

# Blood, Fire and Tears

## Getting Away With Murder

While the mainstream media was focusing the eyes of the world on the alleged genocide taking place within Serbia's Kosovo Province this year, the real genocide was taking place in a small country in West Africa. What you will read below are the words spoken by those who survived. Keep in mind that this was only one short period of time in an eight year rebel war. For further background, see our April 3, 1999 report [Freetown Has No Freedom](#). After reading this latest report, you will surely question why this news has been silenced in the biased media.

### Background of the atrocities

The few weeks of the rebel AFRC and RUF occupation of Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone, in January 1999 was characterized by cold and calculated genocide against the civilian population. Innocent people were gunned down within their houses, rounded up and massacred on the streets, thrown from the upper floors of buildings, used as human shields, and burned alive in cars and houses. They had their limbs hacked off with machetes, eyes gouged out with knives, hands smashed with hammers, and bodies burned with boiling water. Women and girls were systematically sexually abused and raped, and children were abducted by the hundreds or more.

These cowards and sickening excuses for human life, calling themselves rebels as if they were a part of a real army at war, made little - or more accurately - no distinction between civilian and military targets. They repeatedly stated that all civilians should be punished for supporting the duly elected government. Thus, these so-called rebels waged genocide, not war, against the civilian population with total disregard for the sanctity of God given life. While there was some targeting of particular groups, the vast majority of atrocities were committed by rebels who chose their civilian victims at random creating an atmosphere of complete terror. Some victims were murdered for resisting rape or abduction, trying to flee, trying to protect a friend or family member, or refusing to follow instructions to dance on the streets. Most victims and witnesses said they were chosen for execution or mutilation at random, most often without having even been spoken to or interrogated in any manner.

Victims and witnesses clearly overheard the rebel commanders give orders to commit the atrocities. There are very few witnessed accounts of individual rebels or commanders trying to halt the widespread acts of genocide. When a few individual rebels objected and tried to stop the slaughters, they were threatened with death by their fellow rebels. Witnesses have described distinct rebel squads, including the **Burn House Units**, **Cut Hands Commandos**, and **Blood Shed Squads**. Some of these rebel units had a trademark way of killing such as the **Kill Man No Blood** squad, whose method was to beat people to death without shedding any of their blood; or, the **Born Naked Squad**, who stripped their victims before killing them. The closer the counter attack of ECOMOG peacekeeping forces got to rebel positions in Freetown, the more these genocide squads were mobilized.

Upon gaining control of a neighborhood or suburb, the rebels went on systematic looting raids, in which families were hit by wave after wave of rebels demanding money and valuables. Those who didn't have what the rebels demanded were often murdered. While rape and abduction were widespread throughout the offensive, the pace of the executions, amputations and burning of property picked up dramatically as the rebels were forced to withdraw. The acts of genocide committed during the last days of rebel occupation were of a staggering proportion.

### Statistics of Genocide

It's nearly impossible to know how many civilians were killed during the rebel invasion of Freetown last January. The Senior Government Pathologist officially registered the burial of 7,335 corpses who were killed as a result of the January 6 rebel incursion. These include 4,245 which were either left in the city morgue or picked up off the street during the offensive and buried in mass graves, and 3,090 which were later exhumed and reburied after having been hastily disposed of during the fighting and rebel occupation.<sup>1</sup> While the number of combatants from both sides, either killed in battle or after capture or incapacitation by wounds, was thought to be high, human rights activists believe at least half of the dead were civilians. One local human rights group has already firmly documented 2,215 civilian killings.<sup>2</sup>

Freetown's three main hospitals reported treating 827 wounded, although hospital staff note that for the first weeks of the offensive, precise records were not kept.<sup>3</sup> In all three hospitals, the majority of war related injuries resulted from gunshot wounds, followed by lacerations and/or amputations by machete, knife, or axe. One study done in Freetown's Cannaght hospital found that some 80 percent of all wounded were the victims of multiple killings or massacres.<sup>4</sup>

The largest concentration of dead and wounded came from the three densely populated eastern suburbs of Kissy, Wellington, and Calaba Town. During the weeks of rebel occupation, all three suburbs were cut off from the capital's main medical facilities, which are all located within the ECOMOG controlled west. Unable to cross the front lines, most wounded civilians sought medical attention from local nurses and small clinics. However, loathe to identify themselves for fear of abduction, medical personnel had frequently gone into hiding or fled the area. There was also a scarcity of medicine and supplies to treat the wounded as clinics and pharmacies were frequently targeted for looting by the rebels. It was not uncommon for wounded civilians to go for several days before receiving any medical treatment.

