



Voting for Peace, Survival and Self-reliance Internally Displaced Women Go to the Polls in Sierra Leone



September 2002



Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children
122 East 42nd Street
New York, NY 10168-1289

tel. 212.551.3111 or 3088
fax. 212.551.3180
wcrwc@womenscommission.org
www.womenscommission.org

© September 2002 by Women's Commission
for Refugee Women and Children
All rights reserved.
Printed in the United States of America

ISBN: 1-58030-023-5

Mission Statement

The Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children works to ensure that refugee and displaced women, children and adolescents are given protection, encouraged to participate, and have access to humanitarian assistance. Through a vigorous and comprehensive program of advocacy, supported by extensive research and technical expertise, the Women's Commission serves as an expert resource and works with governments, United Nations agencies, international and local nongovernmental organizations, and donors to improve the lives of displaced women and children. The Women's Commission is an affiliate of the International Rescue Committee.

Acknowledgments

The Women's Commission wishes to thank the Oak Foundation for its support. We also thank the many people in Sierra Leone without whom this report would not have been possible: the internally displaced women, security forces (UNAMSIL and the Sierra Leone police), and the National Electoral Commission of Sierra Leone.

This report was written by Binta Mansaray, Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children country representative, Sierra Leone, with contributions from Courtney Mireille O'Connor. It was edited by Mary Diaz, Ramina Johal, Megan McKenna and Diana Quick at the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children.

Photographs © Binta Mansaray

Voting for Peace, Survival and Self-reliance

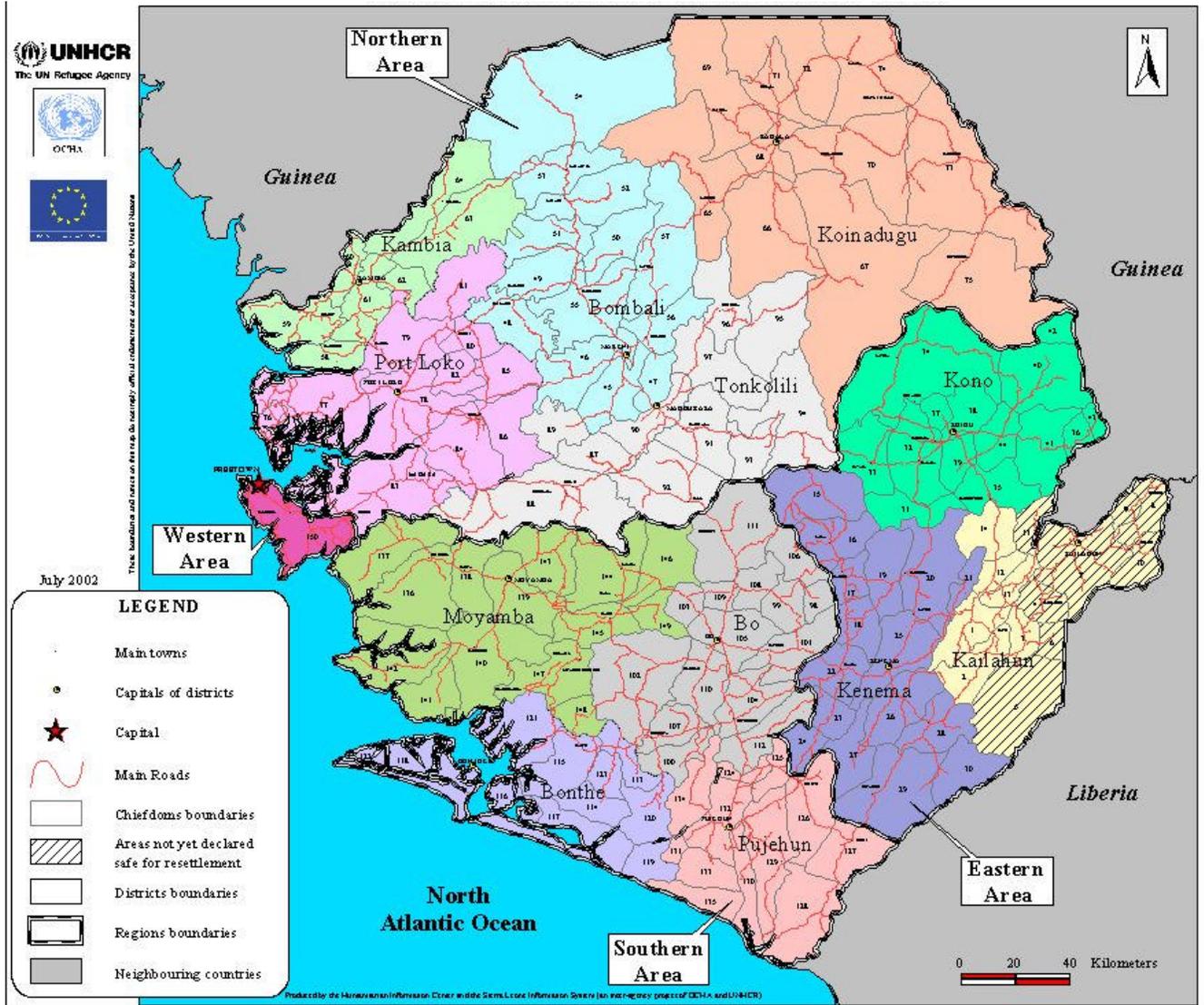
Internally Displaced Women Go to the Polls in Sierra Leone

