

# Profiles

## Sierra Leone

President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah



Source: Sierra Leone on the Web

Virtually unknown within Sierra Leone after spending more than two decades in New York, Ahmad Tejan Kabbah was seen as a compromise candidate when he was put forward by the Mende-dominated Sierra Leone People's Party as their presidential hopeful in 1996. The SLPP won the legislative vote overwhelmingly in the south and east of the country, split the Freetown area with a number of other parties, and lost in the north. With the SLPP party apparatus behind him and promises of coalition government for some of the other contenders, Kabbah won a run-off vote for the presidency against northerner John Karefa-Smart by fifty-nine per cent to forty per cent. Despite the violence surrounding the first round of voting, half the country's voting age population cast ballots in the more tranquil presidential run-off.

Born in 1932 at Pendembu in Kailahun District, eastern Sierra Leone, Kabbah had served as an assistant district commissioner in the colonial administration, and later in senior civil service posts in several ministries. In 1968, he studied law in the UK and then took up a post at the UN as deputy chief of the West Africa Division. When he retired from the UN in the early 1990s, he was director of the Division of Administration and Management. Returning to Sierra Leone, Kabbah provided advice to Valentine Strasser's NPRC military government as chairman of a high level advisory council.

The challenges facing Kabbah's new government called for a miracle worker. The country's armed forces were suspected of collusion with the RUF and national security was largely dependent on foreign troops, mercenaries, and fledgling, ethnic-based militias. The economy was crippled. The administration was steeped in corruption and inefficiency. Lacking a personal political constituency and beholden to the international community for its financial and political backing, Kabbah proved unable to make the transformation from cautious bureaucrat to charismatic national leader. As president, he quickly

moved to engage in peace negotiations initiated by the NPRC, while at the same time turning to international organizations and friendly governments for support for rebuilding the country. The RUF declared a ceasefire, entered negotiations and eventually signed the Abidjan Peace Accord in November 1996. This settlement, in combination with the imprimatur of democratic elections, led to a surge in international assistance during the following three years. Yet Kabbah was unable to sustain the peace promised at Abidjan and was forced to flee the country in the May 1997 coup. After his government was restored by ECOMOG, he was powerless to avert the carnage unleashed by the junta soldiers in Freetown in January 1999. With much of Freetown and the rest of the country in ruins and Nigeria threatening to withdraw its forces, Kabbah eventually bowed to international pressure to re-enter negotiations with the RUF, defying critics vehemently opposed to any dealings with the rebels.

### Foday Sankoh and the RUF



Source: Lennart Johansen

The leader of the Revolutionary United Front, Foday Saybana Sankoh is sixty-four. A Temne from Tonkolili District in northern Sierra Leone, Sankoh was the son of a farmer. "As a small boy, I liked the bush, setting traps for wild animals, fighting with my brothers, you know, we used to wrestle," Sankoh said in an interview in late 1999. "I enjoyed setting up ambushes for children from other villages, we used to fight them and my group was always on top. They used to call me 'the warrior', in our language, *okuruba*."

Sankoh attended primary school and took on a number of jobs in Magburaka before he joined the Sierra Leone army in 1956. He has said that he undertook training in Nigeria and Britain. In 1971, then a corporal, he was cashiered from the army's signal corps and imprisoned for seven years for taking part in a mutiny. "Most of my education, I got when I was in Pademba Road prison. I spent all my time in prison with books, reading and learning."

On his release he worked as an itinerant photographer in the south and east of Sierra Leone, eventually coming in contact with young radicals and finding his way to Libya for insurgency training in 1988. On their return to Sierra Leone, Sankoh and confederates Rashid Mansaray and Abu Kanu solicited support for an armed uprising to oust the APC government. They then travelled to Liberia, where they reportedly continued recruiting and served with Charles Taylor's NPFL.

From the beginning of the war in Sierra Leone in 1991 until 1996, Sankoh stayed in the bush, acting as Head of Ideology and principal spokesman of the RUF. While the RUF practised a form of collective leadership, Sankoh was clearly the most influential figure within the leadership, revered by many of his field commanders and youthful fighters. Potential rivals Mansaray and Kanu were killed.