## **Rebel denial of the truth**

On June 14, 1999, *Human Rights Watch* spoke with Omraie Golley, the official spokesperson and legal representative for the rebel RUF. He denied that his troops had committed any atrocities against the civilian population during the January offensive. He also admitted that while they have received allegations,

**"I have yet to find firm evidence that points to individual soldiers or commanders responsible for committing any atrocities against the civilian population. We've heard a lot of stories, we've heard a lot of terrible things. These kinds of allegations are easy to make but difficult to prove. But, if any of our soldiers or commanders have been guilty of such atrocities they will be brought to book."**

Golley also stated that the RUF rebels have not initiated any formal investigations or disciplinary proceedings against any individual soldier or commander. When asked about the mutilation and amputation of limbs, he said,

**"In July 1997 firm instructions were issued about the use of machetes. They were banned as an implement of war and it was made clear to all our soldiers and commanders that any found guilty of these atrocities would be severely dealt with. The RUF has been fighting a war to protect people, not to destroy them. If any civilians were mutilated during the January offensive, they were not mutilated by the RUF. There were many other groups involved in the conflict during the time of occupation and all of them the Civilian Defense Forces, The Kamajors, ECOMOG, and vigilante groups should be investigated."**

About the use of human shields and reports of rape, he said,

**"We unreservedly deny the use of human shields. This is clearly against our war policy and our commanders are well aware of this. Rape is clearly against the RUF penal code and in the past men found guilty of this have been severely dealt with."**

In response to the allegations of atrocities committed in the last eight years of war, Golley stated that in March 1999, the RUF had asked the government of Sierra Leone to provide them with detailed allegations of such atrocities and set up "an independent commission made up of three RUF military personnel and three civilians to investigate various allegations of atrocities." Golley clarified, however, that, "the fact that we've set up a commission is not an admission of guilt, because as far as we're concerned we are not guilty of having committed atrocities against the people; rather it is in response to these persistent allegations."<sup>5</sup>

So, in answer to these official RUF rebel statements and denials, we present you with first hand accounts and witness testimony to show that you are liars, cowards, and nothing more than a murderous band of thieves and genocidal killers.

# Undeniable evidence and Testimonies

## James Kajue, witness and victim

In the early morning hours of January 6, as they were attempting to flee their home in the eastern suburb of Wellington, James Kajue and his family were stopped by advancing rebels and marched to a nearby side street. After being asked for money, a rebel opened fire on them, wounding both James and his wife Victoria and killing six of their children and their only grandson. One daughter, Frida, survived. James recounted what happened:

"We went to bed on the night of January 5 and left the children watching videos. Around midnight I woke up and heard gunshots coming very close. I didn't hear any shelling from ECOMOG so I figured the rebels were on their way. I called a few friends who live further east and when they didn't answer I said, Victoria, let's get out of here. So we put all the kids in the station wagon and left.

As we drove down the main highway there were thousands of people on the roads and when we'd gone a few more miles the cars were stopped. At that moment someone lit a flare illuminating the area and when I looked back I saw that mixed in with the civilians were hundreds of rebel soldiers. It was then I realized the rebels were among us. There was a lot of gunfire so I told everyone to stay in the car and crouch down. I thought it was safer. Scores of rebels passed by without seeing us but then an eight-year-old rebel with an RPG and who was small enough to see through the window noticed us and alerted the others.

One of them ordered us out of the car and said, you people have been deceived by ECOMOG, why are you fleeing towards them, we're your brothers. Victoria tried to calm him and told him we just wanted to go to someplace safe. He then walked us up a side street a few hundred yards away and told us to sit down. He wanted money so Victoria reached into her bag and gave him some. He said it was too little and as we were about to offer him more I noticed three or four more rebels moving up the road. As they approached I heard them shouting, ASLA on the move...you thought we'd gone but we've come back. As one of them was approaching, I heard him say Why are you wasting time with these civilians...they've been supporting Tejan Kabbah and ECOMOG. We must teach them a lesson. I think we should just fire [kill] them.

And as soon as he said this, he swung around the AK-47, cocked it and opened fire on my family. It wasn't even one minute from the time he walked up to the time he opened up on us. And then I heard one of them saying, Why did you have to do it but the one who did it, who by that time was walking around to check if we were all dead, pulled Frida, who was alive, by the hair and said, see, they're not all dead. And then he got to me and said, I'll just pick up Pa's watch. I was hit on the hand which was resting on my chest so there was a lot of blood. I pretended to be dead so he just ripped off my watch and walked off with the others.

And then the roll call I couldn't do it. Victoria had to do it. Patrick, CiCi, Mary all died instantly. Ester was dying. At that moment only Frida replied. She was wounded but not

gravely. There was a lot of gunfire so I got up and said, I'm going for shelter...can anyone who can walk just please, please follow me.