September 2002

CONTENTS

I. Introduction	1
II. Methodology	1
III. Voter Expectations	3
IV. Participation and Motivation	5
V. Conclusion	7
VI. Recommendations	8
Annexes	10
Notes	14

SIERRA LEONE



“The achievement of democracy presupposes a genuine partnership between men and women in the conduct of the affairs of society in which they work in equality and complementarity, drawing mutual enrichment from their differences.”

Universal Declaration on Democracy, Inter-Parliamentary Union Council¹

“We want the winner, regardless of whether we voted for him or not, to ensure that, when we go back to our villages, we will be there in peace. We are women and we have already suffered a lot. Our husbands have died and we have a lot of children. We have no extended family to depend on now. We have nothing. All our houses have been burnt and, when we think of that, we cry. We want the new president to remember our plight. We women have suffered a lot during this war.”

Kumba, 35 years old, Approved School Camp, originally from Kono,² chiefdom of Kaima

I. INTRODUCTION

The May 14, 2002 presidential and parliamentary elections in Sierra Leone marked a significant milestone in the consolidation of the country’s peace. Cognizant of the role of bad governance in the origins of the 11-year civil war that formally ended in January 2002, the Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children’s Protection Partnership office in Sierra Leone encouraged internally displaced women to register and vote for the candidate of their choice — a step that the Women’s Commission considered critical to improving these women’s lives and to ensuring their role in the reconstruction of Sierra Leone. Attention to participation of uprooted women in decision-making has, in the past, been focussed largely on camp governance and humanitarian assistance. Yet, in order to help sustain Sierra Leone’s peace, internally displaced and returnee women must make free, informed decisions and participate actively at every point along the public-private spectrum of decision-making — from the home to the parliament, from the executive to the United Nations, African Union and other intergovernmental organizations. Voting is one of the most obvious and pivotal meeting places between the private person and the public actor. When a woman casts a free and informed vote, she acknowledges the crucial public role that she can and should play in the future well-being of her society.

On May 14, the Women’s Commission visited several polling stations in and around the capital, Freetown, where internally displaced persons (IDPs) were regis-

tered to vote. The field visits were meant, first and foremost, to ensure that displaced women were able to cast their ballot freely and without intimidation. Secondly, the visits were conducted to understand both the views of the displaced women about the electoral process and the motivations underpinning their vote. This report is intended, therefore, as a snapshot of a turning point in Sierra Leone’s history, and not a full-blown study of the electoral process in that country. One of the Women’s Commission’s main objectives in producing it is to serve as a conduit for the voices of internally displaced women who have spent much of the recent, turbulent history of their country without an effective voice.

The women interviewed said they cast their vote for peace, security, survival and self-reliance. To achieve self-reliance, they highlighted their need for shelter, food, education, health care and income-generation, in that order of priority. Their right to the satisfaction of every one of these demands is clearly and repeatedly justified in the international legal obligations to which the Sierra Leonean government has committed itself over the years.³

II. METHODOLOGY

A. FACTS AND FIGURES

The following camps were visited: Amputee and War Wounded, Approved School, Grafton Displaced,

