

SIERRA LEONE

1. PRESENTATION¹

Basic Facts ²	
Name of Country	Republic of Sierra Leone
Capital	Freetown
Population	6,005,250 (July 2006 estimate)
Area	71,740 sq km
Average Life Expectancy	40.22 years (2006 estimate)
Ethnic Groups	90% African ethnic groups (Temne 30%, Mende 30%, other 30%), Creole (Krio) 10% (descendants of freed Jamaican slaves who were settled in the Freetown area in the late-18th century), refugees from Liberia's recent civil war, small numbers of Europeans, Lebanese, Pakistanis, and Indians
GDP per capita, PPP	\$800 (2005 est.)

Community of Democracies	
Previous Participation	Warsaw 2000: Not Invited Seoul 2002: Observer Santiago 2005: Observer

Timeline of Recent Major Events in Sierra Leone

- **1997** July - The Commonwealth suspends Sierra Leone.
- **1997** October - The UN Security Council imposes sanctions against Sierra Leone, barring the supply of arms and petroleum products. A British company, Sandline, nonetheless supplies "logistical support", including rifles, to Kabbah allies.
- **1998** February - Nigerian-led West African intervention force ECOMOG storms Freetown and drives rebels out.
- **1999** January - Rebels backing Revolutionary United Front leader Foday Sankoh seize parts of Freetown from ECOMOG. After weeks of bitter fighting they are driven out, leaving behind 5,000 dead and a devastated city.
- **1999** July - Six weeks of talks in the Togolese capital, Lome, result in a peace agreement, under which the rebels receive posts in government and assurances they will not be prosecuted for war crimes.
- **2000** May - Rebels close in on Freetown; 800 British paratroopers sent to Freetown to evacuate British citizens and to help secure the airport for UN peacekeepers; rebel leader Foday Sankoh captured.
- **2001** January - Government postpones presidential and parliamentary elections - set for February and March - because of continuing insecurity.
- **2002** January - War declared over. UN mission says disarmament of 45,000 fighters is complete. Government, UN agree to set up war crimes court.

¹ Principal author: Center for Democratic Development - Ghana

² Source: CIA World Factbook at <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html>, accessed on July 5, 2006

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- **2002** May - Kabbah wins a landslide victory in elections. His Sierra Leone People's Party secures a majority in parliament.
- **2004** February - Disarmament and rehabilitation of more than 70,000 civil war combatants officially completed.
- **2004** March - UN-backed war crimes tribunal opens courthouse to try senior militia leaders from both sides of civil war.
- **2004** May - First local elections in more than three decades.
- **2005** August - UN Security Council authorises opening of a UN assistance mission in Sierra Leone from 2006, to follow departure of peacekeepers in December.
- **2005** December - The last UN peacekeeping troops leave Sierra Leone, marking the end of a five-year mission to restore order.
- **2006** April - Charles Taylor, the former Liberian President, faces war crimes charges in a UN-backed court in Sierra Leone over his alleged role in the country's civil war.
- **2006** June - Charles Taylor flown out of Sierra Leone to stand trial at the International Criminal Court in The Hague, accused of war crimes in Sierra Leone and Liberia.
- **2006** August - President Tejan Kabbah announces that presidential and parliamentary elections will be held on 28 July 2007 in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution.

2. BACKGROUND

The eleven-year war in Sierra Leone officially ended in January 2002. However, the country is still experiencing the war's devastating effects. With the economy in ruins and millions of displaced people suffering from the immediate effects of the war, the government remains heavily dependent upon foreign financial aid to provide even basic services and institute necessary democratic structures. Currently, Sierra Leone, aided by international support, is undertaking the process of reconstructing the state, restoring control over the hinterland, and promoting capacity building and rehabilitation of institutions at the national, regional and local levels.