Victoria took my two year-old grandson who was crying and fatally wounded. We later dragged David who'd been hit in the spine and couldn't walk. And I could hear James calling, I'm stuck against this wall and can't move. By now rebels were passing and we couldn't go to him. Later we thought that he must've been hit in the spine and to him it must've felt like he was pinned against a wall. He only called a few times more and then fell silent. Little Hassan died a few hours later; he was hit three times. And David, the last time I spoke to him I said, can you promise me, promise me you'll survive this thing and he said, Dad I promise you but he couldn't. He died later that day.

He [the rebel] came from nowhere. I didn't have time. I would've stood up and offered myself in place of the kids. They didn't ask us any questions. If they were to accuse anyone it should've been me. I would have given myself. I had some money. I would've offered it to them but the one who killed us didn't come for money he came to destroy our lives. He just opened up on my family without saying anything".<sup>6</sup>

## **Ibrahim, witness and survivor**

Several attacks and massacres were made against civilians seeking refuge within churches, mosques, and hospitals. These included the January 18 attack on the **Kissy Mental Hospital** in which some sixteen men were executed and six women attacked with machetes; the January 19 attack on the **Brotherhood of the Cross and Star Church** in Wellington in which twelve people, including at least three children, were taken out and executed; and, the January 22 massacre within the **Rogbalan Mosque** in Kissy in which sixty-six people were gunned down. According to numerous survivors interviewed by *Human Rights Watch*, the massacre at the **Rogbalan Mosque** was an organized, premeditated operation involving two groups of rebels and lasting approximately forty-five minutes. Several survivors described how, a few days prior, rebels had given warning that a massacre was going to be committed. Ibrahim, forty-eight, described what he saw as he was hiding and how he later counted the dead:

"The mosque was packed full of both Muslims and Christians. The rebels had been coming in and out of the mosque; abducting young girls and harassing us, but things were getting so bad outside we thought it was still safer than in our houses. That day at around 10:00 a.m. I was inside the mosque when I saw at least four rebels burst into the courtyard. One of them had a gun, one had a pistol and two others, including a ten year old, had knives and machetes. They were all wearing black pants and black T-shirts.

A sixteen-year-old boy sitting on the steps tried to warn the others that the rebels were coming so when they entered the courtyard, the first thing they did was tell the boy to open his mouth and then the one with the AK put his gun into his mouth and shot him through the head.

Once inside, the one with the pistol started asking everyone for money. In the meantime, two of the other rebels, including the ten year old, moved to block the doors. Then, as the pistol man was walking around pointing his gun and robbing people, a few of the others started arguing over whether to burn us alive in the mosque or shoot us. One of the rebels

then walked around the mosque sprinkling petrol on people and I heard one of them say, you bastard civilians; you don't like us and we don't like you. Finally, one of the others raised his machete and screamed, Our mission is to kill you and cut your hands. People then started screaming and begging and the one with the rifle just started firing.

The mosque was very crowded. It was very confusing and people were running and trying to escape but the ten-year-old was standing by one of the doors and I saw him stab people as they tried to run past him. Sometimes the executioner would aim directly at one person and other times he'd just fire randomly. Then he walked back to the women's section and opened up on the people gathered there. Then he positioned himself in the passage leading out of the mosque and started picking people off as they tried to escape. It was here he killed a lot of people. His was the only way out, so as people made a run for it, he would shoot them.

Some fifteen or so minutes into the thing, another group of rebels arrived to reinforce. They surrounded the place and several of them came around and hit the little Islamic school we have in the back. I think many of the children who died in the massacre were back there. Then at some point a whistle blew and the rebels rushed around searching for things to steal from the dead. And then left.

Somehow a lot of people including myself managed to escape. I was hiding under a mattress in the courtyard and all I could think about was my daughter who was inside when the firing started. I prayed she was able to escape. After I was sure the rebels had gone, I crept out and started looking for her. That's how I came to know how many were killed. I went through the mosque, the women's section, the school, the courtyard, and the street looking for my daughter. I thank god I didn't find her among the dead. But I counted sixty-six bodies including seven little children." <sup>7</sup>

## **Adama, witness and survivor**

During the fighting and rebel occupation, civilians tended to concentrate in the larger or more fortified houses of their neighbors, friends, and family. Such concentrations of people often fell victim to brutal rebel attacks in which large numbers of civilians would be killed. Sometimes the men would be targeted and other times no one would be spared. The houses were frequently set on fire with the wounded civilians still inside.