Following the signing of the November 1996 Abidjan Peace Accord, Sankoh stayed on in the Ivorian capital, sending some of his lieutenants to Freetown to take part in setting up the mechanisms to implement the agreement. In March 1997, the RUF leader was arrested in Nigeria, allegedly for carrying a weapon. A coup and a government restoration later, Sankoh was put on trial in Freetown and found guilty of treason, only to be pardoned as one of the conditions for signing the Lomé Agreement in July 1999.

As leader of the RUF, Sankoh was awarded the status of vice-president of Sierra Leone, as well as the chairmanship of the board of the Commission for the Management of Strategic Resources, National Reconstruction and Development. The commission was to be responsible for 'securing and monitoring the legitimate exploitation of Sierra Leone's gold and diamonds, and other resources that are determined to be of strategic importance for national security and welfare, as well as cater for post-war rehabilitation and reconstruction'. The commission never functioned as such, although Sankoh himself was apparently dealing in diamonds until his re-capture.

In early May 2000, Sankoh was chased from his Freetown residence by an angry crowd of over 200,000 demonstrators after a string of major breaches of the ceasefire and disarmament terms of the Peace Agreement. He was subsequently recaptured and taken into custody.

Sankoh has been characterized by his adversaries as poorly educated, irrational, often unintelligible, and duplicitous. But the RUF under Sankoh demonstrated its ability to remain intact in the face of external pressure and internal stresses, to sustain a guerrilla war, and to negotiate favourable terms of a settlement. Given the

RUF's military and political successes under his leadership, hardcore members of the movement have continued to demonstrate their allegiance to the mercurial former corporal.

### **Sam 'Maskita' Bockarie**

Sam Bockarie, thirty-five, joined the RUF in 1990 in Liberia and was part of the initial incursion into Sierra Leone in 1991. The son of a diamond miner from Kono in eastern Sierra Leone, Bockarie dropped out of secondary school and worked as a diamond miner until 1985. He quit the mines to become a professional disco dancer, touring the mining areas to perform. He then travelled to Liberia and eventually Côte d'Ivoire, where he worked as a hairdresser and waiter.

When Charles Taylor's NPFL invaded Liberia from Côte d'Ivoire in 1989, Bockarie did not join. A few months later, he came across some recruits of a new Sierra Leonean guerrilla movement in Abidjan, climbed aboard their truck and a few days later was in the deep forests of the Liberia-Sierra Leone border region, undergoing military training.

After Sankoh was put under house arrest in Nigeria in early 1997, 'General' Bockarie emerged as the RUF's leading field commander, teaming up with the AFRC during the junta period. He was also considered the principal strategist behind the offensive that culminated in the devastating attack on Freetown in January 1999. "I never wanted myself to be overlooked by my fellow men. Now I think I am at a stage where I am satisfied. I have heard my name all over, I have become famous," Bockarie told an interviewer by satellite phone in the midst of the fighting. In another interview Bockarie said that he was fighting "to liberate my country from unscrupulous politicians and other politicians who send all our money to foreign lands".

In early 2000, Sankoh and Bockarie fell out, reportedly over Bockarie's reluctance to disarm and abide by the Lomé Peace Agreement. Claiming that Sankoh loyalists were being dispatched to his headquarters in eastern Sierra Leone to murder him, Bockarie fled to Monrovia.

### **Johnny Paul Koroma and the AFRC**



Johnny Paul Koroma emerged as the leader of the military coup in May 1997 that ousted Kabbah's civilian government. A thirty-four-year-old, Sandhurst-trained, major in the Republic of Sierra Leone Military Forces, Koroma was being held in prison in Freetown at the time of the coup for his alleged part in a previous coup plot. Koroma, a born-again Christian, had also been implicated in the army's failure to protect the Sierra Rutile mine in January 1995, when it was overrun by the RUF and several Sierra Leonean and foreign hostages seized.

