

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **Sierra Leone: Amnesty International condemns continuing RUF attacks on civilians**

(Freetown) – Amnesty International today condemned continuing attacks by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) on civilians as hostilities intensified between rebel forces, UN peace-keepers and government-allied forces in Northern Province.

"Every effort must be made to protect civilians," said Amnesty International's team of experts currently in Sierra Leone which is compiling testimonies from victims of human rights abuses.

Eye-witness accounts described civilians fleeing the violence, being threatened with and subjected to physical violence as they attempted to pass RUF checkpoints on the road south towards the junction known as Mile 91, some 145 kilometres from Freetown.

Amnesty International reiterates that continuing abuses of human rights, including killings, rape and abductions, are not covered by the amnesty provided in the peace agreement signed by the government and the RUF in Lomé, Togo, in July 1999. The human rights organization has always maintained that the viability of the peace agreement was undermined from the outset by providing a blanket amnesty for human rights abuses, including war crimes and crimes against humanity, committed during the eight-year internal armed conflict.

In a letter sent to each member of the UN Security Council on 17 May, Amnesty International repeated its call for the establishment of an international commission of inquiry to investigate the human rights abuses which occurred during the internal armed conflict in order to bring those responsible to justice.

"The perpetrators of human rights abuses must be brought to justice," Amnesty International said. "Peace in Sierra Leone is predicated on ending impunity for the human rights abuses committed before and after the signing of the Lomé peace agreement."

Amnesty International is urging the Security Council, which is currently considering a draft resolution on Sierra Leone, to finally address the issue of impunity and resolve unambiguously that all those responsible for human rights abuses be brought to justice.

Amnesty International is also again calling on UNAMSIL peace-keeping troops to fulfil their mandate to protect civilians under imminent threat of violence, including the tens of thousands who are currently fleeing front-line fighting in Northern Province.

Amnesty International is calling on the Security Council, as it reviews UNAMSIL's mandate and the number of peace-keepers to be deployed, to:

- provide a clearer mandate for the protection of the human rights of all civilians at all times;
- ensure that UNAMSIL peace-keeping troops have the necessary training and logistical support to protect civilians throughout the country.

“As the largest UN peace-keeping operation in the world, UNAMSIL must provide swift and decisive protection of the human rights of all Sierra Leoneans during this crisis,” said Amnesty International.

During the conflict, Amnesty International has condemned human rights abuses committed by all fighting forces in Sierra Leone, including the RUF, the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), formerly allied to the RUF but now fighting with government-allied forces, and the Civil Defence Forces (CDF), the civilian militia which supports the government.

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