Mandela, National Workshop, and the Trade Center IDP Transit. All of the camps are in the capital, except for the Grafton Displaced, which is located on the outskirts of Freetown. Based on a census conducted by the National Commission for Reconstruction, Resettlement and Rehabilitation (NCRRR) and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in August 2001, the IDP camp population in the Western Area, where the Women’s Commission monitored elections, is 53,964. The camps visited represent 66 percent of the total IDP camp population in the Western Area, as follows: Grafton 22.6 percent (12,173 persons); Approved School 21.8 percent (11,762); National Workshop 11.4 percent (6,160); Trade Center 7 percent (3,759); Amputee 2.2 percent (1,208); and Mandela 1 percent (534). According to the above census the nationwide IDP population was then 283,773, distributed among 24 camps. The camps where the Women’s Commission monitored elections represent 19 percent of the nationwide IDP camp population.⁴ Available statistics about the camp population are disaggregated by age along the following lines: under 5, 5-51 and above 51 years. The number of voting age women is therefore impossible to determine. Statistics about the overall population in each of these camps is available.⁵

Individual and group consultations were held with approximately 154 women between the ages of 18 and 70. Sixty-two individual interviews were held with camp residents, including the “chairladies” of three of the camps visited.⁶ Every “sector” of a camp elects a “Sector Chief” (President). The sector chiefs make up the camp’s Women’s Committee. Each Women’s Committee, in consultation with all women in the camp, elects one “Chairlady” and one “Deputy Chairlady.” The sector members are determined on a first-come, first-served basis.

About 92 women participated in group interviews. Various randomly selected categories of women were interviewed: women on their way to join the queue; women in line, waiting to cast their ballot; women stepping away from the ballot boxes; women leaving the polling station; and women who had already returned to their shelters after casting their ballot. (The random selection was non-scientific; the only criterion for selection was to be a registered voter.) The goal was to capture what was on the minds of women as they went through the process of voting, and to interview as many registered voters as possi-

ble. Given the long queues, it was impossible to follow the same group of women as they proceeded through the voting process. Although the Women’s Commission saw many IDP women in line waiting to vote, it was impossible to determine the total number of displaced women voting.

B. QUESTIONS ASKED WERE OPEN-ENDED

How did the voting go? What was on your mind as you cast your ballot? What were you thinking as you went to the polling station? Why are you waiting in line to vote? Why did you decide to vote? What message do you have for the candidate of your choice? What do the elections mean to you? Follow-up questions, such as, *Do you think the candidate of your choice will address your concerns?* or *Do you think the candidate of your choice will meet your expectations?* were also asked.

C. GROUP CONSULTATIONS WERE HELD

The festive nature of Election Day provided the impoverished women interviewed with the rare luxury of sharing in a group their thoughts about politics and the electoral process. Those who had voted stood or sat together in small groups to talk. The atmosphere was cordial, and women were willing and happy to talk about the elections in such an informal setting. The Women’s Commission interviewer joined the group conversations (with the discussants’ permission) to listen and to ask open-ended questions of the sort described above. The group interviews were conducted at the Amputee and War Wounded Camp, the Mandela Camp and the National Workshop Camp.

* * *

The interviewees were not asked to name the candidate of their choice. Those who mentioned the name of their candidate did so voluntarily. No one was encouraged to vote for any particular candidate. No one turned down an interview request despite the fact that no prior notice was given.

III. VOTER EXPECTATIONS

The extreme suffering of women during 11 years of armed conflict in Sierra Leone was recognized in the Lomé Peace Agreement⁷ and drew grassroots women to the polls in large numbers. By voting, these women sent the message to the new president and his government that they must address the needs of women. By voting for the candidate of their choice, the displaced women said they expected the president-elect and his government to act upon their concerns with regards to peace and security, food, shelter, education, health care and income-generation. Despite their worries, the women seemed confident that their candidate would advance the country's interests and lead Sierra Leone down the path to sustainable peace and development. In interviews reproduced in Annex II to this report, the chairladies cite specific programs that internally displaced women need to be self-sufficient.

A. PEACE AND SECURITY⁸

Asked what was on their minds as they went to the polls to cast their ballot, the displaced women responded that they voted primarily and overwhelmingly for peace. Of the 62 women interviewed individually, 53 rated peace and security as one of their top priorities and expectations from the newly elected (or re-elected) officials. In discussing the various issues, peace and security were mentioned first in every group interview.⁹ Some said they were not sure they would have a meal that day; but they did not mind going without if that was the price they had to pay for an end to the bloody struggle for power. Many women said that they rose as early as 4:30 a.m. to form or join the queue and wait for two, four or even six hours to cast their ballot. In every camp, the internally displaced women said that casting their ballot for the candidate of their choice was their bid to live in peace, especially during and after their much-desired return to their communities. Many women consulted by the Women's Commission in the Approved School, Mandela and Trade Center Transit complained of a lack of security in the camps, resulting in an increased incidence of nighttime robberies.