National presidential and parliamentary elections – viewed as relatively free and fair by international observers – were held in May 2002. Local elections were originally scheduled for 1999 but did not take place until May 2004. Due to widespread disillusionment and structural limitations emanating from poverty and the lack of resources, most contestants could not campaign effectively and the voter turnout in the local elections was low. The electoral process was highly dependent on donor financial support and UN logistical and technical assistance.

In March 2004, the UN-backed Special Court for Sierra Leone began holding trials of those deemed primarily responsible for war crimes and human rights abuses committed during the civil war. In November 2005, Human Rights Watch asserted that the court had broken new ground with practices to promote fair trials, protect witnesses, and make

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justice accessible to Sierra Leoneans. The court received a tremendous boost in April 2006 when Charles Taylor, accused of war crimes in Sierra Leone and Liberia, was captured and scheduled to face trial.

The last troops of the once 17,300-strong UN Mission in Sierra Leone, the world's largest peacekeeping mission, left the country in December 2005. A UN assistance mission opened in January 2006, following the departure of peacekeepers, and will help conduct the elections in 2007.

To help maintain stability, the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, modeled on South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, has recommended that the government reform the judicial system, intensify efforts to eradicate corruption, and fight discrimination against women. Three years after the end of the war, many Sierra Leoneans are discouraged, complaining of corruption, poor infrastructure, and a lack of jobs.

The International Crisis Group (ICG) said in December 2004 that Sierra Leone risked sliding back into conflict if the international community did not stay committed—for the next 15 to 25 years—to a fresh approach to restore security and civil liberties. According to the report, government institutions in Sierra Leone were focused on finding new sources of donor revenue, rather than developing autonomy and self-sufficiency. The ICG also said that voices from civil society who could make real change tended to be marginalized, while the economy was left vulnerable to criminal elements.

3. ANALYSIS

Elections and Democratic Participation

Citizens of Sierra Leone can change their government democratically. Despite some logistical problems, the May 2002 presidential and parliamentary elections were considered the country's fairest since independence. President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah and his Sierra Leone's People's Party (SLPP) enjoyed the advantage of incumbency and state resources for both elections. Sierra Leone has a 124-seat unicameral parliament of which 112 seats are chosen by popular vote and 12 seats are filled by paramount chiefs chosen in separate elections. Parliamentary elections are held every five years. The president is elected by popular vote every five years and serves as both chief of state and head of government.

Dozens of political parties exist, but many revolve around a specific personality and have little following. The major political parties include the SLPP, the All People's Congress, and the Peace and Liberation Party. All parties had opportunities to campaign during the 2002 elections, although many complained that the incumbent SLPP had privileged access to information and that some local officials intimidated opposition party candidates.

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Campaign finance regulations are weakly enforced. Campaign resources usually come from the personal fortunes of candidates and it is widely believed that many candidates acquire these resources through corrupt means. Some groups with links to wartime militias continue to exercise considerable authority, but the presence of UN and other foreign peacekeepers limits their influence in elections.

Sierra Leone possesses a vigorous civic culture, with numerous nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) supporting popular causes. The state protects the rights of this sector to the extent its weak capacity allows, although it is less enthusiastic about allowing civic groups to comment on or influence policy making. Activists complain of the remoteness of some officials and about the slow transmission of government information; the appearance of television and radio talk shows and discussions has brought improvements in communication. Civil society organizations freely collect donations from within Sierra Leone and from abroad. Women, minorities, and people with disabilities are prominent in this sector, reflecting both the failure of the government to take account of their interests in formulating policy, and the support for these groups by foreign NGOs and official aid programs. The post-conflict Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report, released in 2005, repeats many of the recommendations offered by these NGOs, and legitimates the monitoring role that these organizations play.

Rule of Law

More than a decade of war left the judiciary and law enforcement institutions in tatters. Although Sierra Leone's legal and judicial sectors benefit from international assistance, concerns remain over the capacity of the government to sustain this progress in the event of a decrease in foreign assistance.

