CIFORB Country Profile – *Sierra Leone*

Demographics

The Republic of Sierra Leone is situated in West Africa. Its capital is Freetown, which is also its political centre. It gained independence in 1961, and underwent a civil war between 1991 and 2002.

Population: 5.75 million. Over 50% of the population receive less than $1.90 per day. The population is made up of eighteen indigenous ethnic groups, with the largest and most influential being Temne (in the North) and Mende (in the South). A large number of inhabitants (approximately 60,000) are Krio, who are returned former slaves. Lebanese, Indian and Europeans also reside in Sierra Leone.

The Ebola outbreak of 2014 gave rise to humanitarian crisis. The crisis resulted in weaker economic growth, and an increase in exploitation and violence against women and girls.

English is the official language in Sierra Leone, followed by Krio, which unites all ethnic groups, especially in trade and social interactions.

Religious Affairs

According to the Pew Research Centre, 78.0% of persons in Sierra Leone are Muslim and 20.9% are Christian.

Despite the Sunni majority, Sierra Leone celebrates the birthday of Imam Reza (which is a Shia tradition). Sierra Leone celebrates multiple religious national holidays. Such religious and other festivals include Mouloud (Prophet's Birthday), Good Friday, Easter Monday, Eid al-Fitr (End of Ramadan) and Eid al-Adha (Feast of the Sacrifice).

Thousands of Sierra Leoneans see themselves as both Christian and Muslim at the same time. This emerging wave of religious hybridity hints at a future when recording the religious demographics of Sierra Leone may not be as straightforward as separating into Muslim or Christian.

Interreligious marriage and conversions are very common in Sierra Leone, and do not carry the strong repercussions seen across many other countries in the Commonwealth.

Political Affairs

The government is divided into three branches: the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. The president is both head of state and head of government.

At independence, two main parties shared the votes in a multiparty political system. First in office was the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) during 1962-67 under Sir Milton Margai. The 1967 elections were won by the All People's Congress (APC) under Dr. Siaka

Stevens. Almost immediately, Stevens was arrested in a coup, followed days later by another army coup which imposed military rule until the next year. Then, after a further coup, Stevens was reinstated as prime minister.

In 1971, the country became a republic with Stevens as executive president. The general election of 1973 was boycotted by the SLPP and easily won by the APC, which also won the following elections in 1977 after a campaign which sparked violence. In 1978 the country became a one-party state, led by the ruling APC. Single-party elections in 1982 were once again violent. In 1985 Major-General Joseph Momoh succeeded Stevens as president. By the end of the 1980s, economic conditions were continuing to deteriorate and there was a growing demand for constitutional reform. The government responded by setting up a constitutional review commission. The commission's recommendation of a return to a multiparty democratic system was overwhelmingly endorsed in a referendum in August 1991.

A new constitution was promulgated, allowing for a transition towards multiparty elections. Political parties started to register in preparation for elections.

Civil war
The 1991 multiparty constitution was not, however, implemented. Fighting with a rebel movement, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), which had started in March 1991, escalated. There were incursions from neighbouring Liberia, and the RUF in the south of the country was loosely in alliance with Liberian rebels.

In April 1992, Captain Valentine Strasser took control after a coup by junior army officers, and the constitution was suspended. The war escalated and, despite air and ground support from Nigeria, and troops provided by Guinea, by 1995 at one point the government was in secure control only of the capital. In January 1996, Strasser was overthrown by his deputy Brigadier Julius Maada Bio.

Multiparty elections under the 1991 multiparty constitution were finally held in February 1996. In talks between the government and RUF leader Corporal Foday Sankoh, agreement was reached in November 1996 to end the war that had caused the displacement of 2 million people and over 10,000 deaths. The agreement allowed the RUF to register as a political party and permitted it access to the media. However, in 1997 RUF leader Sankoh was arrested while on a visit to Nigeria.

In May 1997 the Kabbah government was overthrown in a military coup led by Major Johnny Paul Koroma, but in October 1997, in a deal brokered by ECOWAS in Conakry, Guinea, the rebel Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) regime agreed to a six-month transition to restore the legitimate civilian government. Apart from a few skirmishes in the area of the diamond mines, the transitional period was reasonably peaceful until early February 1998 when renewed fighting broke out between Nigerian peacekeeping troops and Koroma's forces in Freetown. A few days later, on 12 February, the Nigerians captured Freetown and detained many members of the military regime, though not including Koroma himself. After nine months in exile in Conakry, President Kabbah returned to Freetown in March 1998. Parliament reconvened and about 50% of

its members attended. Within a few days thousands of people had returned to their homes in Freetown.