B. ASSISTANCE TO SURVIVE¹⁰ AND BECOME SELF-RELIANT¹¹

Worries about their current living conditions and apprehension about what the immediate future held in store also inspired internally displaced women to go to the polls. They expected the living conditions at the camps to improve after the elections.¹²

“We want new houses for those whose homes have been burnt down. They should be given money to restart their lives. We want our children to be educated. For example, I haven't been educated and I don't have any skills. That's why I am going through these difficulties. We want our children to be educated. We also want employment for the young men and women. People who are occupied with their jobs or businesses will be productive members of society and they won't have time to create problems.”

— “Chairlady,”

Approved School Displaced Persons Camp

Shelter¹³ — With the rainy season approaching, the displaced women were worried about the deplorable shelter in the camps — tarpaulin booths that leaked and that, in some camps, had not been replaced for several years. This caused much suffering and increased morbidity during the rainy season. One internally displaced woman reminded the Women's Commission that, even if there had not been a war, many Sierra Leoneans would not be able to afford decent housing — a problem that the government is aware of and should address. Women called for the construction of low-cost housing for those living in the camps from the Western Area who are now homeless, though not displaced. In *Sierra Leone Resettlement Strategy: Enabling the displaced to rebuild their lives back in their communities with safety and dignity* (NCRRR Strategy, October 2001), the NCRRR (now NaCSA) states, “In the Western Area, where there is a chronic shortage of low-cost housing and where strict building restrictions are in place, alternative facilities may be offered to former

IDPs and long-term residents of camps on a temporary basis who are faced with the problem of homelessness once certain camps are consolidated and others phased down.”¹⁴

Women also called for the construction of low-cost housing to accommodate returnees. One displaced woman requested the construction of temporary shelters upon the women’s return, where they could stay until they were able to build their own homes.¹⁵

Food — At some camps, internally displaced women were experiencing difficulties with food distribution. Women at the Trade Center IDP Transit Camp reported inadequate and irregular food aid since return had begun. Women from the Grafton and National Workshop Camps made similar complaints. Approved School Camp women reported that they had not received their food supply for two months prior to the elections (i.e., since March 2002).¹⁶ The internally displaced women interviewed reported the consequences to be hunger and starvation, and women and adolescent girls having no alternative but to prostitute themselves to survive.¹⁷

Education¹⁸ — Most of the displaced women interviewed had education on their list of priorities. They wanted their children to have the education that they had not received. The women called for the creation of good schools in their area of return, electricity and skills training for adolescents and those who did not want to return to school.

Health Care¹⁹ — The internally displaced women interviewed reported that conditions at the camp²⁰ were making children sick. At the Approved School IDP Camp, women complained that they had to pay a fee of Le 500 (US\$.25) per consultation — an unaffordable sum for many — which discouraged women from seeking treatment for themselves or their families. They called for free medical services.

Income Generation²¹ — Many displaced women complained of a lack of job opportunities for themselves and their husbands. They called for job creation and skills training for both spouses and adolescents, as well as micro-credit and agricultural assistance. Those from southern Sierra Leone told the Women’s Commission that they had farms and fertile soil and that, with some help, they could produce and sell their own food, thereby becoming self-reliant.

The Chairlady of the Grafton Internally Displaced Persons Camp illustrated with the following statement Sierra Leonean women’s capacity for partnership with the government in building and maintaining peace in their country.

“It isn’t only boys who should learn; girls have to learn, too. They say, if you educate a girl, you educate a nation. We want the government to make it compulsory for girls to receive an education.... All of us have to join hands and work together so we can assist our government and develop. It is not the government only that has to do things; we also have to do things. The government needs to support us with the materials that we need, and we will do the work so our country will develop.”

IV. PARTICIPATION AND MOTIVATION

The depth of the internally displaced women's commitment to this form of political participation as an instrument of peace is exemplified in the following comment:

"I was sick last night; I have been sick for a very long time now. This morning I begged people to give me medicine so I can go and cast my vote. I thank God that I got two Panadol. I was in line very early in the morning to vote and I am so happy that I voted. I voted for peace. All I want is to go back to my village and live in peace. Even if they don't give me anything, let me live in peace. I am tired of running away; I am tired of war; I am tired of living in the camp; and I want to get the chance to die in peace and be buried in peace and dignity. That is all I voted for."