Freed from jail and installed as chairman of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council, Koroma called Sankoh in detention in Nigeria and offered him the vice-chairmanship of the new junta government. Sankoh agreed and ordered his RUF fighters into Freetown to join the soldiers' revolt. When the coup was reversed by Nigerian-led forces in February 1998, Koroma escaped and temporarily disappeared. His elder brother, who had participated in the AFRC administration, was captured in Freetown and later executed along with twenty-three other members of the military found guilty of capital crimes by a court martial. Eventually Koroma resurfaced among junta remnants in eastern Sierra Leone in the care of RUF commander Sam Bockarie.

In the political negotiations that followed the signing of the Lomé Agreement, Koroma was given the post of chairman of the Commission for the Consolidation of Peace, whose mandate was to supervise and monitor the overall implementation of the agreement.

## Samuel Hinga Norman and the CDF

Samuel Hinga Norman is currently deputy minister of defence and national co-ordinator of the Civil Defence Forces. Norman, who retired from the army with the rank of captain, has long been associated with the Sierra Leone People's Party. In 1968, he was found guilty of participating in a coup against Siaka Stevens and jailed at Pademba Road Prison, where Foday Sankoh was to join him three years later. In the military, Sankoh and Norman had served together in the Signal Corps and other units. Norman re-emerged as a national figure in 1996, when he was named deputy minister of defence by the newly elected Kabbah government. Kabbah himself was minister of defence as well as president.

A Mende and regent chief of Telu Bongor chieftdom, Norman had been instrumental in organizing the *Kamajor* civil defence in southern and eastern Sierra Leone before being appointed as de facto defence minister. The emergence of growing numbers of pro-government CDF began to change the dynamics of the war in 1993–94. Prior to that, traditional hunters had mainly been used by the military as scouts or in small units to track and harass the RUF in the bush, where conventional forces were ineffective. From a core of solitary village hunters, armed with single-barrel shotguns and a wealth of esoteric and practical bush lore, rural community leaders began to create a militia that would retake chieftdoms that had been depopulated by the RUF and renegade soldiers.

The CDF movement crystallized among the tens of thousands of displaced southerners around Bo and Kenema under the leadership of Mende traditional chiefs, Poro secret society elders and political figures associated with the SLPP. Drawing on magical religious beliefs that initiates would be invincible in battle, and the Mende historical tradition of the *Kamajor* hunters as community founders, protectors and providers, the militia's moral and political legitimacy with the rural population stood in stark contrast to attitudes towards the RUF and the military.

While attempts to replicate the mobilization of locally rooted militias elsewhere in the country among other ethnic groups were less successful, the *Kamajors* were eventually able to retake much of the rural south and east, with initial support from South African mercenaries, Nigerian and Guinean troops. By the time of the signing of the Lomé Agreement, the CDF reportedly numbered 25,000 members, the largest military force in the country.

## Regional

### Charles Taylor and Liberia

Charles Taylor, President of Liberia since July 1997, came to power after a long and bloody civil war. In December 1989, Taylor launched an insurrection against dictator Samuel Doe, leading about a hundred fighters into Liberia from Côte d'Ivoire. Doe fought back by unleashing a reign of terror against ethnic Mano and Gio because of their support for Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL). When, in mid-1990, it looked as if Taylor was on the verge of taking the capital Monrovia, Doe requested ECOWAS military intervention. A Ghanaian general led the initial ECOWAS Ceasefire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), made up of Nigerians, Sierra Leoneans, Gambians, Ghanaians and Guineans.

As in Sierra Leone, the Liberian war generated hundreds of thousands of refugees. Unlike Sierra Leone, ethnicity was a major factor in the composition of factions. Ethnic massacres were widespread. The Liberian conflict left an estimated 150,000 dead from a total population of about 2.5 million. The eventual military stalemate created by the intervention of ECOMOG led to the negotiation of an interim power-sharing agreement between the various factions and elections in July 1997. In control of most of Liberia, Taylor was elected President with seventy-five per cent of the vote.

