Province, a clear sign of “guerrilla warfare” against the opposition and saying “we cannot tolerate victimisation day by day”. This task force, he claimed, had intimidated people during voter registration.³⁰ Even if, as a diplomat said, it is “not doing too much that is illegal”,³¹ such developments and claims have potential to destabilise the rule of law in the Southern and Eastern Provinces and show the importance of continued police and UN vigilance.³²

Parties have shown a marked tendency in the past to recruit unemployed youths as thugs to intimidate opponents. The APC has a particular history of such violence but indications like those cited above suggest others may be appealing directly to ex-militia fighters who are easy to mobilise. This trend needs to be stopped. Party leaders should make a public commitment to behave responsibly in the interest of peace and stability.

C. THE NEC’S GOOD PERFORMANCE – SO FAR

The National Election Commission inherited a difficult legacy but has been tackling potentially divisive reforms well. Continuation of this performance is vital to securing free and fair elections and ensuring the results are accepted. To maintain momentum, challenges to the process must be dealt with swiftly, transparently and fairly.

NEC passed its first major test with voter registration across the country, ending on 18 March. According to the report it released shortly afterwards, 2,621,313 were registered, 91 per cent of the estimated voting population of 2,873,000.³³ The National Election Watch, a Freetown-based NGO, fielded 187 observers nationwide to monitor the process. Its first report criticised intimidation by “government officers, party members and citizens” in

particular in Kenema districts and Goderich, a village close to the capital, including “beating of registrars, belittling of electoral officers and flogging of other elections officers”. The group, however, praised the NEC for maintaining “neutrality and independence”, even under “great pressure such as the registrars’ strike in two constituencies in Freetown or the incidence of gross political interference in Kenema”.³⁴ The process was completed by 31 May, with an exhibition and enquiry phase, during which more than 900,000 voter names were checked and some 17,500 corrections made.³⁵

NEC’s neutrality and independence, not to mention competence, are refreshing. The current body was set up after an IFES report on the 2004 local government elections detailed irregularities, including blatant ballot rigging by all parties, so extensive that IFES, donors and the government agreed to withhold publication and UK Department for International Development (DFID) kept back part of its budget support for the government.³⁶ A subsequent investigation by Justice Johan Krieger, who helped conduct South Africa’s 1994 elections, recommended completely dismantling and rebuilding the old NEC with new staff and leadership, to make it capable of “attaining and maintaining the capacity to conduct the country’s electoral undertakings fairly, competently, affordably, without outside assistance”. The first step would be for it to “metamorphose from an appendage of the government service into a state-funded but independent electoral management body employing its own core of electoral experts”.³⁷

The new chairman, Christiana Thorpe, a minister under the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) junta in the 1990s, was sworn in in May 2005. Prior to her brief ministerial responsibility, she was a Catholic sister and civil society activist and has a reputation for honesty. Four commissioners were appointed to represent the country’s four regions. NEC then moved to well-equipped new Freetown offices³⁸ and hired a highly educated, competent

²⁹ Crisis Group interview, Charles Margai, Freetown, 6 June 2007.

³⁰ Crisis Group interview, PMDC official, Bo, 9 June 2007.

³¹ Crisis Group interview, UK High Commission official, Freetown, 7 June 2007.

³² Victor Angelo, Executive Representative of the UN Secretary-General, cites the overcrowded Freetown area, where loyalties are much divided, as another part of the country at risk. Crisis Group interview, Freetown, 7 June 2007.

³³ The 91 per cent figure may be a slight overestimate, given doubts about the accuracy of the census number used, 4,976,871.

³⁴ “Report on the Voter Registration Process”, National Election Watch, March 2007.

³⁵ Information provided to Crisis Group by NDI during a meeting at DFID offices in Freetown, 7 June 2007.

³⁶ IFES is a U.S.-based non-profit organisation, formally known as the International Foundation for Election Systems but now using only the acronym. Crisis Group has seen the IFES report, which still has not been published. Crisis Group interview, senior DFID official in Sierra Leone, Freetown, December 2006. The IFES report and the subsequent investigation by Justice John Krieger did not hold the government responsible. The malpractices were initially detected and reported by the earlier incarnation of the NEC and appeared to involve both ruling party and opposition candidates.

³⁷ Johan Krieger, “Second Assessment Report”, May 2005.

³⁸ The former offices were decrepit and neglected.

staff of 135, including those based in regional offices. It has demonstrated independence by supporting members of the Limba ethnic group who filed a petition in the Supreme Court challenging the election of a pro-government candidate.³⁹

The tasks ahead, however, are onerous. The NEC has a shortfall of about \$2 million of the \$20 million it requires to conduct the polls. In May it recommended postponement from 28 July to 11 August to allow more time for campaigning after parliament dissolved on 25 June⁴⁰ but there are serious concerns about organising the elections at the height of the rainy season, which could prevent people reaching polling stations and make the transport of ballot boxes difficult. The UN mission (UNIOSIL) worries about the reaction of those unable to vote.⁴¹ A single week, to 9 July, was allocated for processing candidate nominations, including one day for challenges on grounds such as mistaken identity or a criminal record, before the formal campaign begins.⁴²

A little debated but crucial step in the process is recruitment of polling agents. IFES and others attributed most malpractices during the 2004 local government elections to polling agents. The job is temporary and not well-paid. Experienced political operatives have a way of getting their partisans hired and then using them to tamper with the balloting. NEC has said it will not recruit school teachers, since this might affect their substantive jobs, but it has not indicated what other sources will be sufficient to fill hundreds of positions that require literacy and understanding of electoral rules. In an effort to avoid local affiliations, those hired will be posted outside their home areas.⁴³ PMDC remains sceptical about their independence, so it intends to have party officials at each polling station to report irregularities.⁴⁴

International observers will complement NEC's work. DFID and the European Union (EU) will station theirs across the country, and the U.S.-based National Democratic Institute (NDI), which has offices in Freetown, will work with the local National Elections Watch (NEW) to put mostly Sierra Leonean observers at every polling station. NDI already has its own long-term observers in place

and has also trained local NGOs to help with registration and voter education.⁴⁵ Hope-Sierra Leone has launched a "Clean Election Campaign", which organises dialogues around the country that bring together Paramount Chiefs, local councillors, ward committee members and other stakeholders to discuss how to work towards free, fair and peaceful elections.⁴⁶

Provisions have been made for courts to hear petitions under the Electoral Law over six months, starting with the nominations process in July. Judges and magistrates will be paid extra for this work. Parliamentary election cases will be dealt with under high court rules, presidential election cases under Supreme Court rules.

