

*Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report
For the Children of Sierra Leone*



Child-Friendly Version
2004

COVER:

Vision of a peaceful Sierra Leone

Drawing by a child during a session for psychosocial support
at an interim care centre in Sierra Leone

BACK COVER PHOTO: © UNICEF Sierra Leone

National Cotton Tree in central Freetown



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Members of the Children's Forum Network at the Congo Cross Bridge, renamed the Peace Bridge, to mark the place where the invasion of Freetown was stopped on 6 January 1999

Acknowledgements

The child-friendly version of our Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report for Sierra Leone is unprecedented. No truth commission in the past has produced such a report. This report is ground breaking in other respects, including the participation of representatives of children's groups in its content, language and design. The Commission hopes that it will be widely distributed, both in Sierra Leone and in other countries.

Children first charged the Commission to prepare a child-friendly report so that the children of Sierra Leone would be able to read and understand it, and others outside Sierra Leone might better comprehend what the children of Sierra Leone experienced during the war. This report is a response to that charge.

The Commission deeply thanks all the children of Sierra Leone who have participated in our processes, either individually or through their respective organizations. These stories and experiences are shared with the wider community in the hope that, through united action, other children might be spared the horrors of war.

This report could not have been written without the support of UNICEF. In addition to helping arrange for the participation of the children of Sierra Leone in the Commission's processes, UNICEF provided for the design and printing of the child-friendly version of the Commission's Report.

The Commission acknowledges the tremendous efforts of a number of people and organizations in producing this report. Saudamini Siegrist, a project officer for UNICEF, was inspirational in mobilizing the human resources needed to compile the report on behalf of the Commission. She worked tirelessly, together with Bert Theuermann, the Child Protection Adviser at the United Nations Peacekeeping Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), and in close collaboration with the Children's Forum Network and the Voice of Children Radio at UNAMSIL. Special thanks go to Miranda Sawyerr for her assistance, together with children from the Children's Forum Network, in the design of the Report. The Commission also thanks all the members of its research department, and Messrs. Ozonnia Ojielo and Howard Varney for their dedication and contribution in producing the child-friendly version of the Commission's Report.

The Commission takes primary responsibility for the contents of the report. While it is addressed mostly to children, the Commission wholeheartedly commends it to all Sierra Leoneans and to members of the world community.

Methodology

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission Act, adopted by the Parliament of Sierra Leone in 2000, specifically mentions the need to give special attention to "the experiences of children within the armed conflict." It further notes that "special procedures" may be necessary to address the needs of particular victims, such as children.

In June 2001, a technical meeting on "Children and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission for Sierra Leone" was convened in Freetown by UNICEF, the National Forum for Human Rights, and the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL). Children who participated in the meeting called for "the production of a simplified version for children" of the final Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) report.

In June 2003, during the thematic hearings on children, the Children's Forum Network (CFN) prepared a submission to the Commission. The CFN submission also called for a child-friendly version of the report, to be "used by teachers and children, including children's organizations such as the CFN, to disseminate the findings and recommendations of the Commission to the young and unborn generations of Sierra Leone, as a measure to prevent recurrence of what happened."

The child-friendly version of the report is an official account of the Commission's findings. The preparation was jointly guided by the Commission, UNICEF and UNAMSIL, with the support of many children of Sierra Leone. The child-friendly report was not written by children and does not attempt to speak for all the children of Sierra Leone but instead tells the story of the war from the children's point of view.

The child-friendly version is based on the full report of the Commission and additional information in the official database, including hundreds of statements given by individual children to the Commission. It also includes testimony given by children in closed hearings, and presentations during the thematic hearings on children conducted on 16-17 June 2003, on the occasion of the 'Day of the African Child'. Formal submissions to the Commission by child protection agencies and others, in particular the submission prepared by the CFN, proved a valuable source of information. Submissions by children and others to the National Vision for Sierra Leone project, sponsored by the Commission, were also consulted, and some excerpts have been quoted.

In addition, during a visit of the Special Representative to the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict to Sierra Leone in February 2003, children from the CFN and the Voice of Children Radio met and expressed their thoughts and feelings about the war in artwork. A number of those drawings by children have been included in this publication.

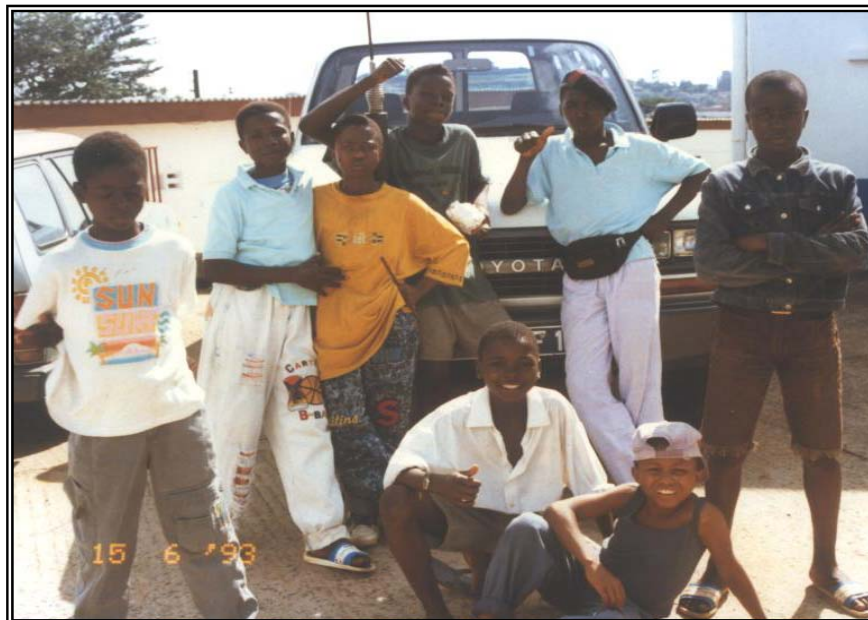
Children contributed throughout the process, helping to give shape to a report that would bring about positive action, for and by children. Children's participation in the drafting process came from three children's networks: the CFN, the Voice of Children Radio and the Children's National Assembly. Over 100 children were involved in the drafting, of whom 15 worked closely with the Commission. Discussions of the child-friendly report, led by children, were also aired on the Voice of Children Radio. During the first-ever Children's National Assembly, held in Freetown in December 2003, meetings were convened to discuss the child-friendly report, which brought children together from all districts around the country. Excerpts from the discussions on the child-friendly report that took place at the Children's National Assembly were broadcast on national television and radio.

The CFN continued to assist with input into the design of the child-friendly report and the development of the dissemination strategy, working in close collaboration with the Commission, and with UNICEF and UNAMSIL.

The child-friendly version of the Commission's report is therefore a culmination of children's involvement and perspective throughout the process, from initial preparation to background research to the preparation of the final text. In addition, the last chapter of the child-friendly version is a menu of activities, created by the children, to outline their role in disseminating the findings and recommendations of the Commission.

The reconciliation process in Sierra Leone demonstrates how children, as active partners in the process, can help break the cycle of violence and re-establish confidence in the rule of law.

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Children in transfer for family tracing and reunification

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Introduction: Remembering the war

There was a very big war in the country of Sierra Leone. It started in 1991 and lasted for 10 long years. Everyone in the country suffered, and many people - including many children - lost their lives. Many who survived the war lost their loved ones, their homes and their belongings. Everywhere there was grief, and children were crying.

"Let us sign a peace agreement," the people said, "Together we can create a better and more peaceful future."

All the people of the country came together and agreed to live in peace. Nobody wanted another war, especially the children. But how could they make sure that the war would not return? "We will create a Truth and Reconciliation Commission," the people said.

"What is a Truth and Reconciliation Commission and what will it do?" the children asked.

The wise men and women of Sierra Leone answered, "The Truth and Reconciliation Commission is a group of people who will come together to learn the truth about the war in Sierra Leone. Some will come from other countries but mostly they will come from Sierra Leone. They will travel to villages and

visit people in all the districts of the country.

"They will speak to people everywhere, including children, and they will collect hundreds and thousands of stories about what happened. The people who suffered, and those who caused suffering, will tell their stories. The stories will be collected, and together they will become part of the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission."

"The Truth and Reconciliation Commission is a group of people who will come together to learn the truth about the war in Sierra Leone".

"We do not understand," the children said.

One of the wise men said, "If the children do not understand, it would not be proper to continue. They have suffered most during the war and they are the future of our country."

"I will explain, so that they will understand," said one of the wise women.

She gathered the children around her and began to explain. "Each person's story is part of the truth," she said. "Each story is like a piece of a very large puzzle. Nobody can tell the truth alone. At first, when you collect the stories from many different people, it is only a jumble of separate pieces.

But when the pieces are arranged together and put into place, then the whole picture can be seen. Do you understand?" she asked.

"Yes," the children said.

She continued, "Just imagine that every one of us carries in our pocket one small treasure. Each treasure is a special size and shape and colour. It might be a memory or a piece of cloth or a fallen star. Or it might be the fragment of a broken heart. That is our very own story to tell. It will be most precious, and it may be very painful to recall.

"Only when we collect the stories together will we begin to see the whole truth, which is as vast and infinite as the night sky. If we study the truth very carefully, we will come to understand each other, and we will come to understand what happened in our country."

"How will all these stories prevent another war?" the children asked.

The wise woman said, "Once the stories are all collected together in one place - in one book - then we will share the book for everyone to read. We will be able to understand what happened and what went wrong. We will learn from the story how to make sure that the war never happens again."

The children felt sad, and they began to cry. "What will happen to the people who tell their stories?" they asked.

"They may learn to forgive each other," the wise woman said. "When all has been told, we will work together to repair the

wrong and to build a just and fair future. Together we will create a vision for a peaceful Sierra Leone."

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"But wait," the children said. "Don't forget about us. We don't want to be left out. We want to tell our stories too. We want our stories about the war to become part of the future of our country," they said.

