

Koroma's forces have been continuing to maraud the Sierra Leone countryside, and also come into direct conflict with the RUF over such key towns as Makeni. The fight over this town through October wreaked havoc with the population, causing mass dislocation and starvation, as aid agencies there fled the scene. By mid-November, the town was under RUF control, and Sankoh went to the town to urge the disarmament of his people there and the AFRC.

But as of Nov. 19, only 915 former rebels had arrived at the disarmament centers to register and turn in their weapons, out of an estimated 9,000 RUF and AFRC fighters. Reportedly, 1,200 AFRC people surrendered their arms on Nov. 22.

Meanwhile, the RUF continues to control those pockets of territory which hold the country's mining operations, including Kenema and Kono districts and the mining area of Tongo.

But until the disarmament process is complete, Sierra Leone continues to be threatened with disintegration into a division of the country by warlords. In the RUF, there are two commanders who do not appear to be under political control: Samuel Bockarie Maskita, who has threatened to break away from the RUF and form his own insurgency, and Dennis Strongman Mingo. Further, Koroma has by no means fully accepted the peace accord, although it is hoped that now, as the new chairman of the Commission for the Consolidation of Peace, he has "bought into" the accords.

Furthermore, the condition of returning rebels is poor. Many of the RUF conscripts were children, who were heavily drugged and unleashed against the population. They are traumatized, demoralized, and in some cases on the verge of starvation. Many will be ineligible to join the newly reorganized armed forces because they are illiterate. Without programs in place to bring these youth into rehabilitation and training for full service in a reorganized armed forces or productive jobs, they remain easy targets for recruitment back into insurgencies, where killing, raping, and stealing are the easy order of the day.

Therefore, as Ambassador Leigh noted, the Sierra Leone government is in immediate need of hard cash for the rehabilitation and reconstruction program required for a permanent peace, in the order of \$50-100 million just for a start. But this money is not forthcoming.

Instead, the slow pace of disarmament and the continuing insecurity in the country are used as an *excuse* to withhold financial assistance from the Kabbah government. UN Undersecretary General for Humanitarian Affairs Carol McAskie visited Sierra Leone in mid-November and declared that her message to donors was that Sierra Leone is still "insecure," with aid agencies unable to gain access to sections of the country. That is, the red light still holds for funds into the country. The World Bank will supply no funding for any projects in Sierra Leone until the situation is secure.

During her visit to Sierra Leone at the end of October, U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright promised \$55 million in aid to Sierra Leone, of which \$4 million is for

logistics to ensure disarmament; \$4 million is for the education of ex-combatants; \$55 million is for aid; and \$1 million is to help Sierra Leone curtail the illegal flow of diamonds and other minerals out of the country. However, none of the money has been seen yet.

Albright further said that the United States would cancel \$65 million of its debt, but only if the government signed an agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Throughout the war and the period following the signing of the accord, the Sierra Leone government has paid its debt service on time. As one government official put it: "An IMF agreement means that the IMF will come in and run the government."

Mining of the country's mineral wealth is proceeding, but the profit does not accrue to either the government or the

## Mafias profit from a 'children's war'

The wars in Sierra Leone and Liberia beginning in 1991 were fought by thousands of child-soldiers. In Liberia, the United Liberian Movement for Democracy in Liberia of Roosevelt Johnson and the National Patriotic Front of Liberia of Charles Taylor both used thousands of child-soldiers, and child-soldiers were the chief cadre of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) of Sierra Leone.

In Liberia, according to a 1994 Human Rights Watch report entitled "Easy Prey: Child Soldiers in Liberia," the warring parties did not abduct or actively recruit child-soldiers, but children came to them for food, protection, and to fight to revenge the killing of their families by the other side in the conflict. The warring parties did not turn such children away, but used them in the most brutal way possible.

In Sierra Leone, the RUF actively recruited and abducted children. In the December 1998-January 1999 offensive to take the capital city of Freetown, the RUF abducted 6,000 children in the space of several weeks. Today, more than 2,000 of those children are unaccounted for.

The treatment of these children by the commanders of the warring parties illustrates the way in which these 1990s West African wars were fought: Armed forces did not square off against each other, but retaliated for military attacks with atrocities against the civilian population in wanton destruction of life and property. "The troops move into a village; they take everything and kill and rape," a commanding officer of the Ecomog forces explained to Human Rights Watch. "They stay there a couple of weeks and then move on. The children are all part of this. It's

people. According to the Nov. 21 *Concord Times*, Liberians have taken control of the rebel-held mining town of Kono, and illegal cross-border trade is now rampant. The government is unable to take back control of the town unless the insurgents holding it are first disarmed.