Adama, sixteen, was hiding in a closet with her two small cousins on January 21, while rebels walked room to room killing seventeen men, women, and children including several relatives. The house was later set on fire with one blind man and at least three of the wounded still inside. She recounted:

"At around 7:30 a.m. when we were just sitting down to breakfast, two rebels came into the compound and told everyone to get inside the house. They started screaming obscenities and then one of them said, we're going to kill all of you so we all ran upstairs.

I hid with my two little cousins but I could see everything. As they were coming up the stairs I heard them shoot two men who'd sought refuge in our house. Then they came into our apartment and my sister's husband Mani started to plead saying, please, I beg you, if it's money you want I'll give it to you but they said, we don't want money, we said we've

come to kill you. Then they shot him in the chest. Then they turned on Mani's brother Tejan who was holding his nine-month-old baby. They shot him and he fell with the baby in his arms. Then they fired a friend of Tejan's. They said nothing, nothing, asked them nothing. The same rebel dressed in blue jeans and a white T-shirt and with dreadlocks was doing all the killing.

When they'd finished in the parlor they went to the bedroom which I could still see from where I was. My sister Fatmata was on the bed with my three year old cousin Sia. They shot my sister two times, and then shot little Sia. Then I heard my twelve-year-old cousin Sahr scream, Amama, have you left me, and then they shot him. Then they shot a ten-year-old neighbor boy on the foot, then our friend Mr. Koroma and a fifteen-year-old neighbor named Aminata.

Then they went to the next room. I couldn't see what happened but I heard three gunshots and later saw the bodies of three of our neighbors. There was a blind man who lived in that apartment with his seven-year-old boy. The blind man was the only one they didn't shoot and as they left the room I heard them say, now, you be sure and take care good care of all these people.

When they were in the third room, my little eight-year-old cousin crept out from behind the wardrobe and went to her father. She was crying and she stood in front of him and bowed down. He was dead and her uncle Tejan who was still alive said, he's left us now...quick, you go hide. But, then she went to her mom and did the same thing. I think she was saying good-bye to them. Then I called her back to me. By this time we could smell smoke coming from downstairs. I guess the other rebels had set fire to the downstairs. The one who did the killing then sprayed petrol throughout our apartment and lit it on fire. Then I heard them go outside.

By now there was a lot of smoke so I grabbed my cousins, went down the stairs and tried to leave but the rebels saw us. They told me to give them my cousins but I refused so two of them pointed their guns at me and said, so it's there you're going to die get back into that house and burn. They then closed the door from outside and leaned on it so I couldn't escape.

I waited for several more minutes until I just couldn't stand it anymore and then tried the door again and this time managed to escape. By now the fire was really blazing. We could hear the screams of people upstairs and from the outside we could see the seven-year-old son of the blind man from the window, but his father was crying and he didn't want to leave him. We convinced him to jump by saying we'd rescue his father in a few minutes. We knew it wouldn't be possible but otherwise the boy wouldn't have come. The blind man and the others were burned alive. They kept crying but there was just nothing we could do.

The second rebel told the bad one at least twice to stop the killing but the bad one said he'd kill him as well if he said anything else. I just don't know why he behaved that way. In a quiet moment I feel it too much." <sup>8</sup>

## **Maria, witness and victim**

There were frequent accounts of the particularly sadistic practice of burning people alive. Children and the elderly seemed to be particularly vulnerable. There were a few documented cases of children being thrown into burning fires and many accounts of elderly people being left behind in a burning house as their children and grandchildren were forced to flee in haste. The pleas by other family members to retrieve their children or elderly parents were most often met with threats of death.

One witness described an incident in which a thirteen-year-old boy who was accused of having washed the clothes and shined the boots of ECOMOG soldiers at a checkpoint was later recognized by one of the rebels and thrown into a burning fire in the business district. Another incident involved a businessman who was forced at gunpoint into his Mercedes Benz and burned alive.

Maria, a fifty-three year old retired nurse, suffered third degree burns and a fractured femur after jumping from the second story of the house in which her daughter and mother were burned alive. She recounted:

"In the early evening a group of about twenty rebels came near the house. As usual I sent my seventeen-year-old son to hide out back, and my five-year-old adopted daughter Titi upstairs to be with my elderly mother while I dealt with them. They [the rebels] asked for water so I got several gallons and gave them all as much as they wanted.

I remember climbing the stairs and thanking God that this large group had left without doing anything to us. But just a few minutes later, another group came. The commander introduced himself as Captain Blood and started demanding that I hand over my daughters. I explained that I only have three sons but he accused me of lying.

As I tried to convince him, he grabbed my kerosene lamp and proceeded to douse the sofa and set it alight. I begged him not to burn my house but he continued and pushed me towards the stairs, continuing to sprinkle kerosene as we went. The other two rebels guarded the entrances so no one could escape.