"Yes," the wise woman said. "We will not and cannot forget you! We have made a special place in this book for the children of Sierra Leone. We will collect many stories from you. And something more, we will make a very special book just for children so that you will understand what happened to you, and you will not forget that the war took place. That way you may also learn to forgive and you will promise never ever to go to war again. You will always uphold peace in your land."

The children nodded to show that they understood and, one by one, they began to tell their stories.

Chapter One: How did it happen?

We are the children of Sierra Leone. The war was targeted against us, our families and our communities. It was a brutal conflict, which we did nothing to cause, but we suffered terribly because of it.

Every child in this country has a story to tell - a heartbreaking one. Unfortunately only a handful of these stories have been told and made known to the world. The memories continue to weigh on our minds and hearts. We, the children of Sierra Leone, witnessed the worst possible human ruthlessness and terror.

Children of this country were forced to fight for a cause we could not understand. We were drugged and made to kill and destroy our brothers and sisters and our mothers and fathers. We were beaten, amputated and used as sex slaves. This was a wretched display of inhuman and immoral actions by those who were supposed to be protecting us. Our hands, which were meant to be used freely for play and schoolwork, were used instead, by force, to burn, kill and destroy.

We do not believe this is the end of our story. Rather, it is the beginning. We, who survived the war, are determined to go forward. We will look to a new future and we ourselves will help build the road to peace.

The country of Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone is a beautiful country in West Africa, with lush green hills and bush and ocean beaches. Our ancestors came from different tribes and traditions. Altogether there are 17 ethnic groups. The groups are the Creole, in the Western Area, the Mende, in the south and east, Kono in the east, and the Temne and the Limba in the north.

List of Ethnic Groups

Creole	Mandingo
Fula	Mende
Gola	Sape
Kissi	Sherbro
Kono	Susu
Korando	Themne
Krim	Vai
Limba	Yalunka
Loko	

The name "Sierra Leone" comes from the Portuguese language and means "mountains with lions". Although there are no lions in Sierra Leone, the beautiful name was adopted for the country because of the lion-shaped mountains on the Peninsula, which were admired by the Portuguese.

The Portuguese arrived by ship in the mid-15th century, but the land was later seized by the British Empire. The Western Area of Sierra Leone was colonised by the British in 1808, and in 1896 the rest of the country came under British control.

The people of Sierra Leone always wanted their independence but the end of colonial rule did not come until after the Second World War. In 1947, following many years of hardship, the territories of Sierra Leone were joined together and in 1961 these territories became one independent country.

Today the total number of people living in Sierra Leone is 5.4 million. The

capital city is Freetown, with a population of about 1.5 million. In the centre of Freetown is a large cotton tree, with a massive trunk and many branches reaching to the sky. The cotton tree has come to symbolise the strength, unity and freedom that inspired our ancestors.

About two thirds of the people in Sierra Leone are subsistence farmers. They raise rice, cassava and potatoes, as well as cash crops such as cocoa and coffee. The most important natural resource is diamonds, which are found mainly in the Eastern Province. The diamonds are precious and valuable and could become a source of income for social improvements.



Political map of Sierra Leone

Unfortunately the diamonds have not benefited the people of Sierra Leone. The diamonds have been under the control of traders from other countries and corrupt government officials.

The story of the war

After independence there was peace in Sierra Leone, but there were also problems. The people could not agree on what was best for the country. By the 1970s, a small group of people controlled the government and made all the decisions. They did not have the best interests of children at heart. Many important needs - such as schooling, health care, clean water and safe roads - were neglected.

Because of these problems the people were poor and unhappy. They saw injustice all around them. Some of them - especially the youth - began to speak together and organise, with the idea that they would start a revolution and create a fair and just society.

They travelled to other countries - to the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya and later to Liberia - where they hoped to find support. Their ideas became confused, and they turned more and more violent. A group of fighters emerged. They called themselves the Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone - or the 'RUF'. The leader of these rebel forces was Foday Sankoh. In Liberia, members of the RUF joined forces with Liberian fighters under the command of Charles Taylor. In March and April of 1991, they launched an attack on the Kailahun District and the Pujehun District of Sierra Leone.

What began as a quest for justice became a terrible and brutal conquest, slaughtering innocent civilians. The rebel forces targeted children for recruitment and forced them into battle.

The war continued to rage in the east and south of the country. Diamonds did not cause the war but they helped pay for the guns and other expenses of war. The fighting forces struggled to control the diamond mines, and many of them used children to wage their battles and to search for gems - or "blood diamonds" as they were called.



Child's drawing of war and peace
in Sierra Leone

In 1992, spurred by the chaos of the war, the Sierra Leonean army overthrew the Government and took control as the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC). During the NPRC rule, corruption and fighting continued.

In 1996, elections were scheduled but without the support of the army or the rebels. People cast their ballot with a thumbprint and, in order to prevent the people from voting, a brutal campaign of amputation was waged. Not only hands but arms and legs were cut off by rebel forces. It was a period of unspeakable horror.

Villages were unprotected from attack, and so the local communities formed armed groups, which became known as the Civil Defence Forces or CDF. During 1996 and 1997 they gained government support.

Peace talks were first held in Abidjan in November 1996 but both sides violated the ceasefire, and so no progress was made.

In 1997, the government was overthrown a second time by the military. Those forces formed the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) but their rule was not accepted by the people and caused more misery.

The AFRC joined with the RUF and found a common enemy in the CDF forces and a small number of loyal government forces. Greater brutality was unleashed. Girls were targeted for rape by all sides, and even young children had limbs amputated.

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Sierra Leonean children at an event to mark the launch of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission proceedings

To the great despair of the innocent civilians and children, the war had lost all reason and become a campaign of destruction and madness. People were massacred, homes burned, properties looted. No one knew any more what the war was about.

In 1998, ECOMOG (the Monitoring Observer Group of the Economic Community of West African States) and the Allied Forces drove the RUF and the AFRC out of Freetown. But in

January 1999, the rebel forces attacked Freetown and burned and looted many parts of the city.

ECOMOG fought to regain control of Freetown. Their efforts succeeded, and in 1999 a peace agreement was negotiated and signed in Lomé (Togo). This agreement became known as the Lomé Peace Accord. In 1999 and 2000 peacekeeping troops arrived under the flag of the United Nations. Everyone thought the war was over but attacks continued. In the Provinces 500 United Nations soldiers were taken hostage.

By the time the end of the war was officially declared, on 18 January 2002, thousands and thousands of people had lost their lives, their families, their homes and all their possessions.

The children of Sierra Leone were targeted for attack and suffered unimaginable violations. Many were brutally killed, mutilated and raped.

Now we, the children, look back at the wreckage. We have lost so many dear family and friends. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission is helping record our experiences and our memories so that we can try to understand what happened and the horrors of war can be put into the past.

We must learn to make sense out of our survival, in order to transform our lives and create a new dream for the future.



Child's drawing of village attacked by rebels

Chapter Two: What is the Truth and Reconciliation Commission?

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Sierra Leone was created to give everyone a chance to tell what happened during the war, to record a full and impartial history, and recommend specific steps that should be taken to help people recover.

By recording the experiences of the war, the report of the Commission can create a common bond and bring the people of Sierra Leone together.

Once these stories are written down, the whole country can begin to understand how to prevent war from happening ever again. People in other countries will also gain from the wisdom and insight of the peace-loving people of Sierra Leone.

The final report of the Commission is long and complicated. It has seven volumes and each volume has several chapters. Many people worked very hard for more than a year to prepare it.

But the purpose of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission - to tell the stories of the war and to bring peace and reconciliation to the country - cannot succeed without the help of children.

Over the last 30 years, there have been more than 25 truth commissions in different countries around the world. Each truth commission has recorded the

misery and sorrow of oppression and war. The Commission in Sierra Leone has added a new dimension to these efforts. Never before have children played such an important role in the truth and reconciliation process.

One reason that children have been so involved is that they were deliberately targeted and suffered so much during the war.

According to submissions to the Commission, some 7,000 children were forced to join armed groups or forces, and thousands more were targeted for abduction, rape, murder and mutilation. Schools and hospitals were destroyed. Villages and homes were burned. Children witnessed these atrocities.

That is why the Commission has made a special effort to speak with children and make sure their stories become a part of this report.

How was the Truth and Reconciliation Commission created?

When the peace agreement was signed in Lomé, in 1999, the people of Sierra Leone decided to create a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. But then the war started again.

When the war finally ended, in January 2002, everyone agreed that a Truth and Reconciliation Commission was needed. The people wanted a full and impartial record of the war. They wanted to tell their stories, so that the truth would be known and everyone could settle their differences and agree on how to bring peace to the country.

The official report of the Commission includes recommendations to the government and to others in the country, and to the international community. The recommendations call for the reform of government institutions and an end to corruption.

Many recommendations advise on how to improve the living conditions of people and communities particularly affected by the conflict, to ease their sense of injustice and give them more reason to look to the future and forgive the sufferings of the past.

The recommendations also advise on specific help or "reparations" for the people who suffered most and lost most during the war. Although what happened cannot be undone, these steps will help people recover, and create a more stable society for the future.

When the Parliament adopted the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Act in 2000, they made sure that the children of Sierra Leone were not forgotten. They drafted special rules to make sure that children's stories would be included in the Commission's report.

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Event in Freetown marking the launch of the Truth and Reconciliation proceedings

How is the Special Court for Sierra Leone different from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission?

The Special Court for Sierra Leone was created in 2002 to bring to justice those most responsible for crimes committed during the war.

The Special Court is a court with prosecutors, defence lawyers and judges, who make decisions about the innocence or guilt of specific persons accused of crimes. The Court also decides on the punishment for those who are found guilty.

Although the Special Court has the authority to prosecute anyone over 15 years of age, the Head Prosecutor of the Special Court decided very early that children under 18 years of age would not be prosecuted by the Special Court.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission does not judge the innocence or guilt of anyone. It does not give out punishment.