To retain goodwill, the NEC must satisfy expectations that all complaints will be handled transparently and fairly and it will respond rapidly to any deterioration in security. If it does this, it will then remain for the newly elected government and parliament to address seriously the governance challenges analysed below.

³⁹ The Supreme Court ruled against the petition on the grounds that the election of a Paramount Chief is not a public election, and the NEC had no role to play in it.

⁴⁰ NEC set one month – 10 July to 9 August – for formal campaigning.

⁴¹ Crisis Group interview, Victor Angelo, Executive Representative of the Secretary-General, Freetown, 7 June 2007.

⁴² Information provided to Crisis Group by NDI during a meeting at DFID offices in Freetown, 7 June 2007.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Crisis Group interview, Charles Margai, Freetown, 6 June 2007.

⁴⁵ Crisis Group interview, Nicholas Demeter, NDI country director, Freetown, January 2007.

⁴⁶ Crisis Group interview, John Koroma, Centre for Human Rights and Peace Education, Bo, 8 June 2007.

III. LIMITED IMPROVEMENTS IN GOVERNANCE

Sierra Leone is still fragile and somewhat volatile. Violent protests involving youth and students, sometimes leading to major property damage and confrontations between rival political supporters, show that domestic instability remains a real threat. A section of the country's impoverished population is willing to take the law into its own hands, as evidenced in occasional riots and vandalism in Freetown, including an incident a few years ago that led to the near-destruction of the national stadium. Impunity for the house burnings described above is another sign of weakness. Law enforcement remains a challenge and can only be assured by competent security professionals, in particular the police and army. Substantial efforts have been put into making these institutions much more accountable and manageable but the jury is still out on their impact; corruption threatens to undermine progress in these and other areas.

A. WIDESPREAD CORRUPTION

With assistance from donors, in particular the UK, the EU and the World Bank, Sierra Leone has made some progress in post-war reconstruction, resettlement and reintegration. Primary school enrolment is higher than in pre-war years,⁴⁷ and there has been substantial devolution of authority to district councils. Across the country since 2003, 406km of roads have been resurfaced or improved, and 153 primary and secondary schools and 76 hospitals or health centres built or rehabilitated.⁴⁸ Freetown had street lights installed in December 2006 after decades of darkness. The new National Revenue Authority has made the government more effective at revenue generation and collection. The economy has registered an impressive growth of nearly 7 per cent annually in the past two years, and violent crime is low.⁴⁹ Donors forgave the \$1.6 billion external debt in 2006, and a new youth employment scheme – partly supported by the UN Peacebuilding

⁴⁷ During his administration, President Kabbah has said, the number of children attending school increased from 400,000 to 1.2 million, farewell speech to parliament, 21 June 2007, at www.thepatrioticvanguard.com/article.php?id_article=1368.

⁴⁸ Crisis Group interview, senior DFID official, Freetown, December 2006.

⁴⁹ An EU-funded study of law enforcement in 2005 found very low levels of violent crime in the country, and noted that “contrary to what might be expected, the war itself and its aftermath does not appear to have caused a sudden growth in the crime rate”. Bruce Baker and Amadu Sidi Bah, “Policing Agencies in Sierra Leone: An Evaluation”, Campaign for Good Governance, occasional papers series, no. 2, 2005, p. 5.

Fund⁵⁰ – has put poor young people to work cleaning the garbage-strewn capital.⁵¹

Nevertheless, indicators reveal that post-war reforms have not had the intended economic impact. Sierra Leone is ranked 176 of 177 countries on the UN Human Development Index (HDI);⁵² youth unemployment, one of the drivers of the eleven-year war, is at an all-time high of nearly 80 per cent, and over 70 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line, including 26 per cent in extreme poverty.⁵³ Prospects for improvement through private investment are poor. The World Bank ranks Sierra Leone 168 of 175 countries for ease of doing business. While recent national economic growth has been good, it has been most evident in subsistence food production and in the mineral and tourism sectors, which are not sufficient to substantially alleviate widespread urban and rural poverty.

Particularly international observers often express frustration that after years of sustained support the country should be in such an abject state.⁵⁴ That progress on good governance, poverty reduction, economic growth and job creation has been far less than hoped for is naturally blamed on the government. There is a growing sense that it is lukewarm towards much-needed reforms. The perception that the state is corrupt has grown since the end of the war, with Sierra Leone slipping from 126 to 142 on Transparency International's ranking in 2006.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ The UN Peacebuilding Fund was launched in 2006 for post-conflict peace building; priority is to be given to countries on the Peacebuilding Commission's agenda, including Sierra Leone.

⁵¹ See “Aid and Votes”, *Africa Confidential*, vol. 48, no. 8, 13 April 2007.

⁵² “Human Development Report”, UN Development Programme (UNDP), 2006.

⁵³ Crisis Group interview, senior DFID official, Freetown, December 2006.

⁵⁴ At the Consultative Group meeting in Freetown in late 2006, the head of DFID/Sierra Leone, Richard Hogg, said: “While we acknowledge the constraints and the distance to be travelled...the time for excuses is passed. What we need is a sustained focus on implementation...I welcome the focus of the vice-president...on growth and infrastructure, particularly energy, but we need to move beyond rhetoric to real commitment to change and reform”. Crisis Group interview, senior DFID official, Freetown, December 2006.

⁵⁵ The index primarily provides an annual snapshot of the views of businesspeople and country analysts. Transparency International points out, however, that year-to-year variations in a country's score can result not only from a changing perception of performance but also from changing samples and methodology. Methodology is discussed in more detail at www.transparency.org/cpi/2004/dnld/framework_en.pdf. The score should be used as a tracking indicator, rather than as the basis for making definitive statements about the level of corruption in any given year.

