Before beginning our novel and film unit, we will need to familiarize ourselves with some issues and terms.

**REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE**

 Population:

- total: 4,717,000

- under-18s: 2,370,000

 Government armed forces:

- active: 3,000-4,000

- paramilitary (Civil Defense Forces): strength unknown

 Compulsory recruitment age: no conscription

 Voluntary recruitment age: previously any age with consent; unknown if recent government commitments to an age limit of 18 has resulted in legislative change

 Voting age for government elections: 21

 Numbers of child recruits/soldiers: indicated - 5,000-10,000 in government and opposition armed groups

 CRC-OP-AC: signed on 8 September 2000; supports “straight-18” position

 Other treaties ratified: CRC; ICC; GC/API+II

 Some 5000 child combatants serve among government and opposition forces, and a further 5,000 are estimated to have been recruited for labour among armed groups. Armed groups typically rely on forced recruitment through abduction and drug use, and are responsible for particularly cruel and degrading treatment of children in their camps, often including the sexual slavery of girls. The Lomè peace agreement of July 1999 included important provisions on the demobilisation of child soldiers, however the resumption of fighting in May 2000 significantly slowed progress. To date slightly more than 1,800 children are reported to have entered disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programmes. Underage recruitment, including the re-enlistment of some of those previously demobilised, has continued among all forces.

**Context**

Since 1991 Sierra Leone has been in the grips of internal armed conflict between government forces and international peacekeepers, and armed groups including the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC). Thousands of men, women and children have been killed, raped, wounded or systematically mutilated. The Lomè peace agreement of July 1999 included important provisions on the demobilisation of child soldiers. Just over 24,000 combatants, including 1,700 children, were disarmed before the peace process collapsed in May 2000. Renewed insecurity resulted in further abuses against civilians and massive displacement. A 30 day ceasefire signed in November 2000 held throughout the early months of 2001, however the RUF did not disarm and violence towards civilians, including returning refugees, continued. The RUF still controls large sections of the diamond-rich north and east of Sierra Leone.

Fighting in Sierra Leone has also affected neighbouring Guinea, where some 340,000 Sierra Leonean refugees reside. Since September 2000 rebel fighters have launched a series of cross-border attacks prompting military counter-attacks by Guinean forces. The deployment of an ECOWAS border monitoring force, agreed upon in January 2001, has been delayed for months pending a status of forces agreement between Guinea and Liberia and approval by the UN Security Council.

Liberia is also involved in the conflict in Sierra Leone, having actively supported the RUF since its inception in 1991 through arms and diamond trafficking. Liberia announced its intention to sever ties with the RUF following UN Security Council action in March 2001.

**Child Recruitment and Deployment by Governmenrt**

The Sierra Leone government has made repeated commitments to raise the legal age of military recruitment to 18, demobilise (means: to release someone from military service) all underage combatants, and fulfil its obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Government-allied forces comprise a loose alliance of the Civil Defence Forces (CDF) and the Sierra Leone Army (SLA), including more recently former AFRC members retrained by British forces. Chain-of-command control for these forces is in practice weak. This is particularly true of the largest and most powerful membership of the CDF, the *Kamajors*, which are well known for recruiting children.

It is not clear how far measures to prevent underage recruitment and demobilise child soldiers have been implemented by the various government-allied forces. There is evidence that these forces continued to recruit and use children in combat in 2000 and currently, including some previously disarmed and demobilised child combatants.

**Child Recruitment and Deployment by Revolutionary United Front (RUF)**

In May 2000 a RUF spokesman SWB Rogers was quoted as saying: "The RUF doesn't believe in using children as soldiers. When they are five or six, they are far too young to fight. We only use the older boys, from ten or eleven upwards." The RUF is well known for its abduction and forcible recruitment of children, both boys and girls, for use as soldiers, sexual slaves and forced labour. In 2000 reports also emerged of armed groups forcing children to work in diamond fields under their control since the signing of the Lomè Accord in 1999.

The RUF commonly abducts children during attacks. After the January 1999 Freetown attack, in which an estimated 10 per cent of armed forces were children, more than 4,800 children were reported missing. Of these about 60 per cent were girls, who are typically forced into sexual slavery.

Since May 2000 RUF forces have continued to abduct and forcibly recruit children as combatants, often using drugs to induce their compliance and fighting ferocity. Others were reported to have volunteered to join the RUF, however it appears that in many cases these children had little option but to do so. From May through August 2000 reports described RUF forces going from village to village demanding a quota of men and boys, most of whom were forced to join under duress. Local traditional rulers, known as Paramount Chiefs, were ordered to provide a certain number of recruits and families were forced to hand over children, including those aged under 18. The RUF has also reportedly killed children who refused to join their forces and frequently extorted money from families of conscripted youths.

Recent interviews of children staying at transit centres set up in Bo and Kenema as part of the demobilisation programme in 2000 confirmed reports of sexual violence and abuse of children, both boys and girls, by RUF personnel. Three adolescent boys interviewed by an aid worker reported they had been abducted around age 14 and 15 and were sexually abused by female members of the RUF. They also reported being sexually abused by male RUF members, apparently as a form of punishment. Other forms of abuse included being forced to aid and abet the rape of girls. Rape of girls by RUF members was frequently cited.

**DEVELOPMENTS**

The problem of child soldiers in Sierra Leone has attracted significant international and national attention. In January 2000 hundreds of people marched in Freetown to protest the recruitment of children and to demand such children be reunited with their families.1690 Some 40 child protection agencies and NGOs working with government have been constituted into a child protection committee coordinated by UNICEF,1691 and the government of Sierra Leone committed itself to establishing a National Commission for War-Affected Children. In October 2000 the UN Security Council urged the government of Sierra Leone to establish the promised Commission.1692 The Coalition vigorously lobbied for the establishment of a special court in Sierra Leone to try those responsible for the recruitment of child soldiers (see below).

**Demobilisation**

In 1999 little demobilisation appeared to be taking place. Following the Lomè peace agreement the RUF admitted that 30% of its forces were under 18 but that official demobilisation had not begun. Later that year a mere 111 children were said to have been demobilised. The CDF reported equally small numbers with approximately 100 children demobilising in October 1999.

In January 2000 the pace picked up considerably and by May the UN reported that approximately 1,700 of an estimated 5,000 underage recruits had entered disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programmes.1694 But renewal of hostilities that month derailed the process, and by November 2000 the total number of demobilised child soldiers had only risen to slightly over 1,800.1695 About 138 of these children, between the ages of 8 and 16, were handed over by the CDF in June 2000.1696 The UN Security Council reported in October 2000 that "a significant portion of the rank and file RUF would be willing to disarm but were not allowed to do so by their commanders, who often used brutal methods, including execution, to prevent fighters, including children, from leaving."

Some of the demobilisation since 1999 has come about through self-disarmament, which established programmes were not always equipped to address. But in 2000 efforts were being made to establish reporting and outreach mechanisms that would facilitate the inclusion of such former combatants in disarmament and reintegration programmes.1698 A National Commission of Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration is expected to be established in 2001.1699