The job of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is to record a full and impartial history of the war. This helps people understand what happened during the war and who was responsible.

The Commission also makes recommendations to help people recover, reconcile their differences, rebuild their lives and society, and prevent future wars from occurring.

How did the Truth and Reconciliation Commission collect information about the war?

The methods used by the Commission to collect information about the war included statement taking, closed and public hearings, expert submissions, and ongoing research and investigation. Children participated in all these activities.

Statements were taken over four months, from December 2002 to March 2003. The Commission had 'statement takers' in all the districts of Sierra Leone, and they collected testimonies from as many people as possible. Over 300 children gave statements.

On the basis of their statements, some children were invited to testify in hearings that the Commission held in all the districts. The hearings that children participated in were closed to the public and strictly confidential.

The hearings, both public and private, continued over five months, from April to August 2003.

There were also thematic hearings in Freetown. For two days, beginning on 16 June, the Day of the African Child, and continuing through 17 June, thematic hearings focused on children. Child representatives and child protection agencies and organizations spoke directly to the Commission, giving advice on what should be done to help the children of Sierra Leone.

Many prepared written submissions. Altogether there were 11 submissions to the Commission focused on children, including one prepared by the Children's Forum Network and one by the Muloma Kids Club from Kailahun.

Throughout the process, the research and investigation team travelled around the country to speak with people, ask questions and gather more information about the war.

How are children involved in the Commission's report?

In June 2001, there was a meeting in Freetown to plan how the children of Sierra Leone would take part in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Experts came from UNICEF and UNAMSIL and from the National Forum for Human Rights. Others came from faraway countries. They also invited children to join the meeting. The children who participated wrote down

ideas and also gave a list of recommendations so that the experts would not forget to pay special attention to the best interests of children.

After the meeting in Freetown, the Commission spoke with UNICEF and the child protection agencies, and they came to an agreement about how children would be involved in the truth and reconciliation process.

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Child's drawing of a village under attack

The experts agreed that a key task of the Commission was to create a historical record of what happened to children during the war, and to make recommendations for improving the situation of children in the future.

It was decided that all children would be treated as witnesses before the Commission, including those who were forced to take part in the war. In this way, children would not be separated into groups of victims or perpetrators.

The Commissioners, together with child protection agencies, agreed that children's voices would be included in the official report through:

- Statement giving by children;
- Special closed hearings for children;
- Public thematic hearings on children;
- Formal submissions by child protection agencies and others, including the Children's Forum Network;
- Research and investigations carried out by the Commission;
- A section dedicated to children in the final report.

They took special care to make sure that children would be protected when the time came to record our stories.

The experts agreed that:

- The participation of children would be guided by the "best interests of the child". All children should be treated with dignity and respect, and every child should be protected from further harm.
- All participation of children would be voluntary. This means that children

and their guardians would decide for themselves whether to give a statement. No child would be forced to speak to the Commission.

- The safety and security of child statement givers would have first priority. Children would only give statements in a safe and child-friendly place.
- The psychosocial health of child statement givers would be protected, including special care to protect their physical, spiritual and psychological well-being.
- Children's names and identities, and everything the children told the Commission, would be strictly confidential. This means that children's privacy would be guaranteed. There is and will be no sharing of information outside the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, including with the Special Court.
- Children could choose to give their statement in the presence of a social worker they know and trust. They could also bring someone from their family. Girls would be interviewed only by female statement takers.

In addition, children should understand why they were invited to speak with the Commission and how their stories would contribute to the report. It was agreed that special care and attention should be given to the experiences of girls.

These guidelines were intended to build a close working relationship between

the Commission's staff and child protection agencies.

When the time came to record the statements of children many obstacles had to be overcome. But, in all cases, the best interests of the child remained the first priority.

What is a child-friendly truth and reconciliation report?

The child-friendly version of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report is a shorter and simpler version that children can read and understand.

The experts and children who met in Freetown in June 2001 to plan how children would take part in the truth and reconciliation process first recommended that the Commission

prepare a simplified version of the final report for children.

The submission by the Children's Forum Network to the Commission made a similar recommendation. The CFN asked for a child-friendly version of the report so that children could read and understand it, "as a measure to prevent recurrence of what happened."

The Commission agreed, and it was decided that a child-friendly version of the report would be prepared - with our help!

The child-friendly report will make it possible for children everywhere in the country to read about what happened during the war - and help us become the child guardians of peace in our country.

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Children of Sierra Leone reaching out for peace

Chapter Three: *What happened to us?*

How can we tell what happened to us? There are no words to describe what we have witnessed. What we saw, what we heard, what we did, and how it changed our lives, is beyond measure. We were murdered, raped, amputated, tortured, mutilated, beaten, enslaved and forced to commit terrible crimes.

Everyone talks about "the impact of war on children." But how do you measure the impact of war? Who suffers the greater horror, the child who is violated, or the child who is forced to become a perpetrator? We are the victim, the perpetrator and the witness, all at once.

If we speak, who will understand us? And yet we cannot and will not remain silent. The war has taught us the meaning of injustice, and we know that the children of Sierra Leone have rights. It is our right to speak up, to try and find the words to tell our story.

Our rights, as children, are clearly stated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This Convention is an international treaty that has been ratified by Sierra Leone and all but two countries in the world. It belongs to us. It is the promise that countries make to protect children and ensure that we have the best possible start in life. Article 38 of the Convention obligates States Parties to "take all feasible measures to ensure protection and care

of children who are affected by an armed conflict."

But we were not protected. We witnessed the destruction of our lives and the lives of everyone around us - our country, our communities and our families. Our culture and traditions which we hold dear were deliberately attacked. Our parents and teachers and others who tried to protect us were powerless. The world was trampled before our eyes.

It is our responsibility to speak and bear witness. Because we are the ones who survived, we are the voice of our sisters and brothers who were murdered in the war. It is our burden and our blessing to speak for them. But the story we have to tell is not a story for children. It is not 'child-friendly'.

Still, we are children and we will not surrender our childhood to war. We are strong enough to stop the war. That is what we believe.

Listen to us. We are not tomorrow's generation. We are the generation of today. The events of yesterday have become part of who we are. Like someone waking up after a long nightmare, we are stepping out in the morning to find our place in the world, to look for the way forward. And if even the road has been destroyed, then, with our footsteps, thousands and thousands of us will build a new road into the future.

We begin always with a prayer. We pray on behalf of all the children of Sierra Leone. We pray with each other and for each other. And our prayer is also a

promise, a solemn vow. The children of Sierra Leone will not forget. Together we will build new hope for a peaceful future in our country.

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Meeting of Children's Forum Network on participation in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Abduction, forced recruitment and the use of children as soldiers

During the war, children were targeted for recruitment by every armed group, paramilitary group and military force. We were taken from our homes, from our villages, torn away from our families, and forced to kill.

The Commission records that children as young as one year old were abducted. In some cases children only five years old were captured and trained to fight.

Some of the commanders who captured us had war names, like 'Show No Mercy', 'Pay Yourself' and 'Nothing' Spoilt'.

One boy was abducted at the age of eight and forced to watch his parents mutilated and killed. Then he was drugged until he didn't know what he was doing and ordered to "wash" - or kill - his remaining family members. He was taken as a fighter in the Revolutionary United Front until he was later captured by the Sierra Leonean army and again recruited by force into its ranks.

According to submissions to the Commission, the estimated number of children who were abducted and forced to fight in the war up numbered up to 10,000. The children fought on all sides, with the RUF, the AFRC, the CDF and the RSLAF (the Sierra Leonean army). An equal number of children were abducted for sexual slavery and forced labour.

Why were we targeted? Because we were powerless and easy to manipulate; because we were frightened and did as we were told; because we were cheap and easy to feed; because we were vulnerable; because we were children; and because they didn't care if we lived or died.

During the war, the smallest among us were often placed closest to the battle because the smallest were said to be the most fearless. Very often we were injected with drugs or given alcohol to deaden our fear and take away our thoughts.

The Commission found that at least half the children who were drugged by the fighting forces were under the age of 13. One small boy told the Commission, "I was abducted in Makeni, injected with cocaine and sent for training....

After the training, I was sent on a mission to attack the Guinean troops."

Another child testified, "Before I was captured, the rebels shot my father and mother in front of me, and having killed them, one of the commandos grabbed me by the throat, tied both of my hands, cut parts of my body with a blade and placed cocaine in it. I had no option but to join them because I no longer had parents."

We were made to loot properties and burn houses. Many of us were forced to kill or rape our own family members, in order to ruin our moral sense and destroy our identity and our family ties.

Once captured, we were treated like slaves. We carried heavy loads and walked long distances at gunpoint. Many of us died. If we tried to escape we were tortured or put to death.

Some of us were branded with scars that spelled the letters of the armed group that enslaved us. One child who testified to the Commission stated, "After we had been captured and trained, they forced us to take up guns and we attacked several villages.... All those who tried to run away were caught and labelled RUF with knives, blades or sharp sticks."

The brand on the children's bodies prevented them from escaping. If they did manage to run away and were found by any other group, they would immediately be killed. Even after the war, some children were unable to go home because of the scars. They were ashamed and afraid because they had been branded and were therefore

accused of the deeds committed by the fighting forces. They were banished from their families and their former happy life. One child told the Commission; "...I was at the age of 10 when rebels captured me...one day a friend reported me to our boss commander that I wanted to run...I was called, interrogated, threatened and he decided to mark RUF on my chest with a razor blade... he purposely marked me... this mark on my chest is a stigma on my body and life."

"After we had been captured and trained, they forced us to take up guns and we attacked several villages.... All those who tried to run away were caught and labelled RUF with knives, blades or sharp sticks."

Many of us spent years under these harsh and brutal conditions. We lost our idea of ourselves, our family and our community.

Recruiting children is wrong. It is also against the law.