1. The unreliable bureaucracy

Development assistance, though modest compared to some other post-conflict countries, has been substantial.⁵⁶ Bilaterally, the most important donor is the UK, mainly through DFID. London committed to providing a total of at least £120 million over three years, making Sierra Leone one of the highest recipients per capita of its development aid in Africa. While it is generally agreed there has been substantial improvement in the security sector and the diamond industry, progress on reducing poverty and improving governance more generally, in particular tackling corruption, has been disappointing.⁵⁷ Direct budget support immediately after Kabbah's arrival, when "there was neither systematic assessment of financial systems nor a plan to improve them", was exceptional and contravened DFID's own subsequent guidance.⁵⁸ Too often the government, attracted by extra funds, has signed up to projects it was clearly unprepared to implement adequately, or which were not immediate priorities. Inadequate commitment to projects, resulting in misuse of the money, has been at the root of much of the corruption that has characterised post-war institution building.

Corruption in the civil service is evident, even without reliable sector statistics.⁵⁹ A recent survey of the provincial branches of the health and agriculture ministries, for example, found 162 ghost (or dead) workers on the payroll; an assessment of the senior civil service in 2005 discovered that salaries were being paid to 236 persons when there were only 125 at those grades.⁶⁰ Often incomprehensible administrative discretion and bogus procedures create opportunities for graft; bribes are common for even basic government services.

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), always problematic, is now virtually moribund. The previous head, Val Collier, a respected former civil servant, was dismissed

in 2006 and replaced by Henry Joko-Smart, a law professor and close friend of President Kabbah.⁶¹ Joko-Smart was (perhaps unfairly) penalised by a corruption inquiry under the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) in 1992 and tends, like the president, to view allegations against senior officials, however well-grounded, as malicious. Whereas Collier brought charges against ministers, an Appeals Court judge and several senior civil servants, Joko-Smart has focused almost exclusively on junior and mid-level officials, thus sending the wrong message about endemic corruption.

A 2006 review of the ACC by two consultants for DFID, its chief supporter, found a "deterioration in the institutional capacity to lead the fight against corruption" and almost zero impact on public perception and reduction of corruption affecting basic service delivery and the private sector. It noted a "significant under-spend" of over \$1 million, suggesting that "work relevant to the achievement of the operational plan in investigations, prevention and community relations is not being carried out". It recommended ending support for the ACC, but DFID plans instead to mainstream anti-corruption and accountability measures in its projects with a view to removing obstacles to private investment.⁶² The findings, however, are a serious indictment of a government which badly needs to attract foreign money to fuel private sector growth and create sustainable jobs. The next president must take the fight against corruption more seriously and set a strong example.

2. Diamond industry transparency

The diamond industry is a key sector that has been a very strong focus for reform because of both its strategic importance – it played the leading funding role in the war – and its economic significance, including as the employer of over 100,000 mostly young people. In the 1960s and 1970s, it was the biggest contributor to GDP (20 per cent), as well as providing over 70 per cent of foreign exchange

⁵⁶ In 2003, donor disbursement (multilateral and bilateral) was \$257,617,819; in 2004, it was \$244,027,607 and in 2005 \$304,163,149, with DFID and EU the top two, followed by the U.S. The 2006 figure is about the same as that for 2005.

⁵⁷ Crisis Group interview, senior DFID official, Freetown, December 2006.

⁵⁸ Quoted in Brian Thomson, "Sierra Leone: Reform or Relapse? Conflict and Governance Reform", Chatham House report, June 2007, p. 19.

⁵⁹ Examples of inconsistent statistics include: the Public Sector Reform Task Force reported in 2005 that the public sector as a whole comprised 60,600 personnel, including 15,500 in the civil service, 24,750 teachers, 8,450 police, and 11,900 military; in 2004 the Establishment Secretary's Office gave a figure for the civil service of 17,500. "Design of a Comprehensive Pay and Grading Reform Strategy for the Government of Sierra Leone", CoEn Consulting, Public Service Reform Unit, May 2004; see also "Drivers of Change/Sierra Leone, 2006", DFID.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ The government accused Collier and his deputy, Andy Felton (a British national and DFID consultant), of causing the death of Gloria Newman-Smart, the former head of customs and immigration, whom the Commission accused of corruption; of discourtesy to the president and parliament (which Collier allegedly described as full of rogues); of "travelling in and out of the country without the permission of the government"; of paying journalists to "write negative articles against the government"; and of giving a French public relations firm \$50,000 "to write against the Sierra Leone Government". The allegations were contained in a memo sent to the British High Commissioner in late 2005. Crisis Group has seen the memo.

⁶² Joel Cutting and Gladwell Otieno, "Annual Review 2006 of DFID Support to Anti-Corruption Commission Phase 2 in Sierra Leone", 25 January 2007. Crisis Group Interview, DFID staff, Freetown, 6 June 2007.

earnings and 15 per cent of tax revenue. The war wiped out this economic contribution but since its end, the sector has started to resume its historic role. In 1999, Sierra Leone officially exported about \$1 million worth of diamonds; in 2005, this rose to \$142 million. It dropped in 2006 to \$125 million, probably due to increased smuggling or depletion of reserves. Most observers, however, say this is a fraction of what the country produces. In 2005 the Peace Diamond Alliance (PDA), an NGO coalition, estimated the annual value of diamond production at \$400 million.⁶³

A DFID review of the industry in 2005 found that although there has “undoubtedly been progress made towards...ensuring that the potential benefits from diamond deposits are fully realised by the government and people of Sierra Leone”, the capacity of the mineral resources ministry (which oversees the industry) “has only marginally improved and remains weak at national and particularly local level”. It added that the ministry “has a narrow focus, lacks management, monitoring and training capacity, and there is no clear strategy for confronting the strong vested interests of politicians and chiefs”. The government has deliberately not put high taxes on the alluvial sector of the diamond trade as it knows that, given the ease of smuggling, it would undermine legal commerce. During 2004, revenue from export tax and licences was only \$5.2 million, of which one quarter went to the Diamond Areas Community Development Fund and another quarter to cover the Gold and Diamond Office’s costs.⁶⁴

An area of concern, and one prone to corruption, has been tax concessions for individual mining companies. Koidu Holdings Ltd. (the biggest diamond mining venture in the country) has on occasion, according to Partnership Africa Canada, been granted duty free facilities for equipment and other mining-related goods it imports, and waivers for the residential permits of its dozens of foreign employees. Such incentives are aimed, understandably, at attracting foreign investment despite the country’s weak infrastructure, but they are problematic. An International Monetary Fund (IMF) review criticised the approach as ad hoc, apparently without documentary framework and costing the government considerable revenue. A review of the mining industry by the Governance Reform Secretariat estimated that revenue losses from several concessions granted to Sierra Leone Rutile’s titanium mines will amount to \$98 million from 2004 to 2016.⁶⁵

⁶³ This is a probably an exaggeration but even the government admits there is still widespread smuggling, and the actual export figure should be in the region of \$200 million. Crisis Group interviews, Freetown, December 2006.