It is estimated that Sierra Leone is annually losing \$300 to \$450 million from the illegal flow of minerals out of the country into the hands of the international mafia that has its grip on the government in neighboring Liberia.

### World's poorest country

Even before the war, Sierra Leone was the world's poorest country, and today stands at the bottom of the so-called Human Development Index of the UN Development Program (UNDP). Because of the war, all productive activity in the

country has ground to a halt, including cultivation. Starvation is rampant in pockets of the country controlled by the rebels, such as Tonkolelie and Gbonkolenkeh districts. Per-capita income is a meaningless \$160 per year.

Sierra Leone's debt in 1997 was \$1.4 billion, having doubled since 1985. In 1997, it paid 21.2% of all its official export earnings to debt service.

In 1997, according to the UNDP, life expectancy in Sierra Leone was 37.2 years, having fallen from 42 years in 1990. Infant mortality was 182 infant deaths out of every 1,000 live births; mortality for children under five years of age was 316 out of every 1,000 live births. Maternal mortality was 1,800 out of every 100,000 women. More than 70% of the people are not expected to live to the age of 60 years. Adult literacy was 34.3%.

civilians who are attacked; it's not soldiers against soldiers. Relatively few soldiers have been killed. But thousands of people have been displaced and turned into refugees"—or killed.

Children were the most cruelly abused victims of the war. The Human Rights Watch report on Liberia notes that orphans often joined the warring factions. Quoting sources that work with child-soldiers, the report said: "Some children saw their parents killed and had no options. Some were forced to join. Some joined because of starvation—they could get food with a warring faction. Some joined because the rebels made promises to them, like 'We'll take you to a football game.' Food was very scarce; some joined to get food for themselves and their families."

A childcare worker in Liberia told Human Rights Watch that once recruited, "some children were the most vicious, brutal fighters of all. I once saw a nine-year-old kill someone at a checkpoint. Children learn by imitation; they saw killings and then when their commanding officers ordered them to kill, they did. Some of the kids killed out of fear; they were told they would be killed if they didn't carry out orders to kill."

A commanding officer of the Ecomog forces in Nigeria noted that "lots of children are used at checkpoints. Manning a checkpoint gives a kid power and influence, even if he's twelve years old. It's a children's war. Kids get promoted in rank for committing an atrocity; they can cut off someone's head without thinking."

Child-soldiers, reports Human Rights Watch, were treated extremely harshly. As one social worker describes it in the report:

"First of all, boys from both factions have told us that there were initiation procedures when they joined, in which they were forced to kill or rape someone or perform some other atrocity, like throwing someone down a well, or into a river. This was supposed to demonstrate that

they were brave enough to be soldiers. Anyway, they were told that they would be shot if they didn't do it."

A counselor working with former child-soldiers reported that "kids have told us that they were actually forced to witness the execution of members of their family or their friends. If they screamed or cried, they were killed. Boys have told us of being lined up to watch executions and being forced to applaud. If you didn't applaud, you could be next. Kids were flogged for minor offenses, or locked up."

### Kids forced onto drugs

In Sierra Leone and in Liberia, the child-soldiers were deliberately put on drugs. According to a childcare worker: "The factions use both alcohol and drugs to control the kids. Children are given a mixture of cane juice (from sugar cane) and gunpowder which makes them high and is supposed to give them courage to go and fight at the front."

As another case worker explained: "Kids are often supplied with drugs; marijuana is the most common drug, but kids are given cocaine too, and cane juice and gunpowder, which can cause brain damage. Also the kids talk about being given 'bubbles,' a tablet that is apparently an amphetamine, an 'upper.' The theory apparently is that if a kid is intoxicated, he'll be braver—jump over his friend's body and keep shooting."

Thus, many of those who are to be disarmed in Sierra Leone are child-soldiers, who were often captured, forced to kill or be killed, torture or be tortured, and are now drug addicts. The disarming, treatment and rehabilitation, and re-training and schooling of these children is no mean mission, but an extraordinary task that Sierra Leone cannot do on its own, without massive help from the international community to make the peace permanent and to launch the reconstruction of this country.—*Linda de Hoyos*