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Revolutionary United Front *Help us provide free content to the world by donating today!*

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The **Revolutionary United Front (RUF)** was a rebel army that fought a failed ten-year insurrection in Sierra Leone, starting in 1991 and ending in 2002. It later developed into a political party, which existed until 2007.

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Creation

The Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone initially coalesced as a group of Sierra Leoneans which led National Patriotic Front of Liberia elements across the border in an attempt to replicate Charles Taylor's earlier success in toppling the Liberian government.^[1]

When it was first formed, the RUF put forward the slogan, "No More Slaves, No More Masters.

Power and Wealth to the People."^[2] While its goal was clearly to overthrow the government of Sierra Leone, the RUF gave little indication of what sort of government would replace it. The group did not advocate Marxism or any similar leftist ideology, nor did it advocate extreme nationalism or Fascism.

It also did not claim to be a force fighting for a certain ethnic group or region.^[3] At one point, during ongoing peace negotiations in 1995, RUF published a pamphlet entitled "Footpaths to Democracy: Toward a New Sierra Leone", which contained some rhetoric references to social justice and pan-Africanism.

The RUF was created by Foday Sankoh, of Temne and Lokko background, and two allies, Abu Kanu and Rashid Mansaray, with substantial assistance from Charles Taylor of Liberia.^[4] At first, the RUF was popular with Sierra Leoneans, many of whom resented a Freetown elite seen as corrupt and looked forward to promised free education and health care and equitable sharing of diamond revenues. However, the RUF developed a reputation internationally for enormous cruelty during its decade-long

Sierra Leone Civil War



Personalities

Charles Taylor - Foday Sankoh
 Hinga Norman - Ahmad Kabbah
 Johnny Paul Koroma
 Valentine Strasser - Solomon Musa

Armed Forces

RUF - SLA - West Side Boys
 Kamajors - Executive Outcomes
 ECOMOG - Sandline International

Attempts at Peace

Lomé Peace Accord - Abidjan Peace Accord
 UNAMSIL - SCSL

Political Groups

SLPP - AFRC - APC

Ethnic Groups

Mende - Temne - Limba - Krio
 See also

Conflict diamond - Mano River
 Freetown - Liberian Civil War

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struggle.^[5]

Coup

Foday Sankoh did not stand by his earlier promises of equitably sharing of diamond revenues and used these funds to buy arms for Charles Taylor and himself.^[6] With the diamond mines under the control of the rebel group, the RUF became singularly focused on protecting its resource base.^[6] Sierra Leone's economy collapsed, with ordinary citizens trapped between the cruelty of RUF troops and starvation. After a coup by the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) in 1997, the RUF and AFRC created a joint junta to control the country before being evicted from the capital by the invasion of a Nigerian-led West African force that reinstated the rule of President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah. The war is estimated to have cost the lives of 200,000 people.^[7]

Child Soldiers

There were many child soldiers in the RUF, up to 23,000 at one point. Most were used for attacks on villages and on guard duty at diamond fields. Today, about 20,000 are still left serving in the military of Sierra Leone. The RUF made extensive use of child soldiers,^[8] using horrific methods to numb their new recruits to barbarity.^[9] Thousands of abducted boys and girls were forced to serve as soldiers or as prostitutes,^[10]^[9] and those chosen to be fighters were sometimes forced to murder their parents.^[11] Guerrillas frequently carved the initials "RUF" on their chests,^[12]^[4]^[13] and officers reportedly rubbed cocaine into open cuts on their troops to make them maniacal and fearless.^[14]^[15]^[5] For entertainment, some soldiers would bet on the sex of an unborn baby and then slice open a woman's womb to determine the winner.^[16]^[17]

Atrocities

The RUF was notorious for severing the limbs of those victims it did not murder, particularly children.^[8] In response to the immediate execution of rebels by government forces, the RUF instead instituted a policy of cutting off the hands of captured soldiers with the intent of sending the message, "You don't hold your weapon against your brother."^[18] Brandishing machetes, RUF rebels amputated the hands, arms, and legs of tens of thousands of Sierra Leoneans.^[18]^[19] The RUF indicated that the reason for these actions was that amputees could no longer mine diamonds, which might be used to support government troops.^[20] The election slogan at that time was that the people 'had power in their hands', so the RUF would hack the hands off to prevent voting.^[20] RUF members are also said to have practiced cannibalism.^[21]^[22]^[19] The government set up a refugee camp where they gathered amputees; the camp was situated next to the international hotels. They also helped fund the camps and gave them food and water.^[23]

Foreign Intervention

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In March 1997, Sankoh fled to Nigeria, where he was put under house arrest, and then imprisoned. From this time until Sankoh's release in 1999, Sam Bockarie performed the task of director of military operations of the RUF. In 1999, an intervention by the USA, the United Kingdom, and other countries as well as the UN resulted in the signing of the Lomé Peace Accord on 7 July 1999. [24] Sankoh was allowed to return under the conditions of the agreement. However fighting again broke out, and the United Nations sent peacekeeping troops in hopes of integrating the RUF into a new national army. This intervention failed as well, and by 2000 they held 500 UN peacekeepers hostage until their release was negotiated by Taylor. The British and Guineans finally sent in a small professional force in 2001. The RUF was routed following several crushing defeats at the hands of the British forces and the revolution ended. Sankoh was captured by a mob and handed to the British where he was indicted for multiple war crimes by a UN-backed court. In 2003 Sankoh died in prison before the trial took place. [5]

Political party

After peace was established, RUF was converted into a political party, the **Revolutionary United Front Party**. As of 2006 general secretary of the party was Jonathan Kposowa. In the May 14, 2002, elections the party won 2.2 % of popular votes and no seats. Its candidate at the presidential elections, Alimamy Pallo Bangura, received 1.7% of the vote. The party received its highest votage in Kailahun, 7.8% in the parliamentary election. [25] In July 2007, RUF merged with the All People's Congress. [26]

Cultural References

Law & Order episode "Blood Money" was heavily mounted around the strife in Sierra Leone and the traffic in conflict diamonds. Most recently, the RUF has been featured in the movies *Blood Diamond* and *Lord of War*. It has also been featured in the book "A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier" by Ishmael Beah. [27]

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Sierra Leone



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Ibrahim Abdullah, Patrick Muana, and David Keen at University College London, 21 October 2005. Full bibliographical information is at Adebayo, p.98.

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External links

- RUF manifesto - *Footpaths to Democracy* (<http://web.archive.org/web/20070614020255/http://www.sierra-leone.org/footpaths.html>)
- The Empire in Africa (<http://www.theempirein africa.com/>)

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