The recruitment or use of children under 15 in armed conflict is a war crime, forbidden by international law. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1989, and the 1977 Additional Protocols to the four

Geneva Conventions of 1949 outlaw the recruitment or use of children under 15 years of age in hostilities. The Rome Statute establishing the International Criminal Court explicitly defines the recruitment or use of children under 15 in hostilities as a war crime.

The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict entered into force on 12 February 2002 and has been ratified by Sierra Leone. It raises the minimum age for direct participation in wartime hostilities to age 18.

“Recruiting children is wrong. It is also against the law.”

All of these international treaties agree that children should not be used to fight in adult wars.

Abduction and sexual slavery

How many girls were captured and raped by the fighting forces? There is no exact figure. Thousands were targeted. Most were raped repeatedly, or gang-raped.

According to the Commission, 50 per cent of sexual slaves whose ages were documented were 15 years or under at the time of abduction. There are reports of girls as young as seven years old being abducted and forced into sexual slavery. Many of the girls bled to death.

We do not even want to tell about these crimes. Many of us who lived through that horror cannot bear to talk about it. We don't want to remember. It is too terrible for you to imagine. Even we cannot imagine how these things happened to us.

Rape, sexual slavery and other forms of sexual violence against girls were organised and widespread. Many of the girls were forced to become so-called 'bush wives' of commanders. Others were locked in a room and used by the fighters. Many became pregnant and gave birth to children when they were, themselves, still children.

The girls who survived that trauma suffered irreparable harm. Physically their bodies were scarred or mutilated. Others were infected with sexually transmitted infections. Some who became pregnant were raped or beaten until they miscarried.

When the war ended these girls had nowhere to go. They were afraid to go home, or their homes were destroyed. Most of them did not receive any help or benefits. They had nowhere to turn.

Rape as a weapon of war is a war crime and a crime against humanity. Those who commit such acts are despised. The crime of sexual violence is an attack against the individual and also an attack against family, against community and against humanity. It destroys our lives and our hopes. It destroys our childhood.

Murders and massacres

The story is not over. Children, families and entire villages were also victims of mass murder. These brutal acts were carried out ruthlessly and without sense or explanation. It was as if life had no meaning and no value.

The Commission learned of one instance, in 1999, when rebels lined up five children from one family. When the father begged the fighters to spare his children they murdered him in cold blood. Then they executed every one of the children. How many times did this happen? How many children were killed without mercy?

Young babies were not spared in this indiscriminate madness. Babies only a few months old were beaten to death for no reason. This is the horror of war, when human beings turn into killers.

Many children were witnesses to these crimes and were also drugged and forced to act in ways that were inhuman. A child told the Commission, "When I was with [...], when he gave me the gun, the first person I killed was a friend, [...]. I also killed six other people... he gave me cocaine regularly... in the bush I was called 'Drink Blood' because after killing people Colonel Jabbie would put some black substance in it and I would drink it..." The memory of these atrocities is still with us. It leaves a scar of terror inside us.



Child's image of war

Amputation and torture

Who can think of the war in Sierra Leone without seeing the victims of amputation? But the act, itself, is unthinkable. Arms and legs were brutally cut off and people were mutilated. This hideous crime left a mark on our country that we cannot erase. It must protect us from such madness in the future.

The children of Sierra Leone were not spared. Our limbs were also cut off and, although many bled to death, others survived as evidence of such cruelty. A child, only eight months old, suffered amputation.

One 12-year-old girl spoke to the Commission during the closed hearings in Makeni. She said, "At about 2 a.m. the rebels attacked our town... They lined up a number of people, sent for a mortar and asked each of us to put our hand and they cut them off... I placed my right hand and it was chopped off."

The torture that was inflicted on us cannot even be described. There are no words to describe it.

Forced child labour

The Sierra Leone diamond mines are well known because the so-called "blood diamonds" helped pay for the machinery of the war. It is another symptom of the insanity of war that we children of Sierra Leone were forced to labour in the diamond mines and retrieve these terrible gems that would become the source of our suffering.

There are stories of unbearable misery told by the children who worked in the diamond mines. If children were exhausted and stumbled in the mines, then they might pay for it with their life. That is how cheap our lives became. Many children, some of them former child soldiers, continued in this toil long after the war.

Children who lost their parents and families also turned to mining in an effort to survive. Others struggled to survive, living in the street. The dignity of life was left in ruins. One nine-year-old boy said that he was ashamed and embarrassed to beg in the street but he had no other means of survival.

We know that children have a right to survival, but what about the children of Sierra Leone? Even our own parents, in their desperation, have sent us out on the street to beg. This injustice turns into an even greater poverty of spirit.

Separation and displacement

One 12-year-old boy's testimony to the Commission tells what happened to him when his village was attacked. "Everyone was running helter-skelter. It was as if the world was coming to an end. I only heard my parents shouting my name but could not see them and neither could they see me. We went our different ways and that was the last time I ever heard the sweet voices of Mama and Pappa."

After this heartbreak - what he called the "great separation" - life became extremely difficult for this boy. He entered a camp for displaced persons

and described the painful experiences that he endured.

Many of us know a similar fate. We once lived in a home with a loving family but now that former life is lost. We know of one girl in the Moyamba District who was separated from her parents when she was only five. The fear and grief broke her heart. Two weeks later she died.

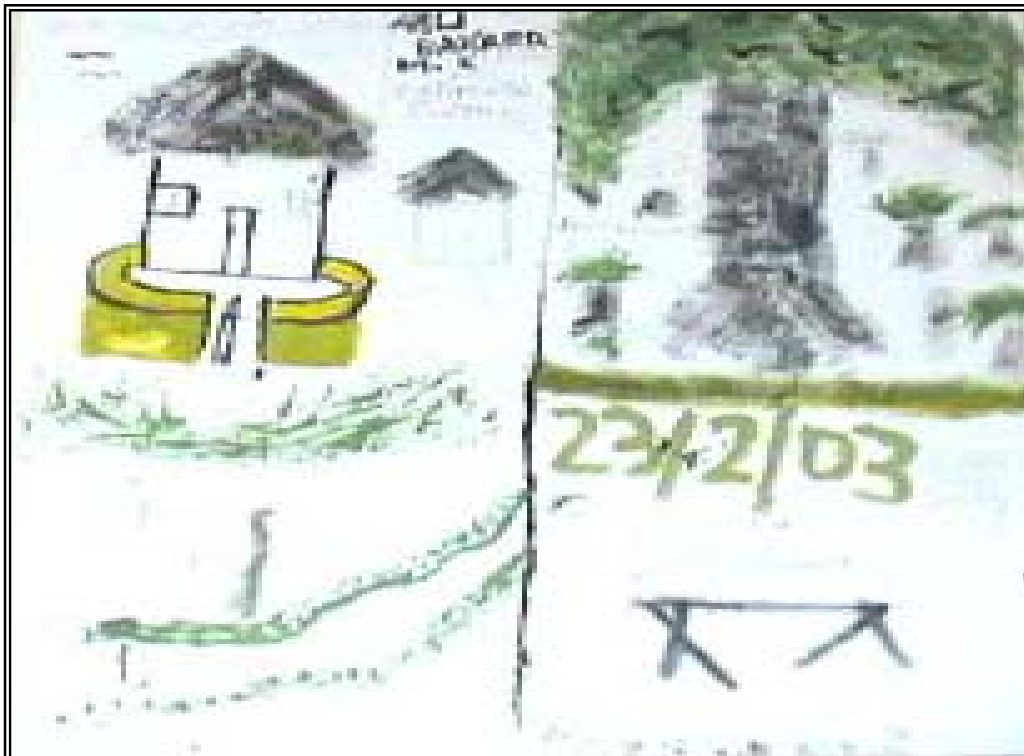
Others have spent their childhood in so-called temporary camps, where families who have lost their home and fled their village, seek refuge. But instead of safety we have found hunger and exploitation. Some of us were sexually abused and exploited in the camps.

The Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs (MSWGCA) reported to the Commission that over

15,000 children suffered separation during the 10-year war. Many children fled across national borders to other West African countries such as Côte d'Ivoire, the Gambia, Guinea, Liberia and Nigeria. Many more fled to neighbouring provinces or chiefdoms inside the country.

Some of us, who were separated from our families at the age of five or six, are not able to identify ourselves. We do not know the name of our village; we cannot remember our mother's face. As far back as we can remember there has been only war.

These are the stories of our childhood. We are not trying to make others feel sorry for us - we don't want sympathy. But we do need help to recover and to search for our identity. We need to find out who we are and what we can become.



Child's drawing of home

*The children's vision for the future
of Sierra Leone*

*Many children sent their ideas to
the National Vision project in the
form of poems, songs, paintings
and drawings. This is what some
of us had to say:*

*Peace Love and Unity
This is what we want
in Sierra Leone
With Love and Unity
Join hands together
Let's join our hands
For Peace today*

*I heard the cry of
'Salone Pikin' been conscripted
'Salone Pikin' raped, killed
Were they not forced
to drink in human skulls?
Oh 'Salone Pikin'
Where is your future?
Sweet Salone*

*Now I can see
the future clearly
One Salone
'Salone Pikin' disarmed,
'Salone Pikin' now a doctor
'Salone pikin' save lives*

*Oh Sierra Leone, My lovely country.
A country of Blessing from our
heavenly Father
A country with natural beauty.
When I imagine how I will like my
country
To be, my heart leaps with joy.
I see a beautiful country with
skyscrapers
That disappears in the cloud.
A country with twenty four hours
electricity and water supply
A renewed country where justice
prevails in every corner of the
country.
A country where teachers are paid
on time.
A country with nice and beautiful
parks where children can play.
A violence- and drug-free country,
A country where corruption is our
greatest enemy.
And, above all, a peaceful and God
fearing country.
With all this good things plus our
natural resources*

*I think Sierra Leone will be the best
country in Africa.*

SONG: STOP CORRUPTION

We get for stopan
 We get for stopan
 We getfor stop corruption
 Na this world

We get for stopan
 We get for stopan
 We getfor stop
 Sierra Leone corruption

We get for stopan
 Parents and guardians
 Brothers and sisters
 Ministers and elders
 Teachers and students

Am here pleading to you
 To stop corruption
 So that our country can get
 Stand for future

THE PEACE

I'm a student and I would like to describe the kind of society in which I will like to live. As a student I will like to live in a society not only free from all armed conflict, but also a society which is free from all corrupt practices and greed. Because corruption is an enemy of progress and leads to the underdevelopment of a nation. I am convinced that the war in Sierra Leone was due to selfishness, mismanagement, and misplacement of priorities. I wish every Sierra Leonean will love another and forget about the past. As the Bible says, love your neighbour as yourself. I believe if we all have love and concern for each other, there will be no more fighting and killing and by so doing we create a Just Fairer World and this is the kind of society in which I will like to live.