Many Sierra Leoneans consider Taylor to be the main external culprit in initiating and sustaining their own war. Taylor had publicly threatened to take the Liberian war to Freetown in response to then President Momoh's support for ECOMOG and the fact that Nigerian warplanes were striking Taylor's forces from their base near Freetown. Foday Sankoh and other RUF members have acknowledged they received support from Taylor to launch their attacks into Sierra Leone in 1991. Liberians loyal to Taylor were among the original RUF insurgents.

Despite various allegations of Taylor's continuous support for the RUF, including the supply of weapons, training and use of transit points for supplies, there is little proof of Liberia's direct military involvement. There is no doubt, however, that the RUF and later, AFRC members, have been welcome in Liberia and that the RUF's main route for external supplies and trade in diamonds and other commodities has passed through Monrovia. On the diplomatic front, Taylor has pressed for negotiations between the RUF and the Sierra Leone government and for inclusion of the RUF in government. In securing the release of hundreds of captive peacekeepers in May 2000, Taylor clearly demonstrated his influence over the RUF.

## **Olusegun Obasanjo and Nigeria**

Nigeria's support for subsequent governments in Sierra Leone goes back to 1989–90 when military dictator Ibrahim Babangida's opposed Charles Taylor's insurgency against Liberian President Samuel Doe. Although Babangida was reportedly partly motivated by personal business interests, Nigerian leadership in forming ECOMOG to protect Doe was a vehicle for the regional economic and military power to project its influence throughout the region. With a settlement in Liberia, albeit one that brought Taylor to power through elections, Sierra Leone became the frontline of Nigeria's regional security role. Successive leaders have stood by Sierra Leonean governments, military or civilian, despite military embarrassments, mounting casualties and accusations of political hypocrisy. These accusations came from internal and external opponents of military rule in Nigeria as Babangida and his successor Sani Abacha pursued the war after March 1997 to ensure the survival of Sierra Leone's democratically elected government.

In February 1999, Nigerians put an end to a string of military dictatorships and elected retired general Olusegun Obasanjo as president. Obasanjo had ruled Nigeria from 1976–79 after the assassination of Murtala Muhammad and had demonstrated his democratic credentials by handing power over to a civilian government in 1979. Through the 1980s and early 1990s, Obasanjo devoted considerable energies to the causes of African leadership, fighting corruption, and conflict resolution, while managing his farm and other businesses. In 1995, criticism of President Abacha landed Obasanjo in jail, only to be released when Abacha died in June 1998.

Obasanjo indicated during his election campaign that he would bring Nigerian troops home from Sierra Leone as quickly as possible. Once in power, the new president became directly involved in the peace negotiations, playing a key role in persuading Foday Sankoh to sign the Lomé Agreement. He also eventually agreed to extend the stay of Nigerian troops in Sierra Leone until a more diverse UN peacekeeping force was positioned to fill any security vacuum.

## **Muammar Ghaddafi and Libya**

Libyan involvement in the Sierra Leone crisis is rooted in decades of support from its leader Muammar Ghaddafi for anti-imperialist movements around the world. Ghaddafi's populist political ideology and his country's oil revenues provided the ingredients for nurturing a number of West African leaders, including Liberia's Charles Taylor, Foday Sankoh, Burkina Faso's Blaise Compaoré and Togo's Gnassingbé Eyadéma.

During the 1980s, Libya's revolutionary influence in Sierra Leone was channelled through students and discussion groups focusing on Ghaddafi's Green Book. Later, some of those student radicals and other dissidents, including Sankoh, went to Libya to receive guerrilla training. In 1996, Ghaddafi welcomed the RUF leader to Tripoli after the signing of the Abidjan Accord. When the RUF re-entered negotiations in 1999, Ghaddafi dispatched his former foreign minister to the talks and Libya became one of the guarantors of the Lomé Agreement.