Then he pushed me into my mother's room where she was lying in bed with Titi curled up, crying beside her. No sooner had he entered the room than he began pouring kerosene over the bed and said to my mother, mommy, it's enough for you, now it's time for you to die. He then tossed a match on the bed which went up in flames and pushed me out the door and into the next room. I heard them screaming but I couldn't do anything.

He then doused the bed in that room, threw in a match and quickly left the room. As I tried to follow him he pushed me violently and I crashed onto the burning bed and cut my head on the bedboard. I got up with my leg burning and tried to leave but Captain Blood was leaning against the door and shouting, it's time for you to die, you're going to die there.

I fell down on the floor with flames beginning to engulf the room and felt my chest tightening. I was bleeding from my head, my chest was filling up with smoke, my leg burning and I thought, Titi is dead, my mother is dead. God, do you want me to die here? Is it here I'm going to meet my maker? And, I just said no. I said no. I got up; burning my hand as I opened that door I rushed to the balcony where I saw a neighbor watching. I

jumped from the second story of my house and felt my leg crack as I landed. I was dragged into the bushes where I waited with my other neighbors for the rebels to pass." <sup>9</sup>

### **Alpha, witness**

Alpha, thirty-five, described how from his hiding place he saw a group of rebels gather up twenty-four civilians, put them in a room, set it ablaze and then position themselves so as to be able to shoot them as they ran out:

"As the killing was happening upstairs, the rebels gathered twenty-four of our neighbors who'd sought refuge in our house and put them under gunpoint in the back room. When the one called Dave came downstairs after having killed everyone, he asked for a lantern and said, I'm not going to waste my bullets on these people let me set this place alight. In fact, they'd already set the upstairs and part of the downstairs on fire.

Then he sprayed kerosene on the civilians, closed the door and as he was leaning on it told them that those who paid 1,000 leones [U.S.50 cents] each to the rebel waiting at the window, would be set free. The civilians then started handing out the 1,000 leones to a few rebels waiting there. One girl came to the window and begged, saying she didn't have any money and the rebel collecting the money shot her in the face.

Then, as the fire was really blazing, the rebels, announced they were leaving but instead positioned themselves around the back door with their guns pointed at the only exit and waited. However, the fire was too intense and those trapped inside were no longer able to move through the hall to get to the back door. By that time the people were really screaming and choking for air at the window. After about ten minutes the rebels finally left, thinking the people would burn to death, and my friend and I rushed to find an axe and break through the bars of the window and let everyone out." <sup>10</sup>

### **Attacks on the Clergy**

On January 12, Catholic Archbishop Joseph Henry Ganda, four Xavierian Fathers and six Sisters of Charity were abducted from their parish homes by RUF rebels. All but the Catholic archbishop were foreign nationals. For over ten days they were kept under the control of the RUF military police and moved from place to place. They were interrogated and a few of them, including Archbishop Ganda, suffered some form of physical abuse. As the rebels fled Kissy on January 20, Archbishop Ganda and three of the Xavierian fathers were able to escape. On January 22 while in the process of withdrawing from Freetown and fleeing into the surrounding hills, four Sisters of Charity were executed and one Italian father was shot. Since 1991, many members of the Catholic clergy, almost always foreign nationals, have been abducted or come under attack by RUF rebels.

While abducted, the church men and women, and thirteen Indian nationals working for the Shankerdas and Sons plastics factory who were abducted at around the same time, were being guarded by the RUF military police. Witnesses to the execution of the nuns and shooting of the priest described elements of the RUF arguing over whether the killing should take place. They felt the rebels' intention was to take them into the bush as hostages, and that the order to protect them had been overridden by a renegade soldier or unit.

### **Beatrice, witness and survivor**



Beatrice, twenty, was abducted with her sister on January 21 and forced by the rebels to retreat to the hills with thousands of other abductees. On January 22 she witnessed the gunning down of seven foreigners, three Sisters of Charity, one Xavierian Priest, and three Indian factory workers. She described the killing, which took place in Allen Town:

"There were thousands of us from Kissy, Wellington, and Calaba Town who'd been taken away with them [the rebels]. Among us were seven foreigners; mostly Indians but also an African Sister of Charity they said was from Kenya and a white Priest. You could tell who were the sisters because they wore that white robe with blue trim. It was in the morning and they had us all seated on a street in Allen Town. There were hundreds of rebels all around the area.

Many of the children were crying for their parents and the young women were crying and a few of them told us to shut up and that they were taking us into the bush. The rebels were drinking, laughing, and playing music. The foreigners were off to one side and we were seated about ten feet away.