P = People's

E = Embrace

A = After

C = Conflict

E = Everywhere

Peace is a never-ending process. It cannot ignore our differences or overlook our common interest

It requires us to work and live together, as no future without forgiveness and we will surely get to our destination if we join hands



*Children's drawings
of a peaceful
Sierra Leone*



Chapter Four: What are we doing now?

At first, when the war ended, we didn't know where to go or how to begin. We couldn't find our families or our villages and we were afraid to return. We didn't want to look back at what we had lost. We didn't want to see the future.

Going home

Many of us were brought to camps for displaced people, and we also suffered there. We had nothing. Our desperation was used as a tool by some of those who were supposed to take care of us. We were exploited for sex and trafficked to other countries. Some of us died of neglect, violence and sexually transmitted infections.

The demobilization programme started in 1998. Soon after, Freetown was attacked by AFRC and RUF forces. It is estimated that more than 4,000 children were abducted during the attack on Freetown, some for the second time. We tried to escape but there was no safe place for us.

Finally, in January 2002, the war came to an end. There were thousands of us, without any hope of finding our families. The National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration that was set up in 1998 began to work at full strength.

The first step was to disarm the fighters. A total of 72,490 combatants were registered. Of that number, 6,774 were children. Children who did not have weapons but were members of the fighting forces were also included in the programme.

The second step was to transfer those of us who were registered as former child soldiers to civilian care or Interim Care Centres. That was called demobilization. Then the Family Tracing and Reintegration programme began.

Every effort was made to reunite children in the demobilization programme with families and communities. If no family member could be found, then a foster family was chosen to care for each child.

In addition, education and skills training were provided to help us find a place again in society. That is the process of reintegration.

Family tracing, reunification and reintegration take time. The reintegration will continue for many years.

Health and recovery

The war was over but inside our hearts and minds the war still raged. We were afraid, and our memories came to haunt us. Some of us couldn't sleep. We had nightmares and were unable to speak. We fought, we felt anxious and we couldn't concentrate.

Slowly these problems began to go away. Child Protection Advisers spoke to us

and helped us. They searched for our families and relatives.

When we met again with our loved ones we were overwhelmed with emotion. We asked for forgiveness and we tried to forgive ourselves and each other.

Going back to school

We wanted to go back to school. That was our wish, our dream and our prayer. Children all over the world go to school and learn and play and dream of the future. The war took that away from us.

This desire to go to school still burns in our hearts. It is our hope for the future.

The Commission asked the children of Sierra Leone what impact the war had had on their lives and what we had lost. The story of each child is unique but our stories repeat the same losses.

Over and over again we told how we had lost our families, our homes and our education.

Many of us have returned to school. But it hasn't been easy. Most of the schools in Sierra Leone were damaged or destroyed during the war, and everything was looted.

But the biggest problem was returning to a life that didn't exist any more. Those of us who were abducted or forced to fight had to face the bad feelings of our families, our friends and our communities. Some of them called us "rebel pikin" or "soja pikin", meaning "rebel children" or "child soldier". They didn't trust us to behave.

Sometimes we didn't behave. We had been taught to use violence. We didn't remember how to respect others or show kindness. No one seemed to understand the terrible shame and sadness that possessed us.



Girls' education is a priority in the national recovery process

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We were accustomed to abuse and violence. We didn't know that it is wrong for adults to beat and abuse children. That is why the Commission has recommended that corporal punishment be prohibited by law, to help teach children not to use physical force and violence to settle disputes, or as a means of discipline.

Gradually we learned how to trust ourselves and each other. Once we left the Interim Care Centres and returned to our families, communities and schools, we could begin to make friends.

The government joined together with UNICEF and other child protection agencies, and they made special arrangements so that we could go back to school. This resulted in the Community Education and Investment Programme (CEIP). Textbooks, pens, pencils and desks were provided by CEIP to the schools that agreed to receive us into their classrooms. We did not have to pay school fees.

CEIP schools include special lessons in healing, peace and child rights. We learn about health care and how to protect ourselves against HIV/AIDS and other diseases. The schools were also given footballs and volleyballs so that we could play again.

But some of us had missed too many years of school and forgotten what we had learned before the war. We couldn't go back to study again with the little children in the first class. We needed to catch up somehow.

The government met with UNICEF and other child protection agencies and

they created a new school curriculum to help us. They named it CREPS or Complementary Rapid Education for Primary Schools. By studying very hard we could complete six years of school in three years. About 30,000 of us have enrolled in CREPS.

Vocational training and employment

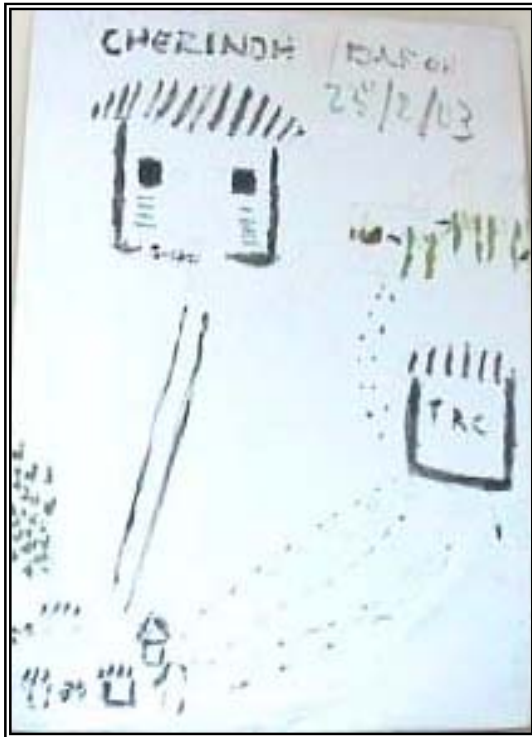
It was too difficult for some of us to return to our studies, especially older children. We didn't feel we belonged in school any more.

We needed to learn a skill and find a job. We are learning carpentry, auto mechanics, masonry, tailoring, baking, *gara* tie-dyeing and hairdressing. But jobs are hard to find.

Not all were eligible or able to benefit from the reintegration programme. Some were left out, or were afraid to come forward, or simply didn't know where to turn for help. Most girls who were abducted into the fighting forces were not considered child combatants and so were not eligible for reintegration benefits. Many remained under the control of their commanders. Many have been forgotten and are living on the street, struggling day by day to survive.

During the war, children in the eastern districts of Kono and Kailahun were forced to mine for diamonds. These children were abducted and worked as slaves for fighting forces but were not recognised as child soldiers, and so did not receive benefits. This problem still needs to be solved.

Very slowly we are finding a place once again in our communities. We are trying to learn new skills so that we can help rebuild our country. We are trying to trust others and be trustworthy, and regain confidence in ourselves.



Drawing by child in interim care centre

Help for amputees

More than 1,600 people were cruelly amputated during the war and survived, including hundreds of children. But twice that number did not survive. They bled to death.

Efforts have been made to provide expert medical care for victims of amputation but many have not benefited. Wheelchairs, crutches and artificial limbs are desperately needed to help these people regain a place in their communities. They also need help with housing and job training.

For children the difficulty is increased because as our bodies grow we need additional medical care to fit artificial limbs and treat other medical complications. Much more help is needed.

Recovering from drug addiction and physical scars

Many of us who were injected with drugs to make us fight as soldiers during the war have continued to suffer. The drugs caused confusion and mental illness and created a terrible addiction in our bodies. They ruined our physical and mental health. Afterwards we couldn't concentrate or study and sometimes we would cry or talk uncontrollably.

We felt that we could not live without those vicious drugs. We lived the nightmare of addiction. We were ready to beg or steal to support our drug habit. Recovering from drug addiction takes a long time, and we need a lot of special care and treatment.

Another terrible problem is how to help the children who were branded and scarred on the chest, forehead, arms or back with the letters of the fighting forces. These children did nothing to deserve that torture. In fact, they tried to run away from the war and were branded to prevent them from escaping their commanders. Many died or were killed by other armed groups. Medical teams, working together with child protection agencies, arranged for surgery to remove the scars from these children. About 100 children were treated for scar removal. Not all the surgery was successful but in some

cases the scars were removed. Others are still awaiting surgery. Those are physical scars. The scars inside us are more difficult to remove.

Girls struggle to recover

Most of the girls who were captured by the fighting forces and kept for sex were left out of the reintegration programme. Among the 6,774 children who were demobilised, only 513 were girls. That was a terrible mistake. Thousands of girls were not admitted into the demobilization programme. These girls were abandoned and had to fend for their survival. Many have been exposed to further violations and continue to suffer.

Why were so many girls left behind? Many were afraid to come forward. We knew that the attack on us was also an attack against our communities and we were afraid our families would reject us and blame us for what happened.

It wasn't our fault. We were forced to become the so-called 'bush wives' of the fighting forces. As a result, many of us gave birth. Our children were called "*rebel pikin*".

In many cases, the commanders who abducted us did not release us. We continued under their control. The national Family Tracing and Reintegration programme tried to help. They used video interviews to trace our relatives, but the help was too little and late in coming.