## **Lansana Conté and Guinea**

Wrapped around Sierra Leone to the north and east and sharing a border with Liberia, Guinea has been most directly effected by the wars in the sub-region. Hundreds of thousands of Sierra Leoneans have fled to Guinea, causing severe strain on a country already struggling to overcome poverty and ethnic and political divisions. While Guinea has largely welcomed the refugees, the influx has had serious financial, social, political and environmental repercussions.

At the political level, Guinea has served as a haven for ousted Sierra Leonean leaders, beginning with Siaka Stevens in the 1960s, through Joseph Momoh, Valentine Strasser to Tejan Kabbah. While the AFRC–RUF junta was in power in Freetown, Kabbah and members of his administration found refuge in the Guinean capital Conakry, under the protection of President Lansana Conté.

Conté had seized power after the death of dictator Sékou Touré in 1984 and moved away from Touré's brand of African socialism by liberalizing the economy and encouraging foreign investment. In response to external and domestic pressure, he allowed and won multi-party elections in 1994 and again in December 1998, though both votes were violent and the results contested. President Kabbah reportedly met weekly with Conté while in exile after the 1997 coup. Kabbah traces his Mandingo ethnic roots back to the Futa Jallon region of western Guinea.

In 1990, Guinean troops were among the first ECOMOG forces to go into Liberia to prevent Charles Taylor from seizing power. Guinean forces have also been active in Sierra Leone under bilateral defence agreements and later as part of ECOMOG. Mutual distrust between Conté and Taylor has been constant. Rival Liberian warlord Alhaji Kromah, a Mandingo, called for a Muslim holy war against Taylor's NPFL from Conakry in 1991. Kromah went on to take over the leadership of the United Liberation Movement for Democracy in Liberia (ULIMO). Taylor has often accused Guinea of harbouring and encouraging his political foes.

## Blaise Compaoré and Burkina Faso

The former French colony is ruled by ex-paratrooper Blaise Compaoré, whose interest in Liberia and Sierra Leone can be traced back to his family links with the late president of Côte d'Ivoire, Félix Houphuet-Boigny. Compaoré came to power in 1982 after the killing of Thomas Sankara, a charismatic, radical, young army officer. Compaoré was part of Sankara's cabinet at the time. He was first elected president in 1991 in a ballot boycotted by opposition parties. While pursuing conventional development policies, Compaoré has also maintained strong ties with Libya and provided a haven for regional dissidents. Burkina Faso has been accused of providing military training and political support to Taylor's NPFL and to the RUF and of being a transit route for arms purchased in Eastern Europe. Burkinabes are known to have fought along Taylor in Liberia and to have been part of the original RUF force in 1991. More recently, Burkina Faso was named in a UN report on violations of international sanctions 'against Angola's insurgent movement UNITA as being a transshipment point for arms. Compaoré himself was reported to have received direct payments from UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi and to have provided 'a safe haven' for diamond transactions by the rebel movement.

## Others

### ECOWAS and ECOMOG

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has been the principal regional organization implicated in Sierra Leone's war and the search for peace. ECOWAS was established in 1975 by sixteen West African governments as a means to promote regional economic integration. Nigeria dwarfs the other fifteen members in terms of population as well as economic and military power as it contains about half the region's population and accounts for about seventy per cent of its gross domestic product. Nigeria's willingness to use ECOWAS as a vehicle to protect or extend its interests has often conflicted with the interests of other members, particularly the former French colonies of Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Togo and Benin. Years of rivalry between Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire stem, in part, from the late Ivorian President Félix Houphuet-Boigny's military and diplomatic support for the Biafrans in Nigeria's civil war of 1967–70. Economic competition between Côte d'Ivoire, with the most successful economy in the region, and Nigeria has sometimes imperilled ECOWAS effectiveness. Ghana, Nigeria's principal anglophone rival in the region, has also been an uneasy participant.