Judges enjoy considerable constitutional protection from governmental interference and generally are not influenced by state officials. However, legislative, executive, and other governmental authorities only sporadically comply with judicial rulings. Prosecutors are relatively independent of political direction, although this agency suffers the same institutional deficiencies that afflict other branches of the judicial services. The attorney general's office, however, which is fused with duties of the old office of minister of justice, lacks the independence of the public prosecutions office.

Those charged with criminal offenses are presumed innocent before proven guilty. However, defendants are often held for long periods without charge and are not offered reasonable prospects for bail, reflecting the scarcity of resources and the inability of state agencies to keep records and monitor defendants. In principle, citizens are promised fair hearings by competent, independent, impartial tribunals. However, the public perception is that corruption often determines the outcome of court proceedings.

Courts lack adequate translation services to render hearings and documents comprehensible in Krio or other indigenous languages. This situation leaves at least three quarters of the country's population without judicial services in a language they

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understand. All of these problems are related to the abysmal conditions of service in the judiciary, its crushing caseload, low pay, and poor physical facilities.

Customary law is not adequately codified. In instances such as the rights of women in family law, it contradicts official guarantees of human rights. In practice there is scant opportunity for appeal, owing to the poverty of most rural people and the weak capacity of formal legal institutions.

UN efforts to reinstate the rule of law include support for a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which heard testimony of wartime victims and perpetrators between April and August 2003. The TRC submitted its final report to President Kabbah in October 2004 and the report has been publicly available since August 2005. The paucity of donor support for the commission contributed to the relatively short duration of hearings. Of an initial budget of \$4.5 million, only \$2.3 million was received from donors. The TRC heard testimony while the Special Court for Sierra Leone was issuing indictments against suspected war criminals. Some suspected that testimony that they gave to the TRC might be used in the Special Court's proceedings, but this did not occur.

Members of the military and police refrain from interference in politics and remain under civilian control. The presence of British military trainers likely reduces the chance that any coup attempt would succeed.

Separation of Powers

The power of the president overshadows the power of the legislature and courts. This reflects the paucity of resources available to legislative representatives, who work with very little staff support. Furthermore, the tendency of weakly institutionalized parties to focus on personal and factional quarrels undermines the legislature's capacity to exercise a check on executive power. There is a growing tendency to submit all executive, legislative and judicial procedures to the approval of President Kabbah and the dominant party, the SLPP, effectively consolidating and perpetuating the respective power bases.

Civil Liberties

The 1991 Constitution Act provides for freedom of assembly, freedom of movement, freedom of conscience, and equal access for women to political and civil rights. Nonetheless, weak state capacity dilutes official guarantees of civil rights.

National and international non-governmental organizations and civic groups, including human rights groups, operate openly and freely. Workers have the rights to join independent trade unions of their choice. Up to 60 percent of workers in urban areas, including government employees, are unionized. There is a legal framework for collective bargaining, and workers have the right to strike.

Sierra Leone's 1991 constitution prohibits "any form of torture or any punishment or other form of treatment which is inhuman or degrading" (Section III, 21(1)). Alleged

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violations of civil and political rights have been investigated and prosecuted, although the weak capacity of the judicial system limits the consistency of this practice.

Freedom of religious observance is constitutionally guaranteed and widely respected in practice. Nonbelievers and adherents of minority religious faiths enjoy official protections. State officials refrain from interfering in the appointment of spiritual leaders. The government does not have requirements for recognizing, registering, or regulating religious groups.

Most minorities do not suffer systematic discrimination with regard to the enforcement of rights and freedoms and enjoy full equality before the law, within the serious limits of state capacity to provide it. The only significant exception concerns treatment of ethnic Lebanese residents, many of whom are from families resident in the country for generations. The Sierra Leone Citizenship Act of 1973 limits citizenship to persons who are of “Negro African descent” and whose father or grandfather was born in Sierra Leone. In principle, this means that those of Lebanese descent cannot be citizens, although many individuals have been able to use personal connections and persuasion to procure citizenship.