Some of us went to Freetown or other cities. We couldn't go home. But Freetown was another trap. We didn't

have food or money. We had to survive somehow. Some of the peacekeepers who had come to protect us became customers for sex. And they were not the only ones. Everyone wanted to use us but no one seemed to care about us.

Because of the sexual violence and sexual slavery during the war we had very serious health problems. We need special care to treat infections such as syphilis and HIV/AIDS. Many of us need surgery to repair the damage to our bodies caused by rape and early pregnancy.

Most of all, we need help and advice about how to protect ourselves from further exploitation. We need to know how to earn a living and how to create new opportunities in our lives. We need to recover our dignity and our pride.

Community-based reintegration

In many of the villages, tribal and religious leaders, schoolteachers, parents and children began to meet and talk about what they could do to help children recover from the war. With help from the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs and the Child Protection Network, Child Welfare Committees were formed to help bring us back into our villages and back to school.

The Child Welfare Committees organised tracing, health care and special counselling. They also created children's clubs for sports, drama and cultural activities. The community began to breathe and live again.



Education, the stepping stone to peace

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But too many of us have not received this help. Our families have not been found. There is no one to feed us, no one to love us. We are children and we have urgent needs. We cannot wait for schools and hospitals to be rebuilt. We are impatient for the future.

NaCWAC, Children's Forum Network, and the Voice of Children Radio

A new Commission was created to pay special attention to the needs of children after the war. It is called the National Commission for War-Affected Children or NaCWAC.

This Commission belongs to all of us. It is an advocate for children affected by the war, supporting the efforts of the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs.

We formed a network of our own. The Children's Forum Network (CFN) is run

by the children of Sierra Leone. CFN was established by children, with help from the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs, UNICEF, UNAMSIL and Plan Sierra Leone.

We also started the Voice of Children radio station with the help of the Special Representative to the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, the Government of Sierra Leone, UNAMSIL and UNICEF. We have brought together the first Children's National Assembly of Sierra Leone, with representatives from all over the country.

In June 2003, through the Children's Forum Network, we submitted our own report on the war to the Commission. One of our recommendations was that the Commission produce a child-friendly version of its report. This child-friendly report could then be used by children and their teachers to inform the future generations of Sierra Leone, so that war will never return to our country.

Chapter Five: Findings and Recommendations

*T*he Truth and Reconciliation Commission wrote down all the information collected from the people of Sierra Leone. After carefully studying the information, the Commission brought together the findings and made recommendations to the Government of Sierra Leone. The findings and recommendations will help our country become peaceful and prosperous, and help us prevent another war.

The government has to translate these recommendations into reality. We know that our future depends on what happens today and so we want to learn about these recommendations and understand their importance.

In fact, there are too many findings and recommendations to name them all here. But we have listed some of the most important, especially as they apply to children.

Children of Sierra Leone also made recommendations to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Many of our ideas are included in the official recommendations of the Commission. We know that our government, our elders, our teachers and our parents are all responsible for us and we want to do everything we can to make sure they keep their promise to protect the children.

But we also would like to begin to take responsibility. We want to help decide the future path of our country. We need to work together, to set an example for one another.

Because of the terrible war, we know how valuable peace is in our lives. Our most important recommendation - to the people of Sierra Leone and to ourselves - is to do all that we can to bring peace to our country. With peace will come well-being and happiness.

We are watching closely. We do not want to be misled and abused ever again by those we look to for guidance, by those who are bound by law to promote our best interests.

We have already begun our work for peace and we will continue. We know that our vision for a peaceful future is not only possible - it is essential. Our lives, our future and the future of our country depend on peace. We will not be discouraged and we will not be turned away from our goal.

Creating a better future through reparations

Reparations are given to repair a wrong. They help people recover and regain their dignity. Many victims of the war have not received assistance, and they continue to suffer terribly.

In some cases, ex-combatants have received more help than their victims. Those who suffered and lost most also want their voices to be heard. They need help to rebuild their lives.

Reparations are given in many different forms. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission suggests two kinds of reparations for the victims of the war:

- Rehabilitation, such as medical care and other health and social support;
- Symbolic reparations, showing respect for the victim and recognizing the harm that was suffered.

Why are reparations important for Sierra Leone?

The reason that reparations are important is because they are evidence of respect for the victims who have suffered and they help repair the wrong. A Reparations Programme should be set up and put into action. This would help restore trust in the government by showing its care and respect for people in need.

The Commission believes that reparations are needed in the reconciliation process. If no help is given, then the victims may feel that their loss has not been taken seriously.

Reparations are also important because of their symbolic value. Symbolic reparations recognise the sufferings of the war and give people a place to remember and reflect on the past.

For example, the Congo Cross Bridge in Freetown was renamed the Peace Bridge to mark the place where the invasion of Freetown on 6 January 1999 was stopped. The Peace Bridge reminds the people of Sierra Leone that the war was overcome. And it gives hope that peace will become the bridge to the future.

In some villages, mosques and churches may be built as a memorial, at the place where many villagers were killed or at the site of mass graves.

Who will receive reparations?

In Sierra Leone, every child, woman and man is a victim and a survivor of the war. But some people need special help to recover their health and well-being, and start a new life.

For example, those who were amputated require medical help, and some need surgery. They also need to be fitted for artificial limbs or prosthetics, which will help them become more independent and active in society. They need help with housing and with education and skills training, for themselves and their children.

Girls and women who suffered brutal rape and sexual violence also require medical help. Many of them are afraid to tell what happened, and so they need private counselling. They also need skills training to help them earn a living and support their children.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommends that special help be given to children who have not found their families or were orphaned by the war. Children who were born to girls and women as a result of rape also need special help. These children should receive free schooling or skills training, and they may also need counselling.

Village leaders will help the Government of Sierra Leone to identify those victims and survivors who are most in need of help.

THE WAR

Findings

- The crimes committed during the war deliberately sought to destroy the culture and tradition of Sierra Leone. People who lost everything during the war are now searching for new meaning in life.
- The fighting forces that took part in the war were composed chiefly of young men and boys. Many were frustrated and angry with the system of government in Sierra Leone and were easily convinced to join the fighting. Many others were abducted and became fighters against their will.
- Civilians, especially children, were the direct targets of the fighting forces. They suffered brutal violations, including mass murder, rape, abduction and forced recruitment, sexual slavery, torture and looting.
- Children were used by all the fighting forces. However, the AFRC and the RUF were responsible for most of the forced recruitment that occurred during the war, especially the forced recruitment of children.

Recommendations

- National laws should be put into force, in agreement with international law, to prohibit and criminalise the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict.
- The young adults of Sierra Leone should be given a stronger voice in the democratic decision-making process so that they can contribute and are not frustrated into taking violent action.

HUMAN RIGHTS AND CHILD RIGHTS

Findings

- There is a need to restore human dignity and respect the rights of all, without exception. This is important for individuals and for the country, as a whole.
- Oppression and the lack of freedom of expression contributed to the sense of frustration that erupted in violence and helped to fuel the armed conflict.
- Before the start of the war, there was a failure of accountability in government that undermined democracy and the rule of law throughout the country.
- Military forces and armed groups abused their authority. Soldiers and police officers did not defend national security but instead became agents of instability and violence.

Recommendations

- In order to establish a culture of human rights in Sierra Leone, the right to life and human dignity should be enshrined in the Constitution.
- The death penalty should be abolished and Parliament should make sure there are no laws authorising its use.
- A culture of debate and tolerance for dissent should be encouraged as essential to a vibrant and healthy democracy.
- Citizenship based on equal rights, mutual respect, understanding and tolerance should be promoted.
- In order to restore accountability and the rule of law, there should be respect for an independent judicial system, for the role of parliament, and for the holding of free and fair elections.
- The Constitution should enshrine new principles of national security that reflect the will of the people to live in peace and harmony.

IMPROVE GOVERNMENT AND STOP CORRUPTION

Findings

- There is no single explanation for the war, but rather many complex and interrelated causes.
- Injustice, corruption and bad governance were among the causes of the war. The majority of the people had no voice in the government and no opportunities in life, and so they were easily provoked to violence.
- The war represented a failure of leadership on the part of government, public life and civil society. Now there is an urgent call for good leadership at all levels of Sierra Leone society.

Recommendations

- A new culture of ethics and service is needed to fight corruption and bring prosperity for the people of Sierra Leone.
- Effective monitoring should be put in place to prevent, punish and end corruption.
- A Freedom of Information Act should be passed so that people in Sierra Leone can easily learn about government activities.

CHILDREN

Findings

- Thousands of children were singled out and targeted for serious violations, including abduction, forced recruitment, use as child soldiers, sexual violence, rape and sexual slavery, amputation, mutilation, forced labour and torture.
- Children were abducted in the greatest number for recruitment and sexual slavery. They were abducted because they were powerless and easy to manipulate.
- Young girls were targeted for sexual slavery as so-called 'bush wives' or they were confined to locked rooms and raped repeatedly. Many became pregnant and gave birth to children. Most girls did not benefit from the demobilization and reintegration process.
- Children were forced to commit atrocities. Some children were drugged in order to destroy their moral sense and their family and community ties.

Recommendations

- The rights of children, spelled out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international treaties, should be passed into national law. The Child Rights Bill should therefore be adopted by Parliament without delay and swiftly implemented.
- Parliament should enact legislation making 18 the age of majority, when childhood ends, as set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- The government should pass laws forbidding the marriage of girls under age 18. Legislation should be passed making it a criminal offense to have sexual relations with a child under age 16. Any case of sexual relations with girls below age 16 should be prosecuted as rape.
- In order to guarantee that all children in Sierra Leone receive free primary education, there should also be strict rules to limit extra fees for examinations, participation in sports, science classes, drama and other activities. It should be a criminal offence not to send children to primary school. Secondary education should be affordable and parents should be encouraged to understand the benefits of educating their children, especially girls.
- Urgent attention should be given to children most affected by the war, especially girls, who did not benefit from the programme of the National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration, to help them recover, learn educational and vocational skills and lead productive lives.