⁶⁴ Thomson, “Reform or Relapse?”, op. cit.

⁶⁵ Cited in “Annual Diamond Review 2005”, Partnership Africa Canada, at www.pacweb.org.

3. Security risks

Many poor countries emerging from war tend to relapse into armed conflict because the fundamental conditions that sustained violence and made it attractive, such as the opportunity to plunder a feeble and corrupt state, remain unchanged. The risk is particularly great if, as in Sierra Leone’s case, those who fought the war believe they are not benefiting much from the peace. At the end of Sierra Leone’s war in 2002, 71,043 combatants went through a UN-supervised disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) process. A report on the aftermath of that process in July 2004 gave some insight into the problems of unemployment and disillusionment still prevalent in the country, particularly among the former fighters. It concluded that “overall, the data support the view that the fighters in the conflict were largely underprivileged individuals who had been failed by the Sierra Leonean state” and explained that:

Across factions, both political and material motivations mattered for the recruitment of fighters. RUF combatants claimed that they fought to express dissatisfaction, to root out corruption and to bring down the existing regime. CDF fighters argued that they aimed to defend their communities from the violence brought by the war. Political motivations notwithstanding, there were strong material incentives as well. RUF combatants were promised jobs, money, and women; during the war, they received women, drugs and sometimes more valuable goods. The CDF helped to meet the basic needs of the members and provided increased security for their families.⁶⁶

Only 42 per cent who had completed DDR training had found jobs, 72 per cent of these in the first three months. With respect to employment opportunities and corruption, the report noted, “more than 50 per cent of [those surveyed] think things are about the same or worse [as] before the war”. Though most ex-combatants “think the government has made progress in rebuilding the educational infrastructure, education remains far and away the most important priority (48 per cent), employment appears as the second most prominent concern (23 per cent), followed by corruption (11 per cent)... Importantly, combatants across factions broadly accept this set of priorities, whether they have returned to their home communities or entered new ones in the post-war period”.⁶⁷ Another recent evaluation found that “for those [former child soldiers] who took part in the formal disarmament,

⁶⁶ Macartan Humphreys and Jeremy M. Weinstein, “What the Fighters Say: A Survey of Ex-Combatants in Sierra Leone June-August 2003”, interim report produced in partnership with Pride, Sierra Leone, July 2004.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) process, vocational training and employment opportunities were inadequate.... [Moreover,] significant numbers, perhaps as many as half, did not take part in the DDR process and subsequently received no support".⁶⁸

B. ENTRENCHED DOMINATION BY THE CHIEFTAINCY

The much-heralded decentralisation process, which both donors and the government embraced, has encountered many problems resulting from the state's inherent weaknesses and the bad, old ways of doing things, notably persistence of chieftom governance; chaotic revenue collection systems; informal provincial land and property markets; and poor record-keeping.⁶⁹

Of these, the position of Paramount Chiefs is the greatest threat to decentralisation. Paramount Chiefs have often actively interfered with the operation of the new local councils and distorted their powers. Elected local councillors complain of humiliation at the hands of chiefs, who remain powerful partly because they are actively supported by parliamentarians and other central government officials who look to them to deliver votes.⁷⁰ Donors bear some responsibility for this. When peace came, DFID spent millions of dollars on an ill-conceived project to restore Paramount Chiefs – most of whom had been displaced by the war – as a way of stabilising the interior.⁷¹ The money, in most cases corruptly used by local officials, reinforced the power of unaccountable individuals over people who probably no longer needed them.

In fact, 44 per cent of Paramount Chiefs today were elected after 2002. Though most of the new chiefs are educated, well travelled and apparently progressive, the institution remains built around a system that ties the chiefs to central government officials in a mutually reinforcing alliance that, in the words of one analyst, leaves "large groups of excluded citizens and some groups that [in effect] have no hope for advancement within such a closed feudal approach to governance".⁷² The position of Paramount

Chiefs has implications well beyond local government. It is central in sustaining elite patronage politics, increases SLPP leverage and helps subvert efforts to build more formal state structures.⁷³

Sierra Leone's government, like that of other African countries, has to negotiate its authority with social institutions. As in colonial days, there are two sets of laws: one based on the British judicial system and anchored in a constitution, statutes and judicial precedents, the other resting on unwritten traditional customs, known as customary law and enforced by chiefs with hereditary powers.⁷⁴ The modern component, on which most reform efforts have focused, is the smaller; 66 per cent of the population lives in rural areas, and over 70 per cent – including many in cities such as Freetown – submit to the jurisdiction of traditional authorities.⁷⁵ Most importantly, the right to hereditary use of land in villages and chiefdoms depends in most cases on the whims of chiefs. These rights and privileges are unwritten, and chiefs, as customary authorities, remain their primary guarantors, with very few checks and balances.

The injustices and petty tyrannies inherent in traditional authority, especially as they relate to young people's access to land and to women for marriage, contributed to the alienation which drove some to join the rebellion.⁷⁶ The challenge has been to streamline customary law and make it fairer and its execution more transparent. Chiefs are additionally given restrictive powers by statutory law. The 1965 Public Order Act stipulates that any person intending to "convene or hold a public meeting at any place in the provinces shall first notify in writing the Paramount Chief of the Chiefdom in which such place is situated". The chief in question shall then "by order in writing addressed to such person giving notice, disallow the convening or holding of the public meeting in any place in the Provinces or impose such conditions as he may consider necessary on any such meeting where the interests of defence, public order, public safety or public morality reasonably so require".⁷⁷

Affairs, vol. 106, no. 422, January 2007, p. 101.

⁷³ *Ibid*, pp. 96-111.