Discrimination in employment and remuneration is a serious problem in Sierra Leone and participation of women in the formal economy is low. Despite constitutionally guaranteed equal rights, women face extensive legal and de facto discrimination, as well as limited access to education and formal (business) sector jobs. Married women have fewer property rights than men, especially in rural areas, where customary law prevails. Also female genital mutilation is widespread.

According to the global trade unionists, child labour is widespread and law enforcement is weak. Almost three quarters of all Sierra Leonean children are engaged in some kind of work. Furthermore, many children are forced into mine works and girls are kept in sexual slavery. Sierra Leone has signed but not ratified the International Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour or the Convention on Minimum Age.

Press Freedom

Sierra Leone’s constitution guarantees freedom of expression, but the unreformed legal sector and government actions restricts this right in practice. Dozens of newspapers are published, many openly critical of the government. Numerous private radio stations offer a wide array of views and information. The Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service (SLBS) operates a television station in Freetown with considerable civil society input in the production of some shows.

Persecution of journalists has occurred; officials continue to charge critical journalists with libel, low professional standards, and threats to public order. Critical stances of some of the more established newspapers have attracted retaliation by those officials facing criticism. Seditious libel cases are often brought under the 1965 Public Order Act, long a target of criticism from journalists in Sierra Leone and abroad.

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Some journalists allegedly accept bribes in return for favorable coverage or for promises to halt investigative reporting. Others are accused of using their newspapers to settle personal scores. Politicians continue to act as shadow proprietors for some newspapers to ensure favorable coverage. Inaccurate or false reports undermine the credibility of the press.

Despite these problems, the coverage of the 2004 elections demonstrated the considerable value of Sierra Leone's media for enhancing public voice and ensuring accountability. Media provided access for all political parties, including the political leadership of the RUF. In the opinion of several newspaper editors, the reporting of the government-owned SLBS helped promote equal access for political candidates to newspaper coverage. SLBS television and radio gave airtime access to all 10 presidential candidates for the 2002 election on a quota basis to avoid favoring any one candidate.

The country's poverty hampers efforts to improve the quality of media. While many editors adhere to high professional standards, some are school dropouts who have discovered that setting up a newspaper and then selling favorable coverage or blackmailing targets of exposés can provide an alternative to a professional career. Low levels of investigative and editorial capacity reflect poor economic conditions. But the tumult of Sierra Leone's media, particularly newspapers, also reflects a long history of vigorous press participation in political debates stretching back to the earliest days of nationalist ferment.

4. SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

The transition challenges of Sierra Leone are enormous; however, there have been encouraging signs in recent years. The country's human rights record has improved and the government has made a firm commitment to holding free and fair elections in 2007.

This notwithstanding, the July 2007 elections in Sierra Leone will present a major test of the country's commitment to democracy. Lessons need to be learned from the 2002 elections, which although deemed free and fair, had notable shortcomings. For example, the government must improve the process of voter registration and provide better voting education for polling officials and the electorate. Furthermore, the state needs to ensure steep penalties for officials who inappropriately use government resources for campaigning, and for those found guilty of unlawful intimidation of their political opponents.

Corruption presents one of the main obstacles to political development in Sierra Leone. In order to combat the problem, the government must provide greater political support for oversight and investigative agencies. The laws for declaration of personal assets for political office-holders need to be strengthened and better enforced. The state also needs to ease excessive bureaucratic regulations and registration requirements, which breed a culture of bribes.

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To facilitate the movement towards free media, the seditious libel law under the 1965 Public Order Act needs to be repealed. Moreover, the state should take a minimalist approach to monitoring professional standards of journalists and leave this task, as much as possible, to the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists, whose efforts to establish professional standards will be more successful and less contentious than direct government regulation of the media.