There was this rebel, and he had it out for the nuns. He said his name was Colonel Foday Bah and for the last day we'd heard him threatening to kill the nuns. Another rebel named Tina Musa, she was SAJ Musa's wife, kept insisting that they be left alone and they argued about it. So that morning she had to go on a mission and no sooner had she climbed the hill behind Allen town, than Foday Bah started in again on the nuns.

At around 10:00 a.m. he got out his pistol and started threatening, but seriously now. The nuns started crying and praying and we did as well, so he announced, I am Colonel Foday Bah. I'm an SLA man. We came for peace but you people don't want it. You're the ones selling out our country. In the process he was hitting the nuns and others with a stick. Another rebel told him to leave them, but Foday threatened to kill him as well.

When it became clear he was serious, the nuns started praying. And then he walked over to the black nun, and shot her with his pistol in the head. Then he shot a white man. And, then even as the others were begging and begging he shot a yellow [Asian] nun and then another yellow [Asian] one, and then the others. When he was finished he went over, removed their slippers and gave them to a few of the abductees. When Tina came back down the hill and saw the nuns had been killed she was furious and upset." <sup>11</sup>

## **Mutilations and Amputations of civilians**

The practice of mutilation and, in particular, amputation of hands, arms, legs and other parts of the body was also widespread during the January RUF offensive. The rebels used axes, machetes, and knives to kill and maim hundreds of people, mostly men but also women and children.

During the month of January, Freetown's three main hospitals Connaught, Brookfield, and Netland Hospital treated ninety-seven victims of amputations resulting from attacks with axes and machetes. The majority of amputations were of the hands and arms, including twenty-six double amputations. One hospital treated over forty cases of attempted amputations, serious lacerations to the arms and legs, where medical staff were able to save the extremity or extremities.<sup>12</sup> In these cases, medical personnel note that the damage to the nerves, tendons, muscles, and bones frequently leads to some degree of decreased functioning.<sup>12</sup> Wounds from lacerations to the head, neck, and other areas were also numerous.

What will never be known is the number of victims who died before being able to receive medical attention. Many people reported seeing corpses on the streets of Freetown with both hands dangling or missing. Public health workers and mortuary attendants responsible for the collection of corpses and burial within mass graves, also observed many bodies with missing limbs and lacerations.<sup>13</sup> The main hospitals, which were located in western Freetown and under ECOMOG control, were inaccessible to the majority of victims in the east where the vast majority of amputations took place. Unable to cross front lines, victims frequently reported going two to three days before receiving medical attention.

### **Lansana, witness and survivor**

Lansana, twenty-four, was one of three brothers each to have one of their hands hacked off as they were attempting to flee towards an ECOMOG position on January 18. He described how one brother died near the site of the amputation:

"The closer ECOMOG moved to our area, the more they [the rebels] started committing atrocities. At 9:00 a.m. me and my brothers Amara, seventeen, and Brima, twenty, decided to flee. We packed up a few things and then took off. About a quarter mile from our house, we rounded a bend and ran straight into a group of about fifty rebels. They argued about whether or not to kill us and then one of them said "let's send them to ECOMOG," which is their way of saying our arms should be cut.

They told us to lie down in the road, face down they had their guns to our heads. The first to be cut was Brima; they cut his left hand with an axe. Then my left hand was hacked off and then Amara's right hand. They didn't ask us any questions or accuse of us anything. There was a lot of gunfire all around. The battle for the place was really on. We were all bleeding so much. Brima tried to get up a few times, but he stumbled and fell. The last time he only made it a few yards and then collapsed. He couldn't move, he fell down right there. I think he lost too much blood or just couldn't take the shock. It was so tense; the bullets were flying and me and Amara had no other choice. We had to leave our brother right there on the street.

After we got out of the hospital we went back to the place where it happened. The people there told us Brima had been buried later that day in a common grave, right near where he fell."<sup>14</sup>

### **Ramatu, witness and victim**

Civilians were often mutilated in pairs or groups of up to eight, during small rebel operations in which victims were rounded up, made to form a line and their limbs amputated one after the other. Other amputations were done as punishment for having resisted the abduction of a family member or for fleeing from a rebel patrol. In other cases the rebels choose their victims randomly, frequently without asking a single question. Ramatu, fifteen, and five other neighbors rounded up by the rebels, had their hands or arms amputated near the Kissy Mental Home where dozens of amputations were witnessed. She described how they hacked off her left arm:

"Ten rebels broke into our house and started demanding money. Then they ordered us outside and grouped us together with about thirty other people from the area. They held us at gunpoint in a circle, and started pointing, "you, you, you," and telling us to follow them. They didn't ask us any questions. I don't know why they chose me, or the others. We were three men and three women. A few of them were young like me.