⁷⁴ One presidential hopeful, Charles Margai, suggested in 2005 that he would subject Paramount Chiefs to periodic elections but he quickly backed down when they objected.

⁷⁵ Crisis Group interviews, Freetown, December 2006; see also "The Sierra Leone Poverty Profile" (the country's poverty reduction strategy paper, PRSP), IMF, February 2005, Chapter 3, pp. 20-28.

⁷⁶ Paul Richards has done valuable work on this, though sometimes his analysis seems overdrawn. See "Controversy over Recent West African Wars: An Agrarian Question?", occasional paper, Centre of African Studies, University of Copenhagen, January 2004.

⁷⁷ "The Public Order Act, 1965: Being an Act to Consolidate and Amend the Law Relating to Public Order", 31 December 1965, Part IV, 24(1) and (2).

⁶⁸ "Child Soldiers Coalition welcomes verdicts against child recruiters in Sierra Leone", Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, press release, Dakar, 20 June 2007.

⁶⁹ Crisis Group interviews, Freetown, December 2006. For a review of fast-track decentralisation limitations, see also Richard Fanthorpe, "On the limits of liberal peace: Chiefs and democratic decentralisation in post-war Sierra Leone", *African Affairs*, vol. 105, no. 418, January 2006, pp. 27-49.

⁷⁰ Crisis Group interviews, Bo, December 2006.

⁷¹ See Crisis Group Report, *Liberia and Sierra Leone*, op. cit., pp. 23-24.

⁷² Paul Jackson, "Reshuffling an Old Deck of Cards? The politics of local government reform in Sierra Leone", *African*

Decentralisation has done little to curb their power, so chiefs remain a serious barrier to a strong and accountable state. Many are pro-SLPP, some aggressively so. Secretary-General Jacob Jusu Saffa says his party is the natural home for chiefs because it is distinctly friendly to traditional authority.⁷⁸ Some abuse the 1965 law to suppress rival parties. A threat assessment by the Office of National Security (ONS) in December 2006 noted instances in which Paramount Chiefs tried to prevent the activities of parties other than the SLPP; in one case a chief led the police and others to deface the APC party symbol in Kambia District. The report noted that the “blatant show of support” by chiefs for a party could “threaten to limit the rights and freedom of supporters of other parties”, which “may nurture disgruntlement among the locals and possibly confrontations during the electioneering process”.

The Code of Conduct for Political Parties, signed by eight registered parties on 20 October 2006,⁷⁹ urges all to “ensure that they do not coerce or intimidate Paramount Chiefs or their sub-chiefs, or any other authority to deny any political party the right of access to any chieftom for political functions”.⁸⁰ The Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC) now has code monitors for all twelve districts, based in the regional capitals, but no powers to sanction misconduct. In the current election period, the chief of Bo Town, after reluctantly granting the APC permission to hold a town hall meeting, disappeared with the key. The police had to break the lock so that the meeting could take place.⁸¹ There are also isolated examples of citizen defiance; the Paramount Chief of Mambolo, Northern Province, apparently sought refuge in Freetown after his community rejected his urging to support the SLPP.⁸²

C. SUSTAINABILITY OF SECURITY SECTOR REFORM

Although in political geography – a small, fairly evenly distributed population of some five million, a solid resource base and manageable communications – Sierra Leone appears far from terminally fragile, it has been one of West Africa’s most unstable countries, suffering coups and counter-coups, violent upheavals and, recently, total state collapse. Since the brutal civil war of 1991-2002

ended, it has faced the major challenges of re-establishing state authority by improving governance and creating “a viable structure of coercion” – that is, firmly establishing the state’s monopoly over armed violence by rebuilding and strengthening the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) and the Sierra Leone Police (SLP).⁸³ Because threats have traditionally been internal, emanating chiefly from those security forces, the test has been to create especially a military that is accountable and loyal to the civilian leadership. Since the collapse of the first military government in 1968, this concern has led to at least six attempts at institutional reform of the RSLAF, the latest the current UK-funded security sector reform.⁸⁴

1. Army loyalty

During the war, the RSLAF nearly self-destructed, with many of its personnel joining the rebels to fight against the government, which was backed by West African forces and the Kamajor militia. After he was reinstated to power in 1998, President Kabbah initially announced that the army was to be disbanded but later changed his mind. Instead, it was to be reformed by new recruitment and intensive training. The UK took the lead, providing substantial funding from its Africa Conflict Prevention Pool.⁸⁵ The projects are now backed by less than 100 UK troops, led by a brigadier general, under the International Military Advisory and Training Team (IMATT).

RSLAF strength reached 10,300 in 2006, a figure that appears unsustainable. Even with strong UK support, pay is low (about \$50 monthly for the rank and file). The army still lacks logistical, communication, accommodation and transport capabilities and is certainly not yet the highly mobile, capable force envisaged in the security sector review commissioned by the UK.⁸⁶ Operation Pebu, the important UK-funded project to build barracks, is on schedule to be completed by 2009, however. Lack of accommodation for many RSLAF personnel potentially jeopardises discipline and military coherence.

With its history of abuse and violence, the army is still feared by a large section of the populace, and a key problem is that the new force is not so new; many members have been involved in coups and counter-coups and collaborated with the insurgents during the war, which raises concerns about their dependability.⁸⁷ There is

⁷⁸ Crisis Group interview, Freetown, December 2006.

⁷⁹ They are: the SLPP, APC, PMDC, Peace and Liberation Party (PLP), Revolutionary United Front Party (RUF), United National People’s Party (UNPP), National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and People’s Democratic Party (PDP).

⁸⁰ “Political Parties Code of Conduct”, *We Yone*, 11 December 2006.

⁸¹ Crisis Group interview, Sallieu Kamara, Network Movement for Justice and Development, Bo, 8 June 2007.

⁸² Crisis Group interview, civil society activist, Bo, 8 June 2007.

⁸³ Christopher Clapham, “Sierra Leone: The Political Economy of Internal Conflict”, Clingendael working paper, July 2003.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Aid to Sierra Leone is one of the most significant investments made under this instrument.

⁸⁶ “Supporting Security, Justice, and Development: Lessons for a New Era”, Vera Institute of Justice, June 2005, pp. 17-19.