- Laws should be passed and enforced to prevent and stop the sexual exploitation and trafficking of children. Measures should be taken to reduce the sexual exploitation of girls and boys by providing health care, vocational training and psychosocial support for the most vulnerable children.
- There should be consideration to end the full-time employment of any child under age 18 and all workplaces should be safe and humane, in keeping with international rules and standards.
- Corporal punishment, whether in school or at home, legitimises violence as a means to control behaviour and should be outlawed.
- Serious violations of children's rights should be monitored and reported at local, district, provincial and national levels. Perpetrators should be held accountable within the national courts and the legal system should be strengthened to ensure that national courts have the capacity to prosecute perpetrators, in conformity with international human rights principles.
- Recreational centres should be set up for children as a means of replacing violence with sports and play.
- Children should be guided and supported in their endeavour to contribute their voice, opinions and ideas to the social dialogue and processes of decision-making. Facilities should be provided within the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs to support the Children's Forum Network (CFN) at national, provincial and local levels, in particular in the Northern, Eastern and Southern Provinces. After the departure of UNAMSIL, the Voice of Children Radio should also be continued and expanded under government leadership.

YOUTH

Findings

- A large number of youths are unemployed and have little faith in the government. They are frustrated because they have few career opportunities for the future.
- Many youths who survived the war lived for years in an atmosphere of violence and still look to violence as a means to solve their problems.
- Drug addiction is a serious problem for youth in Sierra Leone, partly because so many young people who fought in the war were given drugs to numb their fear and their moral sense.

Recommendations

- The needs of youth should be seen as a national emergency that demands immediate attention. The National Youth Policy and the National Youth Plan should be put into action.
- The Ministry of Youth and Sport should be transformed into a National Youth Commission, able to raise funds in order to implement the National Youth Policy and the National Youth Plan.
- The government should take steps to build partnerships with youth and increase their confidence in the government efficiency and integrity.
- New government policies should focus on training and employing the growing number of unemployed youths, and building their self-esteem.
- Every year a "State of the Youth" report should be prepared by the National Youth Commission to make sure that youth concerns and problems are being considered and acted upon.
- Youth programmes to prevent and stop drug addiction should be made free and available.
- Electoral laws should be changed to make sure that at least 10 per cent of all parliamentary candidates are young people, between 18 and 35 years of age.

WOMEN AND GIRLS

Findings

- During the war, girls and women were deliberate targets for rape, torture, sexual abuse, sexual slavery, trafficking, enslavement, abductions, amputations, forced pregnancy and forced labour.
- As a result of the war, a very large number of people in Sierra Leone were forced to flee their homes. Many of the girls and women have not returned to their homes, and most live in extreme poverty.
- Many of the girls who were abducted into the fighting forces and used as sex slaves have not been reintegrated into their families and communities, and many have suffered hostility directed at them and their children.
- Discrimination against girls and women exists in all spheres of life in Sierra Leone. Early marriage and other harmful traditional practices prevent girls from attending school.

- Girls and women have many serious health problems because of sexual violence during the war, and they have not received proper health care or psychosocial support.

Recommendations

- The Government of Sierra Leone should publish a statement of apology, acknowledging that all parties to conflict committed terrible crimes against girls and women during the war, and promising to do everything possible to make sure those crimes are never repeated.
- Child protection agencies, working together with government partners, should encourage communities to accept rape survivors and girls who were abducted by the fighting forces for reintegration, and provide support for their children. They should receive free health care and psychosocial support.
- The government should take steps to end the practice whereby women and girls who are victims of rape are then made to marry the offender.
- Local and national government officials and community leaders should promote girls' enrolment in school, including through free primary and secondary education. A special effort should be made to help parents understand the benefits of secondary education for girls. The practice of expelling girls from school if they become pregnant should be ended.
- National laws should be reformed in order to end discrimination against girls and women and promote their rights and protection, in agreement with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention to End Discrimination Against Women.
- The government should do everything possible to make sure that women have equal representation in government jobs within 10 years. In addition, political parties should be required to ensure that at least 30 per cent of their candidates for public office are women.
- A Women's Desk should be established within the police where women and girls who are victims of sexual and domestic violence can go for help.

MINERAL RESOURCES

Findings

- The country of Sierra Leone has been blessed with fertile soil, an open harbour and rich reserves of precious minerals. Bad decisions have been made about how to use

those resources. The profits from the resources have not benefited the people of Sierra Leone.

- Diamonds were not the cause of the war in Sierra Leone but they helped the fighting forces pay for their guns and other expenses of the war.
- Poverty and injustice are still common in the diamond-mining areas, and children are still being used to labour in the mines, instead of studying in school.
- The lack of control of the international diamond trade made it easy for fighting forces to sell illegal or 'blood' diamonds.

Recommendations

- Profits made from the valuable resources of Sierra Leone should be invested in the development of our country.
- Strict national laws and border controls are needed to prevent the illegal mining and trading of diamonds.
- The international community must take more steps to identify and trace diamonds that can be the cause of conflict and outlaw the type of trading of diamonds that can fuel hostilities.
- No children under 18 years of age should work in the diamond mines. Anyone who employs a child miner should be prosecuted. Children who have worked in the mines should receive care and schooling.
- The Community Development Fund, created in January 2001, should make sure that mining communities receive a fair profit from the diamond business, to be used for development purposes, such as the building of schools and roads.

REPARATIONS

Findings

- Many victims of the war think that the ex-combatants have received more help than the victims. The victims want their voices to be heard and they want help to rebuild their lives.
- Victims who have been excluded from benefits and are still suffering severely from the war find it much more difficult to forgive those responsible for their sufferings.
- Many people have lost their trust in democracy because they see too much mismanagement of public money, while their own problems have been ignored. If

their grievances are heard and efforts are made to repair their lives, then they will have more confidence in the government.

Recommendations

- A Reparations Programme should be established and put into action to help those who suffered most as victims in the war rebuild their lives, and to help the country come to terms with its violent past.
- Reparations should be focused in three areas: helping victims through services such as health care, counselling, education and vocational skills training; payment of pensions for those who cannot earn a living; and symbolic acts to show respect for war victims.
- All child amputees and children who were orphaned by the war or abducted or were victims of sexual violence should receive free medical care and counselling, free education or skills training, and scar removal, as needed.
- Urgent priority should be given to children living on the street, many of whom suffered abduction, forced recruitment and sexual slavery during the war. They should receive free health care and schooling or vocational training, and psychosocial support.
- All adult and child victims of sexual violence should receive free medical care and surgery, as needed. Skills training, education and microcredit loans should also be provided free of charge for the families of these victims.
- All amputees should receive free medical care, surgery and artificial limbs, as well as skills training or education. Microcredit loans, housing and pensions should be available for families of amputees.
- War memorials should be established at key locations around the country.

RECONCILIATION

Findings

- Reconciliation depends on the culture, tradition and wishes of the people. Many people who spoke to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission said that in order for people to forgive each other, certain steps would need to be taken. These would include improved living conditions, an end to corruption in government, the hiring and training of a trustworthy police force, and the provision of reparations to right the wrongs committed.
- Reconciliation requires remorse, confession, apologies, recognition of the suffering of the victims, and forgiveness.

- No one can force reconciliation. It can only happen when people are willing to forgive, and to ask for forgiveness.
- Reconciliation is a community process, involving religious and traditional leaders, including women.
- The process of reconciliation will need to continue after the Commission concludes its work.

Recommendations

- The government should take steps to improve the living conditions of people and communities particularly affected by the conflict, to ease their sense of injustice and give them more reason to look to the future and forgive the sufferings of the past.
- Reconciliation should involve local religious and community leaders and follow traditional beliefs. Children should be included. Efforts should be made to restore people's sense of values and their self-esteem.
- It is important that all 13 Districts participate in reconciliation activities. The Provinces, outside of Freetown, were the most affected by the war and should be included in reconciliation efforts.
- Special attention should be given to the reconciliation of those who have been most often rejected by the community, for example, girls who were abducted and sexually abused, ex-child combatants, amputees, and the children of rape victims and so-called 'bush wives'.
- The need for reconciliation should be the focus of public discussions, art exhibitions, sports activities, religious events and traditional dances and ceremonies.
- The 18th of January should be declared a National Day of Peace, commemorating the official end of the war, declared on the 18th of January 2003, and the symbolic burning of 3,000 weapons at Lunghi. The day should be recognised as a national holiday, with activities promoting reconciliation and solidarity.

Chapter Six: *What do we see for the future?*

story and bring the hope and dream of peace to children everywhere.

What does the future hold?

That question weighs on our minds and hearts. Very often we hear people say that the children of Sierra Leone are the hope and promise of our country. We believe that too. But we know that the problems we face are great. We have inherited the history of war, and those scars do not disappear all at once.

There is a bird that rises from the ashes and soars into the heavens. That is what we want to become. We want to rise up from the ashes of war. We want to become the rebirth of our country.

It is a huge task, and we are only children. How can we build a bridge to the future? But, if not us, then who else can do it? It is our country. We are the children of Sierra Leone. The future is our challenge, and we cannot refuse.

In order to succeed we must be idealistic and realistic at the same time. The ideal is our dream, our vision of the future. To build a bridge takes time. It takes hard work, real tools and building materials. We are determined to cross the bridge. We are already at work.

That is not all. We want our vision for Sierra Leone to go beyond the borders of our country. We are children and citizens of Sierra Leone, and we are also children and citizens of the world. We want to share our ideas with children in other countries, to tell our

National Vision for Sierra Leone

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission is working to inspire the vision of a peaceful future in our country.

The Commissioners gathered together the statements, submissions, hearings and thematic research, and recorded the advice of other experts. But when all this information was collected, something more was needed.