They then marched us at gunpoint to the hill near Kissy Mental. They didn't say why they were taking us but we knew. When we arrived they ordered us to lay face down and started cutting us. They dragged us, they had us get down on our knees and put our arms on a concrete slab. They had others standing over us and holding us from behind. One rebel did all the cutting. A few had both hands cut off; others just one. And then they walked away. I couldn't even bury my arm. And now I don't think I'll ever find someone to marry me." <sup>15</sup>

### **Mani, witness and victim**

Mani, forty-eight, watched as a commander ordered the execution of seven civilians and then singled him out for amputation on January 21. He said:

"A group of thirteen rebels came to my house, poured kerosene on the furniture and then set it ablaze. I stumbled out of my house and started running up the street but was immediately caught by a group of ten rebels. They ordered me to join a group of seven other people from my neighborhood.

The commander, who introduced himself as a Liberian, then ordered everyone but me to stand to one side and said, "I'm going to kill you all, so say good-bye to the world." He kept them there begging for three minutes and then, at 7:03 p.m. - I looked at my watch - ordered another rebel to open fire on them.

Then, the same Liberian said, "I'm ordered and paid by Sam Bockerie not to spare anyone and that is why I have killed. You saw it with your own eyes. But now I am ordering your hand to be cut." He ordered me to lay face down in the road and called forward a rebel with an axe who then hacked off my hand. It was hanging off limp and bleeding and when I saw it I started to cry. The rebels just walked away." <sup>15</sup>

### **Amadu, witness and victim**

After massacring his neighbors in Kissy on January 20, Amadu, forty, described how the rebels hacked off his arms:

"I was hiding in my house with my wife and family, when at around 9:30 p.m. we started hearing shouts and screams. Several minutes later we heard our neighbors begging, "don't kill me, I beg," and then I heard gunfire. I peeked out but one of them [rebels] saw me and screamed for me to come out. I ran back into my house but after a few minutes they doused it with kerosene and set it on fire. When the heat was too much we fled out the back but they caught me and marched me to my neighbor's compound.

It was then I saw over what had happened to my neighbors; I saw at least twenty of them lying on the ground and I screamed, "you've killed my people there." One of them called for the man with the axe to come and hack off my arms and they did it right there in that compound. When they were done they said, "you go to Pa Kabbah [President Tejan Kabbah of Sierra Leone] and ask him for a new set of arms." <sup>16</sup>

### **Tejan, witness and victim**

The majority of amputations were done shortly before the rebels were forced to retreat from neighborhoods under their control. Victims and witnesses describe the rebels often mobilizing special cut hand squads which were then sent on operation. The leaders of some of these infamous squads introduced themselves to their victims as **Captain 2 Hands**, **Betty Cut Hands**, **OC Cut Hands**, and **Adama Cut Hands**. After being captured, the victims were sometimes made to wait until the cut hands unit arrived. Several of the commanders and members of these units were adolescents or women. Tejan, a forty-three year old driver, described the brutal way in which a fifteen-year-old combatant from one of these units named **Commander Cut Hands** hacked off his two hands in Kissy on January 20:

"After they set fire to my house they caught me trying to escape out the back door. They then brought me to the compound next door where I saw they'd captured two of my neighbors. They started arguing over whether to kill me or cut my hands. Then the one who seemed to be in charge gave the order to amputate both my hands and called forward a fifteen-year-old boy they called "Commander Cut Hands."

I refused to lie down. They beat me and it took several of them to hold me. They tripped me and when I fell to the ground three of them had to sit on my legs and back and another few had to hold my arms. Then they took out that axe. I was crying and after they'd hacked off both of my hands I screamed, "just kill me, kill me."

They also cut off the hands of my two neighbors. I feared they might attack me because I was a driver for the SLPP [Sierra Leone People's Party], the President's party, but they never found that out. They knew nothing about me." <sup>16</sup>

### **Allieu, witness and victim**

The particularly macabre practice of filling up bags with amputated hands and fingers was witnessed by several people interviewed. Another witness hiding within a house in Calaba Town on January 24 witnessed a commander calling himself **Dr. Blood** summon five rebels and order them to begin a "cut hands" operation. He then said, "I want a bag of hands from Kissy, one from Wellington, and one from Calaba Town." <sup>17</sup> Allieu, fifty, a civil servant with the customs department, described seeing a bloody rice bag full of hands during the brutal amputation of both of his arms at Kissy on January 21:

"They surrounded my family and one of them said, "Since Pa Kabbah [President Kabbah] won't give us peace, we have come to cut your hands." I begged them not to harm my wife and children so they fired their guns in the air and told them to run away. They then marched me up the hill to the grounds of **St. Patrick's Catholic Church** where I saw over one hundred rebels. They ordered me to put my left arm on a tree trunk and then they swung the axe from behind and hacked it off. They kept talking about President Kabbah and as they ordered me to put my other hand. I screamed, "but I don't know anything about politics" and one of them answered, "but you voted for Kabbah." Then he hacked off my remaining hand.