In July 1998, the UN agreed to establish an observer mission to monitor the military and security situation in the country and to advise the government on the rebuilding of the police and security forces. Sankoh was returned to Freetown from detention in Lagos to face charges of treason and was sentenced to death in October 1998. On news of Sankoh's death sentence, RUF and AFRC rebels launched a campaign of severe brutality in the towns and villages they took over as they advanced rapidly on Freetown and in January 1999 Nigerian troops halted their advance very close to the capital. A wider peace agreement was signed in July 1999, which included a power-sharing arrangement between Kabbah and the RUF (with four RUF leaders appointed to ministerial portfolios in November 1999), annulment of Sankoh's death sentence and the release of those sentenced for their role in the 1997 coup. UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan recommended the deployment of 6,000 troops to Sierra Leone to guarantee the peace agreement and this was increased to 11,000 on the departure of the Nigerians in 2000. In May 2000, as the UN peacekeepers moved into the diamond-producing region and began to demobilise the rebels, the peace agreement collapsed when the rebels took 500 UN troops hostage and fighting resumed between the Sierra Leone Army and the rebels. Power sharing ceased and Sankoh was arrested, though the hostages were eventually released unharmed. In July 2000, the UN resolved to ban trade in uncut diamonds from Sierra Leone until the government had established an authentication system but the illicit trade continued into 2001, when there were signs that the ban was beginning to be effective.

In June 2004 special courts with Sierra Leonean and UN-appointed judges began trying those both on government and rebel sides accused of war crimes.

Following signature of the July 1999 peace agreement, UN peacekeepers proceeded with disarming rebel troops and took control over a growing area of the country. In May 2002, presidential and parliamentary elections were held with Commonwealth observers present. Multiparty elections have been held in Sierra Leone since then. Juilus Maada Bio of the SLPP was elected president in the latest presidential election held in March 2018.

International Affairs (including membership of int. organisations, UPR/treaty committees coming up etc) treaty compliance

Sierra Leone is a member of:
- United Nations
- African Union
- ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States)
- Mano River Union
- Commonwealth of Nations
- African Development Bank
- Organisation of Islamic Cooperation

- African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States
- Non-Aligned Movement
- World Trade Organization

The government is party to six core international human rights treaties. The government has also signed several other international human rights treaties, but is yet to ratify these treaties.

FORB (including legislation)

Chapter III of Constitution provides for the recognition and protection of fundamental human rights and freedoms of the individual. It guarantees:

Protection of freedom of conscience (freedom of thought and religion, subject to the interests of defense, public safety, order, morality, and health, and to protect other person's rights and freedoms);
Protection from discrimination; and
Protection of freedom of movement.

Generally, Sierra Leone holds a strong FORB record, and interreligious relations are good. For instance, interreligious marriages and conversions are very common, and accepted.

FoRB challenges:

Marijuana forms a core component of Rastafari religious practice, although the law in Sierra Leone prohibits the production, sale and consumption of it. Members of the Rastafari community view this as a breach of their right to religious practice, and report regular harassment by police. Sierra Leone's government continues to refuse to recognise the Rastafarian title to land that the community has used to construct and operate temples.

The Safe Abortion Act of 2015 was sent back to Parliament due to concerns raised by religious leaders. There have been reports of pregnant girls being denied education by being asked to leave the classrooms, and essentially being suspended from school on account of carrying a child.

Meanwhile, Sierra Leone continues to confront challenges with respect to harmful traditional practices, such as forced marriages and female genital mutilation.

Commonwealth Relationship

Sierra Leone joined the Commonwealth in 1961, when British rule ended. It was the African country with the longest tenure as a Commonwealth realm – from 1961-1971. While a Commonwealth realm, the Queen remained Head of State. This link with the monarchy was abolished on the promulgation of the 1971 consultation, when the prime minister became the first president, and Sierra Leone became a republic within the

Commonwealth.

Sierra Leone has the lowest per capita income in the Commonwealth. Its main investment opportunities lie in natural resources, as it is naturally rich in diamonds, gold, bauxite, and rutile.

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