⁸⁷ Kellie Conteh, retired brigadier and National Security Coordinator, insisted in December 2006 Crisis Group interviews

also some evidence that a minority is very hostile to Berewa, because he is believed to have masterminded while attorney general and justice minister the 1998 trial and execution of more than a dozen officers who participated in the bloody coup the previous year. The army is still largely dominated by people from the Northern Province, so more naturally APC supporters. Despite substantial effort to make it more professional and subject to civilian control, this is still not certain. The armed forces, in other words, remain a potential source of instability and probably the most important factor in the country's fragility.

The UK military, with RSLAF personnel, conducted spectacular amphibious exercises in Sierra Leone in October 2006, involving some 3,000 soldiers and intended to provide reassurance that help could come quickly from over the horizon in the event of trouble. Such exercises should continue for at least the next five to ten years; one should be conducted a few weeks before the elections. UK troops are highly respected, and feared, by the RSLAF, and may be the main reason for the army's present quiescence. In the 2002 elections, the security forces voted separately, and the results showed limited support for Kabbah and the ruling SLPP. In some areas an estimated 80 per cent of the army voted for ex-Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) leader Johnny Paul Koroma's party, while the police appeared to support it.⁸⁸

2. Police capacity

The UK alone has spent some \$40 million retraining and restructuring the SLP, which had been reduced from 9,317 (pre-war) to 6,000 at the end of the war.⁸⁹ Public perception of crime, however, shows little regard for the result. Only 3 per cent of those questioned in a 2004 SLP survey in the four major towns, Freetown, Bo, Makeni and Kenema, replied they felt "very safe" in their communities; 25 per cent did not feel safe at all. A further 26 per cent said they "just trust in the Lord's protection"; 81 per cent claimed the traffic police extorted money from drivers.⁹⁰

In fact, these perceptions do not fully accord with the reality of crime incidence. An EU-funded study of policing agencies in 2005 found low levels of violent crime for a country just emerging from war.⁹¹ One finding in the police perception survey, however, goes to the heart of the

that the ONS and the RSLAF have calculated that soldiers with this past and who may be prone to subversive activities are probably less than 1 per cent and were being monitored.

⁸⁸ Crisis Group Africa Report N°49, *Sierra Leone After Elections: Politics as Usual?*, 12 July 2002.

⁸⁹ About 900 officers were killed during the war; many fled the country or left what had become an extremely dangerous job.

⁹⁰ See "Policing Agencies in Sierra Leone", op. cit., p. 8.

⁹¹ Ibid, p. 5.

problem of the police and of Sierra Leone more generally, namely institutional neglect of the poor. While the capital's economically powerful, such as businesspeople, newspaper editors and lawyers, said the police responded quickly when contacted, impoverished market traders and youths said they were always slow or never responded.⁹²

The SLP handled the Bo crisis in November 2005 inappropriately.⁹³ Its lack of training in crowd control was evident. The incident, which probably could have been contained easily, caused such trouble in the country's second largest city that British-led IMATT forces had to be dispatched to reassure the populace. They flew Margai out to Freetown, where the SLP arrested him. Several officers were later redeployed from Bo to less volatile areas.⁹⁴

The SLP reached its target of 9,500 personnel in 2006, and recruitment in 2007 aims to add a further 250 officers. The UN Mission's police section is working with the force to review the training curriculum.⁹⁵ Some 3,000 personnel have recently received new training focused on crowd control and related activities relevant to the elections. The SLP today is a much more disciplined, better equipped force than it was a few years ago. New uniforms, vehicles and better pay and training are clearly in evidence but few think it is yet competent to handle such critical issues as election violence or widespread demonstrations on its own. Some fear its new-found efficiency and professional outlook will be hard to sustain once the British withdraw. The strategy for the elections is to free the police from their border tasks and deploy them in potentially volatile areas like Bo, Kenema and Kono. The army will not participate in the electoral process but will take over posts temporarily vacated by the police.

D. POLITICISATION OF THE JUDICIARY

In addition to concerns about the limited scope and huge expense of the Special Court for Sierra Leone and its indictment of CDF members, there are persistent doubts about lack of accountability and absence of rule of law more broadly. The 2004 Truth and Reconciliation

⁹² To be fair to the SLP, 46 per cent of those surveyed said there had been "a great improvement" in police attitude and competence; only 15 per cent said that there had been "no improvement".

⁹³ See Section II.B above.

⁹⁴ Crisis Group interviews, Freetown, December 2006. Another pending case involves Ernest Koroma, the APC leader, whose bodyguard was arrested for possession of unlicensed weapons. Many observers think both cases are politically motivated.

⁹⁵ "Third Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone", 28 November 2006, p. 4.

Commission (TRC) report identified the collapse of an independent judiciary and the abuse of power and denial of basic human rights that resulted from this collapse as part of the “deplorable conditions” that led to and fuelled the long conflict.⁹⁶ The perception of the judiciary as unjust and subservient to the executive is still very strong. The prominent cases below indicate how corrosive the problem is. Access to justice is at the heart of democratic governance and accountability; fair and timely judgements are essential for the rule of law.

In 2005, thugs reportedly acting on the orders of an SLPP parliamentarian and including two of her children, attacked a young journalist, Harry Yansanneh, acting editor of *For Di People*. He died from kidney failure in hospital shortly after, apparently as a result of his severe beating. An inquest headed by Senior Magistrate Adrian Fischer recommended that the parliamentarian, Fatmata Komeh, and her children be tried for manslaughter. Komeh was arrested and briefly detained but freed on order of the attorney general and justice minister,⁹⁷ Fred Carew, who threw out the charges on grounds that in making the recommendation Fischer had not followed “the rules laid down in law”. Komeh, whom the SLPP has not nominated to stand in the August 2007 election, and her children (now in the UK) are free. The Sierra Leone Journalist Association (SLAJ) as well as family and friends of Yansanneh remain seriously aggrieved by what they perceive as state injustice.⁹⁸

Omrie Michael Golley, a UK-based lawyer and former self-proclaimed spokesman for the RUF insurgents, was arrested on 12 January 2006. On 23 January, he and two others, Mohamed Bah and David Kai Tongi, both junior ex-RUF combatants, were charged with plotting to overthrow the government and assassinate Vice President Berewa. They have been denied bail and their trial postponed nearly two dozen times. Key evidence the state prosecutor has produced includes \$100 (said to be from \$1,000) and two mobile phones Golley is alleged to have given the others to facilitate the plot. Also made public is a picture of the accused, which the defence and other observers state was taken over a week after their arrests, and which appears to show them inspecting the main army

ordnance depot in Freetown (sources suggest they had been specially taken there by the police).⁹⁹