ECOWAS structures include the Authority of the Heads of State, the Standing Mediation Committee, a Secretariat and a number of committees made up of specific member countries. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, ECOWAS heads of state established a collective security framework to counter external threats and resolve disputes between and within member states. ECOMOG, the ECOWAS Ceasefire Monitoring Group, was originally constituted in 1990 to intervene in the Liberian civil war. Key ECOWAS structures in the Sierra Leone conflict have been the Authority, which comes together under the sitting chairman of the organization in annual summits and other meetings; the Secretariat, which played a co-ordinating and support role in Sierra Leone's peace negotiations; the Committee of Five, made up of Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia and Nigeria (later the Committee of Six with the addition of Togo); and ECOMOG.

Through the early 1990s, ECOMOG's presence in Sierra Leone was limited to a few hundred logistics troops in support of operations in Liberia. However, under separate bilateral agreements with Nigeria and Guinea, non-ECOMOG combat units from those countries were stationed in Freetown and northern and southern Sierra Leone. Two months prior to the May 1997 coup that ousted the Kabbah government, Sierra Leone and Nigeria renewed their agreement – Nigeria was to provide presidential protection, training for the Sierra Leone army and "strategic support."

In opposition to the coup, ECOMOG deployed more troops to Sierra Leone, with the force growing to over 12,000 by February 1998, when the junta was routed from Freetown. Throughout the interventions in Liberia and Sierra Leone, the force has usually been commanded by a Nigerian and Nigeria has provided by far the largest troop contingents. In Sierra Leone, Guinea, Ghana and Mali have also provided forces. With the signing of the Lomé Agreement, the UN moved to replace most of ECOMOG with a more diverse international contingent.

### United Nations

While UN development and humanitarian agencies were active in Sierra Leone throughout the war, the world body's political involvement intensified in 1994 after NPRC Chairman Valentine Strasser asked the Security Council for help in negotiating a settlement. UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali dispatched Sudanese diplomat Berhanu Dinka as his special representative to Sierra Leone. However, Dinka's personal style and positioning in Freetown aroused RUF suspicions of his impartiality. Amid the plethora of regional and international organizations seeking to facilitate an

agreement – ECOWAS, the OAU, the Commonwealth, International Alert, and Western diplomats – the UN's role was limited. Nonetheless, the UN was expected to help observe and monitor the 1996 Abidjan Accord and became one of its 'moral guarantors'. The rapid collapse of the settlement prevented the deployment of UN peacekeepers.

Following the May 1997 coup, the UN was vocal in condemning the military takeover and calling for a return to civilian rule. It also eventually imposed sanctions on the junta, in support of ECOWAS sanctions. In 1999, Dinka's replacement, Ugandan diplomat Francis Okelo, proved more acceptable to the insurgents and he was instrumental in persuading the RUF to enter into negotiations under the auspices of ECOWAS. The UN was to become a guarantor of the Lomé Agreement, however, Okelo was instructed to sign with the explicit proviso that the UN understands the amnesty and pardon not to apply to international crimes.

With the threatened pull-out of the Nigerian contingent from ECOMOG by December 1999, the UN moved to establish a 6,000-strong peacekeeping operation, and UNOMSIL was renamed the UN Mission in Sierra Leone, UNAMSIL, in October 1999. Controversially, Nigeria was to retain a key security role during implementation of the peace deal by providing blue-helmeted UN troops, instead of forces for ECOMOG. Ghana, Guinea, India, Jordan, Kenya and Zambia made up the remainder of the UN force, with 220 military observers drawn from 30 countries.

The main purpose of the peacekeeping force was to 'assist the government in carrying out its programme to disarm and demobilize all former combatants and help create the conditions of confidence and stability required for the smooth implementation of the peace process'. ECOMOG was to maintain responsibility for security in Freetown and at the nearby international airport, as well as for carrying out operations against 'rogue elements unwilling to participate in the peace process'.

In the ten months after the signing of the Lomé Agreement numerous security problems emerged: disarmament was slow and combatants from all sides became impatient; ECOMOG forces continued to be withdrawn without proper replacement; some RUF commanders were reluctant to allow free access of UN troops and humanitarian agencies; and there were incidents of UN or ECOMOG forces being disarmed and their weapons taken by rebel forces. In view of these problems Secretary General Kofi Annan recommended in January 2000 to increase the strength of UNAMSIL to 11,100 and revise the force's mandate. The new mandate allowed it to protect civilians, escort humanitarian

supplies, increase security at demobilization and disarmament sites, carry out more patrolling and provide armed escorts on main roads, retrieve illegal weapons, and guard government buildings and other installations.