The Commission wanted the people of Sierra Leone to join together and create a vision of the future. And so they started a project called the 'National Vision for Sierra Leone'. They requested essays, poems, paintings, drawings, songs and other creative activities that would express the hope of all citizens, including children, civil society groups, religious groups, professional and traditional associations, and others who wanted to contribute.

They invited the people of Sierra Leone to express their ideas, hopes and dreams. The people were asked to describe their visions for the future, to tell about the kind of society they wanted to create and how they could help make their country a better place. Children were also invited to contribute. The vision could be expressed in writing as a poem, song, story or slogan, or in artwork as a drawing, painting, sculpture or photograph.

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Children in Freetown celebrating the Day of the African Child, 16 June 2003

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission received hundreds of 'visions' from people all over the country. After touring the country in an exhibition, the writings and artworks will travel around the world so that people in other countries will be inspired by the visions created in Sierra Leone. These visions will be collected and recorded in a book.

The National Vision project carries the message of peace to people everywhere. It also draws attention to the creative voice of writers, poets, artists, musicians and photographers in Sierra Leone, including many children.

Together we will help transform the memories of our past into a vision of the future.

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School children upcountry, at play

*Chapter Seven:
Plan of Action
Making the report a reality*

The children of Sierra Leone have a very important role to play in telling people all over the country and all over the world about the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and its findings and recommendations.

We want to make sure that children learn about the Commission's report so that it will make a difference in the lives of children everywhere.

The Children's Forum Network (CFN) held discussions with the Commission, and together we thought of many ways children can work together with the government, child protection agencies, community leaders, our teachers and our parents, to tell more children about the Child-Friendly Version of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report.

We know that if we speak and work together, our voice will be loud and clear and our actions will be strong. We invite children throughout the country of Sierra Leone and throughout the world to join us in this work. Together we can create the vision of a peaceful future.

These are our proposals for making the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report a reality:

- The Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs should

work together with community groups, such as Child Welfare Committees, and with the CFN, to organise discussions and debates all over the country to raise awareness about the child-friendly Truth and Reconciliation Commission report.

- The CFN should create a plan of action, in follow-up to the Children's National Assembly, to distribute the child-friendly Version of the report through local CFN branches and to raise awareness among children throughout the country.
- The child-friendly report is printed in English. We want to make sure it is also translated into local languages. We will work together with university students and teachers in the Provinces to help us translate the report into Krio, Temne, Limba, Mende and other local languages.
- The Ministry of Education should include the child-friendly Truth and reconciliation Commission report in both the primary and secondary school curricula. The Ministry should distribute copies to schools and teachers so that it can be used in history and social studies classes.
- Children could help organise school activities focused on the child-friendly report, such as debates, symposiums, presentations, drama, music and sports events.
- Children could work through youth groups to help organise activities focused around the child-friendly

- report for children who are not in school.
- Voice of Children Radio should prepare an audio version of the child-friendly report and also create radio dramas and discussions to be played on children's radio programmes and on community radio.
 - We would like to create dramas about the stories that are told in the child-friendly report and perform the dramas throughout the country.
 - Children should organise puppet shows for younger children about the child-friendly report so that they can understand and help us create a peaceful future.
 - A national contest should be organised for jingles and poems written on the themes of the child-friendly report, with suitable prizes.
 - Concerts should be organised with musicians, drummers and dancers, to perform songs about the themes of the child-friendly report.
 - The CFN, working with the Government and child protection agencies, should prepare a Braille version of the child-friendly report for children who are blind.
 - We will print posters in all languages telling about the child-friendly report.
 - Special events should be organised by children at the time of the national and international launches of the child-friendly report,
- including television and radio interviews with experts, government officials and, most important, children.
 - Children should use the child-friendly Truth and Reconciliation Commission report to lobby the Government and make sure the Government lives up to the promises proposed in the findings and recommendations chapter.
 - Children should also use the child-friendly report to lobby politicians to promote the best interests of children, for example, by passing the Children's Act.
 - The child-friendly report should be presented by children in Parliament.
 - Children should find ways to involve parents in these activities and present new ideas.

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National Cotton Tree, Freetown

Glossary

Accountability

Accountability is to be held responsible for your actions, in particular, for any wrongdoing.

Best interests of the child

The best interests of the child means that any action that affects children must be good for them and help fulfil their hopes and dreams for the future. When adults make decisions they should always make sure that the decisions will be good for children.

Child protection agencies

Child protection agencies are local and international organizations and groups that help protect children in time of need. In Sierra Leone, they work closely with the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs and UNICEF. Together, they form the Child Protection Network.

Child rights violation

A child rights violation is an act that goes against the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Child rights violations are bad for children, and sometimes they are criminal acts. Some examples of child rights violations are: beating a child, using a child as a soldier in war, giving a child drugs or alcohol, making a child work instead of going to school, taking a child away from her or his family.

Community Education and Investment Programme (CEIP)

The Community Education and Investment Programme in Sierra Leone is a formal education programme for children who were with the fighting forces, or separated from their families during the war.

Complementary Rapid Education for Primary Schools (CREPS)

The Complementary Rapid Education for Primary Schools in Sierra Leone is a programme to help the countless children in the society who cannot afford formal schooling.

Convention on the Rights of the Child

The Convention is the most universally accepted human rights instrument in history - it has been ratified by every country in the world except two. It lists all the rights of children. By signing the Convention on the Rights of the Child, countries make a promise to place children centre stage, promoting and protecting the basic human rights of all children, everywhere, all of the time.

Definition of a child

A child is a person who is below 18 years of age.

Family Tracing and Reintegration (FTR)

The Family Tracing and Reintegration programme in Sierra Leone is responsible for helping children who were with the fighting forces and other separated children reunite with their families. It helps trace lost families and find the parents of children who are returning from the war.

Impunity

Impunity is a state of being unpunished for a wrong that was done, or when somebody does something wrong and does not make amends.

In camera

An *in camera* meeting or discussion is held behind closed doors, without witnesses. *In camera* meetings were held by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission with children in order to protect the identity of children.

Interim Care Centre (ICC)

An Interim Care Centre is an institution where children who were with the fighting forces stay for a short while, until they are reunited with their families and communities.

International community

The international community groups all the people and countries in the world under one umbrella.

International law

International law is made up of treaties or conventions that are signed and ratified by countries. The treaties or conventions are promises that countries agree to honour for the good of all people. International law covers such areas as human rights and trade relations. The CRC is the most important international law for the protection of children.

Ministry of Education, Science and Technology

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology in Sierra Leone is responsible for improvement of the educational system in the country. It has a very important responsibility because the future of the country depends on the education of the children.

Ministry of Health and Sanitation

The Ministry of Health and Sanitation in Sierra Leone is responsible for health care and for the improvement of the health of the people of Sierra Leone.

Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs (MSWGCA)

The Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs in Sierra Leone is an important ministry for the protection of vulnerable children in Sierra Leone. It helps prevent violations of the rights of children throughout the country.

Ministry of Youth and Sport

The Ministry of Youth and Sport in Sierra Leone encourages young people to discover their talents, especially in athletics, and to improve the social life of the country.

National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (NCDDDR)

The National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration in Sierra Leone is the organization responsible for the disarming of ex-combatants. It helps former soldiers return home to their families and communities and also helps them learn a skill so that they can earn a living and find a place in society.

National Commission for War-Affected Children (NaCWAC)

The National Commission for War-Affected Children in Sierra Leone is the organization responsible for helping war-affected children. It provides assistance, including educational help and health care.

Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child

The two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child are additional treaties that strengthen the promises countries made when they signed the Convention. The Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography increases the protections for children from sexual abuse and exploitation and also criminalises these very serious violations. The Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict outlaws the involvement of children under age 18 in war and helps prevent and stop the use of child soldiers.

Perpetrator

A perpetrator is a person who commits a crime or violation against another person, for example, to kill, rape or torture a weaker person. In order to end impunity, perpetrators shall be held accountable.

Special Court for Sierra Leone

The Special Court for Sierra Leone was set up jointly by the Government of Sierra Leone and the United Nations. Its purpose is to try those who bear the greatest responsibility for the atrocities committed during the war.

Statement givers

Statement givers are people who tell or explain their stories to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, giving an account of exactly what happened to them during the war in their country. Many children gave confidential statements.

Statement takers

Statement takers are people who travel around the country and listen to stories told by victims of the war about what happened to them. They write down the stories and submit the written account to the Commissioners for the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Testimony

Testimony is the firsthand account told by a person about what happened to that person. It may be given under oath, as evidence, in public, or *in camera*. Children gave testimony only *in camera*.

Training and Employment Programme (TEP)

The Training and Employment Programme in Sierra Leone is a programme that teaches people skills earn their living and contribute to society.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)

A Truth and Reconciliation Commission is a group of people who investigate violations that occurred during an armed conflict and to learn the truth about what happened. The Commission brings both victims and perpetrators together to tell their stories. It creates a public record by gathering testimony and interviewing many people, including children. Truth and Reconciliation Commissions also make recommendations to prevent future wars from taking place.

UNAMSIL

UNAMSIL is the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone. It is a peacekeeping mission of the United Nations that monitors the end of the war and helps bring peace and stability to Sierra Leone. UNAMSIL consists of soldiers, police officers and civilians. It includes Child Protection Advisers that are specially trained to help children and protect their rights.

UNHCR

UNHCR is the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. It is an agency of the United Nations that takes care of refugees and internally displaced persons, either because of war or natural disaster.

UNICEF

UNICEF is the United Nations Children's Fund, and created in 1946. UNICEF is the part of the United Nations that takes care of children, including during emergencies and war. It cares for children and upholds their rights by providing protection, food, clothes, medicines and education, in order to make the world a better, safer and friendlier place for children.

Victim

A victim is a person who suffers from a particular violation, for example, war or natural disaster.

Witness

A witness is a person who has personal knowledge of a particular event and can explain what happened.