Blood was spurting out of my arms. I was weak and kept falling as I tried to get up. They started laughing at me and I shouted, "just kill me, kill me, look at how you've left me." They spit on me and started pounding me and then several of them took a hammer, held

me down and started knocking out my teeth. I left four of them [teeth] in the dirt. They danced around me and said, "we've really got you now, here you will die."

As I lay there bleeding in the church courtyard I saw them amputate the hands of two other men. And, then a rebel walked by with a white rice bag, with blood dripping out the bottom, and said - pointing to my hands lying on the ground - "put those things in here."<sup>15</sup>

## Lucia, witness and victim

Children and, in some cases, even toddlers were not immune from attack. In one case, children were even singled out. The youngest known amputation victim from January 1999 was a boy aged just one year and eight months. One small clinic in Kissy during January 1999 treated twenty-one children from three to fifteen years old for laceration wounds, mutilation, and amputation. Five of these children were from three to five years old.<sup>18</sup> Lucia, ten, described how on January 13 she and two of her friends were chosen out of a large group, taken away, and had both of their arms amputated:

"At around 4:00 in the afternoon I was sitting under the big mango tree in front of my house with all of my family and neighbors when we saw a group of four rebels coming down the road. We got up and ran inside. When they arrived they ordered us all outside. They had a container of petrol and asked for matches. We thought they were going to burn our house but instead they started pointing at several of us; me, my cousin Miata who is twelve, and my friend Finda who is fifteen.

They marched us up the hill where we were joined by another rebel and two more adult men. And, then they started hacking off our arms. When it was my turn they pushed me to the ground and told me to put my right hand on a big stone. One rebel held me down, one put his foot on my arm while the one they called **Blood** hacked it off with a big axe. Then they did the same thing with my left hand. They hit each hand one time each.

We couldn't run; they had their guns on us the whole time. It was so fast; the whole thing only took about ten minutes. They then walked us back down the hill and back to our compound. When my mother saw me, with my hands dangling from my arms and blood spurting everywhere she screamed and burst out crying. When they were cutting me, I heard one of them say, "now you will know the rebels; now you will know the bitterness of the war."<sup>19</sup>

Interviews for this report were conducted by the *Human Rights Watch Africa Division* (HRW) during the months of April, May, and June 1999. While we have printed only a few eye witness accounts, several hundred witnesses and victims were interviewed within their homes, at centers for the displaced, in hospitals and clinics, market places, churches, mosques, and places of work. The names of all witnesses and survivors, except where noted, have been changed in order to protect their identity, ensure their privacy, and safeguard them from any possible future retaliation by the rebels.

## Footnotes

1 HRW interview with Dr. Arthur C. Williams, Freetown, April 20, 1999

- 2 HRW interview with Moses Sahr Lamine, Network Movement for Justice and Development, May 31, 1999.
- 3 Freetown's three main hospitals are Connaught Hospital, Brookfields Community Hospital, and Netland Hospital.
- 4 HRW interview with Martha Carey, Médecins Sans Frontières, May 27, 1999. Study at Connaught Hospital on Feb. 14, 1999.
- 5 HRW telephone interview with Omraie Golley, Official RUF spokesperson, Lomé, Togo, June 14, 1999.
- 6 HRW interview with James Kajue, Freetown, May 18, 1999. Real names used by permission of surviving victims.
- 7 HRW interview, Freetown, June 1, 1999.
- 8 HRW interview, Freetown, May 15, 1999.
- 9 HRW interview, Freetown, April 16, 1999.
- 10 HRW interview, Freetown, May 1, 1999.
- 11 HRW interview, Freetown, May 2, 1999.
- 12 HRW interview with Medécins Sans Frontières, Freetown, May 6, 1999.
- 13 HRW interview with Morgue Attendants at Connaught Hospital, Freetown, May 5, 1999.
- 14 HRW interview, Freetown, May 12, 1999.
- 15 HRW interview, Freetown, April 19, 1999.
- 16 HRW interview, Freetown, April 11, 1999.
- 17 HRW interview, Freetown, April 23, 1999.
- 18 HRW interview with Nurse Ibrahim Conteh, Kissy Summertime Clinic, May 6, 1999. The clinic also treated seven children between six to ten years old, and nine children between eleven to fifteen years old for injuries related to lacerations with axes, knives, and machetes.
- 19 HRW interview, Freetown, May 6, 1999.

Compiled by *Anthony Wayne* for *Lawgiver.Org*