Meanwhile, the RUF had started testing the deployed forces, severely undermining the credibility of the peacekeeping operation. In early May 2000, about 500 peacekeepers were taken captive in a series of incidents, only to be released weeks later after the intervention of Liberian President Taylor. Critics charged that the force had been sent in where there was no peace to keep and that the contingent had been under-trained and under-equipped.

### United Kingdom

As the former colonial power in Sierra Leone, the UK has been one of the main external actors throughout the war period. UK diplomatic and humanitarian leverage was evident in pressuring the NPRC government to allow elections in 1996, and in subsequent support for the Kabbah government, both before and after the 1997 coup.

Until the death of Nigeria's military ruler Abacha in June 1998, UK backing of the Kabbah government was complicated by the tough international stance the UK had taken against the Nigerian regime and the fact that a succession of Nigerian military leaders had been the main defenders of the Sierra Leone government. Nigerian democratization allowed London to begin actively co-operating with Abuja.

Diplomatically, the UK rallied UN member states and international organizations to provide political and material support for the elected government. While Kabbah's government was in exile, the UK hosted his appearance at a Commonwealth meeting in Edinburgh and provided financial and technical support to develop plans to be implemented once it was restored. Behind the scenes, the UK provided funds and equipment for a pro-government radio station.

Career diplomat Peter Penfold became UK High Commissioner to Sierra Leone a few weeks before the Kabbah government was overthrown in May 1997. Demonstrating the UK government's continued recognition of the elected government and resolve to see the coup reversed, Penfold set up a diplomatic mission in the Guinean capital Conakry, where the Kabbah government had fled. Though working towards the restoration of the elected government by diplomatic means, Penfold and other UK officials did not rule out the possible use of force. In 1998, a UK commission of inquiry was set up into what came to be known as the 'arms to



Africa affair'. It found that in breach of a UN arms embargo Penfold had given tacit approval to a deal between Sandline International, a Bahamas-registered private military company, and the Kabbah government for the delivery of US\$10 million worth of technical know-how, arms and ammunition for forces loyal to the government. Reprimanded in the UK for providing 'a degree of approval' for the deal, Penfold's support to Kabbah was celebrated in the streets of Freetown and he was made an honorary paramount chief. Although the scandal caused deep embarrassment to UK politicians and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the weapons only arrived weeks after ECOMOG had pushed the junta out of Freetown.

After Lomé, UK aid to Sierra Leone has involved providing military equipment to ECOMOG and the government of Sierra Leone, restructuring and retraining of the military and police, material support and advice to the disarmament and demobilization process, as well as emergency relief and funding for governance and civil society activities.

As the security situation deteriorated in early May 2000, Britain dispatched a 900-strong contingent of crack troops, ostensibly to evacuate British nationals. The British

forces temporarily helped shore up the defences of Freetown and stiffened the resolve of UN peacekeepers, pro-government soldiers and CDF. By mid-June, the majority of troops were withdrawn and the British military role reverted to training and advice.

### **United States of America**

Between 1991 and 1999, the US was the single largest donor of humanitarian aid to Sierra Leone, providing a total of US\$293 million and an additional US\$110 million in support of ECOMOG in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Diplomatically, the US took a more active role in promoting a negotiated settlement of the war than the UK, working behind the scenes to gain the confidence of the RUF and pressing the Kabbah government to enter negotiations. As the Lomé negotiations entered their final stages, President Clinton personally intervened, speaking to Sankoh by phone. Sankoh told an American journalists later: "What rebel leader gets called by the president of the United States? I only got that call because I fought in the bush for so many years."

### ***Locals bathe near the UN heliport, May 2000***

Source: AFP/Corbis