Part of the reason for the delay in bringing the men to trial is the fact that the judiciary does not have sufficient judges, and the government has had to hire retired judges on contract. One of these, Samuel Ademusu, is presiding, and Golley’s lawyers have objected, arguing that because he lacks tenure, he will do what the government wants. This has visibly aggravated the judge. The case has also been put back several times on the grounds that there is no petrol for the prison van to bring the accused to court. Golley has lost more than half his body weight in the Pademba Road prison, and a doctor stated he has had “recurrent episodes of malarial fever and typhoid” and exhibits acute kidney problems.¹⁰⁰

While the concerns raised in these high-profile, politically sensitive cases are obvious, the interplay between customary law and the formal sector brings its own problems for vulnerable groups such as women.¹⁰¹ President Kabbah’s reference to justice sector reform in his farewell speech to parliament was complacent, listing measures in train, but the only concrete improvements are some new laws and new justices of the peace to address the shortage of judges.¹⁰² Respect for law remains low, while impunity continues to characterise much of society. This is a disincentive to economic investment and undermines respect for human rights – both of which are needed to prevent a return to conflict.

⁹⁶ “Witness to Truth”, op. cit.

⁹⁷ Several Crisis Group reports, as well as human rights activists in the country, have called for separating the offices of attorney general and justice minister. The combination politicises the position of chief government prosecutor and is one reason why anti-corruption cases, in particular those dealing with senior officials, have gone nowhere. The separation of the two offices, also recommended in the TRC report “Witness to Truth”, op. cit., is believed to have been one of the constitutional review proposals in the shelved referendum.

⁹⁸ Crisis Group interviews, Freetown, December 2006.

⁹⁹ Crisis Group interviews, lawyers and legal experts following the case, Freetown, January 2006.

¹⁰⁰ Crisis Group has seen the medical record.

¹⁰¹ For an overview of women’s experience of the informal legal sector, see “Sierra Leone: Woman face human rights abuses in the informal legal sector”, Amnesty International, 17 May 2006.

¹⁰² “Many of the ills of our society were blamed on the lack of justice particularly for the weak and poor. It is also well known that there could be no sustainable human development where there is no justice and where the basic human rights of the citizens are trampled. Reform of the Justice Sector is therefore indispensable for the promotion of the rule of law, the protection of Human Rights, delivery of justice, good governance and economic and social progress. The efforts of my Government to reform the Justice Sector have been supported by a number of Donor interventions notably UNDP, UNAMSIL, DFID and the Commonwealth. UNAMSIL and [UNCIVPOL] have been involved in Human Rights training and a Bill for the establishment of a Human Rights Commission has been enacted and the Commission set up. UNICEF is undertaking the strengthening of the Juvenile Justice System in Sierra Leone. Furthermore, my government has appointed Justices of the Peace in order to address severe manpower shortages and to ensure the functioning of the courts in the districts and the chiefdoms to address minor cases”. Kabbah, farewell speech, op. cit.

E. RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE MEDIA

The vibrancy and diversity of Sierra Leone's media are not matched by its credibility. In fact, the media is seriously limited in both scope and quality. The dozens of newspapers are often more vocal than reasoned. There is a broad public perception that most are unprofessional and unreliable.¹⁰³ All are small, generally owned and edited by the proprietors themselves, and Freetown-based. Few circulate outside the capital. There are persistent reports of politicians and businesspeople planting stories for self-promotion or to attack opponents and competitors. While the quality of reporting and analysis can be judged negatively, however, the press is taken seriously by the ruling elite, as indicated by persistent attacks on editors and reporters by the government and powerful individuals.

Given limited literacy and widespread poverty, radio has become the most accessible and dynamic media form. There are 31 stations, almost all private, and more than a dozen new ones are to be launched soon. They are deemed more credible than the press. Politically outspoken and broadcasting in several national languages, radio reaches far and wide; with the proliferation of mobile phones, call-in programs have become a strong measure of free expression and political education.¹⁰⁴

UNIOSIL has initiated timely discussions with journalists about election reporting. Despite radio's greater reach, the print media has considerable influence on public debate. Responsible, professional print coverage, therefore, is critical for successful, violence-free polls. Nevertheless, a donor-supported project to "improve the capacity of civil society and the media to provide information on and monitor the 2007 national elections and 2008 local government elections", with a budget of more than \$4 million, does not include engagement with newspapers and radio. Instead, PIVOT (Promoting Information and Voice for Transparency on Elections) proposes to work with the international media, including the BBC World Service Trust and Hironnelle Foundation. If its aims are to be realised, it is imperative that its managers engage with Sierra Leone journalists, perhaps through the SLAJ. Likewise, those journalists, again possibly under SLAJ auspices, should commit to reporting the elections fairly and responsibly.

Equally, the government must respect the media's role, including by ensuring that all parties and their leaders have equal access to state-owned radio and TV. The

independent media should also make an effort to be open to all and fair in its coverage of political activities.

The 1965 Public Order Act has criminal provisions, including a three-year prison term, for "defamatory and seditious libel", which have been interpreted so as to limit critical or embarrassing comment regardless of accuracy. It states that during a trial for seditious libel, "the truth of the matters charged may be inquired into, but shall not amount to defence". Such provisions led to the imprisonment in 2004 for nearly two years of a leading journalist, Paul Kamara, of *For Di People*, an opposition newspaper. He wrote articles in October 2003 reproducing a 1967 commission of inquiry report into allegations of fraud relating to the now-defunct Sierra Leone Produce Marketing Board (SLPMB), which was partly overseen by President Kabbah, who was then permanent secretary in the finance ministry. The paper was suspended for six months, and the owner of its printing press was also arrested. The law in effect restricts inquiry into activities, past and present, of those in authority or aspiring to high office.¹⁰⁵

The Code of Conduct for Political Parties states "there shall be equal access to the state media".¹⁰⁶ However, without the power to impose sanctions, the PPRC is not in a position to police this provision. The SLAJ has a five-person monitoring team to oversee fairness, objectivity and equal access, but only for the written press. It will initially report on a weekly basis to UNIOSIL, which is committed to ensuring that at least its own radio station will be open to all parties during the campaign.