Presently, the greatest threats to civil and political rights in Sierra Leone come from unauthorized actions of individual government agents and the lack of coordination of official policy due to continuing weakness of government institutions. Thus, overall strengthening of administrative capacity and oversight are needed to remedy this problem. Further, continued police training and more vigorous prosecution of police abuse of citizens are necessary to improve the government's record for protecting existing rights. Constitutional provisions that limit citizenship on the basis of ancestry must be modified to address legal vulnerabilities of ethnic Lebanese Sierra Leoneans.

In order to strengthen rule of law, competitive salaries must be provided for court officials, police, and military to attract competent people and to combat corruption. In addition, the bifurcation of the country's legal system must be reformed, despite serious, possibly violent opposition, from those who have benefited from the arrangement.

Finally, the prosecutorial weakness of the attorney general's office with respect to corruption is related to the general weakness and understaffing of the country's judiciary, and will have to be addressed in the context of overall reform of that governmental sector. Rehabilitation of the country's court system will be necessary to provide citizens with means to redress inconsistent enforcement of rights. This measure will require a mechanism to ensure the country's impoverished majority gains access to these institutions.

5. COUNTRY STATISTICS AND INDICATORS

World Bank Institute Governance Indicators 2005	Sierra Leone Score	Key
Voice and Accountability	34.8	Range 0-100 (Lower value indicates weak voice and accountability; higher value indicates strong voice and account)
Political Stability and Absence of Violence	30.7	Range 0-100 (Lower value indicates weak political stability and high violence; higher value indicates opposite)
Government Effectiveness	9.6	Range 0-100 (Lower value indicates weak government effectiveness; higher value indicates strong govt. effectiveness)
Regulatory Quality	17.8	Range 0-100 (Lower value indicates weak regulatory quality; higher value indicates strong regulatory quality)
Rule of Law	12.1	Range 0-100 (Lower value indicates weak rule of law; higher value indicates strong rule of law)
Control of Corruption	17.2	Range 0-100 (Lower value indicates weak control of corruption; higher value indicates strong control of corruption)

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Freedom House: Freedom in the World 2006	Sierra Leone Score	Key
Political Rights	4	Range 1-7 (Lower value indicates good system of political rights; higher value indicates bad system political rights)
Civil Liberties	3	Range 1-7 (Lower value indicates good system of civil liberties; higher value indicates bad system civil liberties)
Status	PF	3 Categories: F (Free); PF (Partly Free); NF (Not Free) / (*) Indicates electoral system

Freedom House: Freedom of the Press 2006	Sierra Leone Score	Key
Total Score	59PF	Range 0-100 (Lower value indicates total free press; higher value indicates less freedom) / 3 Categories: F (Free); PF (Partly Free); NF (Not Free)

Freedom House: Countries at the Crossroads 2006	Sierra Leone Score	Key
Accountability and Public Voice	4.65	Range 0-7 (0 representing weakest and 7 representing strongest performance)
Civil Liberties	4.15	Range 0-7 (0 representing weakest and 7 representing strongest performance)
Rule of Law	3.78	Range 0-7 (0 representing weakest and 7 representing strongest performance)
Anticorruption and Transparency	3.17	Range 0-7 (0 representing weakest and 7 representing strongest performance)

Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2006	Sierra Leone Score	Key
Stateness	7.5	Range 0-10 (Lower value indicates negative democratic development; higher value indicates positive democratic development)
Political Participation	7.5	
Rule of Law	4.8	
Stability of democratic Institutions	6.0	
Political and Social Integration	5.0	
Total Score Political Transformation	6.15	Range 0-10 (Lower value indicates negative democratic development; higher value indicates positive democratic development) / Arrow shows trend in democratic development (↑Improved; ↓Worsened)
Total Score Political Management	5.73	Range 0-10 (Lower value indicates lower quality of political management; higher value indicates higher quality of political management)

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Corruption Perceptions Index 2006	Sierra Leone Score	Key
Total Score	2.2	Range 0-10 (lower value indicates high corruption; higher value indicates lower values of corruption)

6. SOURCES

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