F. UN SUPPORT FOR PEACEBUILDING

The decision of the UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) to make Sierra Leone one of its first two priority countries was a welcome promise of sustained international attention to and support for post-conflict reconstruction and consolidation of democracy. The \$35 million allocated by the Secretary-General under the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) for reconstruction represents some 10 per cent of the country's annual official development assistance and a tangible signal of commitment.¹⁰⁷ The government's

¹⁰³ See "Media Sector Mapping in Sierra Leone", a report by Search for Common Ground/Talking Drum Studio Sierra Leone, 31 October 2005.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ In 2006, the SLAJ began a campaign, including a legal challenge, to have the law rescinded, Crisis Group interviews, leading journalists Isaac Massaquoi and David Tam-Baryoh, Freetown, December 2006.

¹⁰⁶ Code of Conduct for Political Parties, para 11.

¹⁰⁷ The Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) is one component of the enhanced UN peacebuilding architecture that also includes the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC). It provides a quick infusion of resources to countries just emerging from conflict or suffering a funding gap in the post-conflict phase of their peace process. It helps countries under consideration by the PBC but is also

plan for spending it identifies four critical areas: youth empowerment and employment; democracy and good governance; justice and security; and capacity building of public administration. Approximately \$6.6 million has already been distributed to projects to enhance police crowd control capabilities, create jobs for young people through microfinance and skills training, and build the capacity of the Human Rights Commission.

Nonetheless, there is controversy over the timing of the disbursement of these funds. The Secretary-General announced the allocation in March 2007, only a few months ahead of the presidential and parliamentary elections, thus opening the UN to the charge that it was helping the ruling party fund patronage projects in order to secure votes. The allegation has appeared more plausible to some in Sierra Leone because the ruling party presidential candidate, Vice President Berewa, co-chairs the national steering committee that decides how to spend the PBF money. The UN should clarify that the funds would have gone to Sierra Leone under any government and are unconnected to the elections.

Another concern is that the money was released before adoption of the Strategic Peacebuilding Framework (Compact), negotiations on which have appropriately been postponed until after the elections in order to secure sustainable local ownership. Disbursement at this time, however, has diminished the UN's leverage to secure important commitments from the government in those negotiations. It has also led to a focus in Freetown on who gets the money rather than consensus building over the details of the Compact.¹⁰⁸ The \$35 million is intended as only a short-term infusion and catalyst. Much more donor help is required to address adequately youth employment, good governance, justice and a capable public service. The projects receiving PBF funding, particularly the one aimed at strengthening youth employment, may backfire if they raise expectations that cannot be met because funding has dried up. Both bilateral donors and the international financial institutions will need to supply the more substantial, longer-term funding required to keep the projects functioning.

available to other countries as designated by the Secretary-General. Its resources, which come from voluntary contributions, are meant to act as a catalyst for other, longer-term financial aid.
¹⁰⁸ "Consolidating the Peace? Views from Sierra Leone and Burundi on the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission", Action Aid, Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD) and Care International, June 2007.

IV. CONCLUSION

Shortly after the 2002 elections, a veteran observer of Sierra Leone's politics wrote:

The landslide victory by the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) in the 2002 elections was due not to any ideological or policy differences with opposition parties, but to the perception among a plurality of voters that the party delivered on its promise to end the war and therefore deserved re-election... The SLPP, however, can ill-afford to bask in electoral triumph or ignore the festering problems of rampant official corruption and mass poverty that led to armed conflict in the 1990s. Tackling the problem of corruption and mass deprivation may hold the key to democratic consolidation, but it is doubtful whether the SLPP, as presently constituted, is capable of leading the fight against these scourges. The SLPP may be reaching out to become a national party but it still remains an unreconstructed patronage outfit that is unresponsive to popular currents and mass aspirations.¹⁰⁹

It is unfair to say that Sierra Leone today is identical to the pre-war shadow state the RUF rebelled against. However fragile, national institutions have been rebuilt or built from scratch: serious effort has been put into constructing an army and police force that submits to democratic, civilian control; the new National Revenue Authority (NRA) has ensured transparent tax collection; and strict implementation of the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme has made official diamond exports transparent. President Kabbah is a weak leader but not a Siaka Stevens. Except for occasional misuse of the Public Order Act, there is a reasonable level of freedom of the press and other forms of expression, including widely listened to satirical songs, such as Emmerson's "Tu Fut Arata" about the approaching elections and corruption.

But corruption in the public services, fuelled no doubt in part by extremely low civil service pay and emoluments, remains the elephant in the room. Rooting it out requires more than higher salaries or occasional exposure and prosecution of an official. It demands a thorough review of the system perpetuating the practice.

The security and justice sectors need several more years of external oversight and support to become self-sustaining. They remain untested, an especially pertinent point in view

¹⁰⁹ Jimmy Kandeh, "Sierra Leone's post-conflict elections of 2002", *Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 41, June 2003, pp. 182-216.

of instability in neighbouring Guinea, which in early 2007 experienced serious unrest and whose crisis could threaten peace in Sierra Leone and Liberia.¹¹⁰

The 2007 elections are a crucial test of whether Sierra Leone has definitively turned away from conflict, in terms of both security and democratic governance. Renewed political vibrancy has opened up competition but also heightened rivalry. Getting the elections right requires commitment by those in office and those fighting for office. A success would significantly boost chances for recovery and sustainable democracy. A fiasco could undo the gains of an expensive peace process and set the country on the path of destabilisation again.

Perhaps for the first time since the war's end, the population has a real chance to make a free choice for change. There is no immediate danger of return to conflict if a certain candidate does not win but there is real risk of this if whoever wins does not take seriously the challenge to tackle the still extant conditions for conflict. Those who gain power must commit to substantial governance reforms, and civil society and the electorate more generally, with further international help, must ensure that commitment is kept.

Dakar/Brussels, 12 July 2007

¹¹⁰ See Crisis Group Africa Report N°121, *Guinea: Change or Chaos*, 14 February 2007.

APPENDIX A

MAP OF SIERRA LEONE