— Nma, 70 years old,
National Workshop Camp

A. THE PROCESS

THE DAYS LEADING UP TO MAY 14

The displaced women reported that, prior to the elections, they had been receiving threats from certain individuals and groups. A woman from the National Workshop Displaced Camp told the Women's Commission that some men had threatened them with amputation or murder if they voted for certain parties. They reported this to the police, who the women felt resolved the situation successfully by warning the men that anyone caught intimidating voters would be arrested. At the Trade Center IDP Transit Camp at Ferry, several kilometers east of Freetown, it was reported that numerous families

had left the camps due to fear of being targeted, should the elections turn violent. As a result of their absence, thieves had broken into the empty tents. Similar threats were reported at the Amputee, Approved School and Grafton Camps. At the Amputee Camp, the Chairlady and the Women's Commission monitor intervened to reassure the women that they could vote in safety.²²

ELECTION DAY

The internally displaced women interviewed described May 14 as a long-awaited day — a day they considered important enough for them to break away from their life-sustaining routine of going to the forest to collect firewood to sell, or begging on the street for the few coins that enable them to survive to the next day. The Women's Commission found that, overall, despite the long queues and relentless sun, the voting went smoothly. Pregnant women, older women and nursing mothers were given priority to cast their ballot. The minor problems that occurred were mainly due to logistics. The interviewees spoke freely; the interviewers witnessed no attempts at, or apparent fear of, intimidation. At the Grafton Displaced Camp, however, it was reported that a man at the polling station had tried to coerce some displaced women into voting for a particular candidate. The second woman he tried to intimidate complained to the chair of the camp's Women's Committee. A report was made to the UNAMSIL authorities, who immediately removed the man from the polling station without disruption to the process. All registered voters had the chance to vote by the end of the day.²³

B. POLITICAL AWARENESS

The Women's Commission interviewed a fraction of the women in queue to vote, all of them destitute, vulnerable and from Sierra Leone's grass roots. Such women, in previous elections had been targets of political exploitation and manipulation of politicians who wooed them with a few cups or bags of rice to get their vote. After the elections, the politicians would disappear from their lives until the next election season.²⁴ This time, given their experiences and the difficulties they faced, the interviewees seemed acutely aware of what was at stake in this election, and were keen to exercise their political right. Although women in Sierra Leone have voted before, there was an unprecedented sense of urgency and

importance in this election. The internally displaced women seemed to feel that they were no longer the political pawns that they had been in previous elections, but could actually change things. The Women's Commission heard women state time and again on May 14 that they were voting for their rights; despite the hot burning sun and long queues, they were prepared to wait until they cast their ballot. The displaced women understood clearly that their political choice would have a direct bearing on their life — that they were voting for their own survival, and for their children's future. The conditions at the camps and the difficulties they anticipated upon "resettlement"²⁵ in their communities were concerns that influenced not only their desire to vote, but also their choice of candidate.

"We asked the politicians, 'You want us to vote for you? When you win, what will you do for us?' We told them the first thing we wanted was for the government to put education on the agenda.... We told them that as soon as they win, they should put in place programs for us, the women.... Widows and older women should be given micro-credit...and younger women should be included in agricultural programs."

— "Chairlady,"
Grafton Displaced Persons Camp

C. THE EFFECT OF PERSECUTION ON POLITICAL CHOICE

For the amputee women, there was a dimension to the collective imperative to vote for peace, security, survival and self-reliance that other displaced women did not share. The women amputees felt that their fate was linked with that of incumbent President Kabbah.²⁶ Most of them said they voted for him because, when the rebels amputated their limbs, they told them to "go to Tejan Kabbah to replace your hand" or "go to the president to replace your foot." The amputee voters felt that, as a consequence, if Kabbah lost, his successor would not empathize and assist them as much as Kabbah would.

Two lessons can be learned from these women's choices. First, the method of persecution chosen by those opposition elements in the conflict who maimed their compatriots had an effect diametrically opposed to their objective. Instead of turning the civilian population against a president and government who could not protect them from this torture, the maiming fortified the survivors' political loyalty. Second, instead of breaking these women's spirit, the heinous persecution that they suffered deepened their sense of self-determination, thereby demonstrating the indomitable and resilient nature of the human spirit — when there exists some hope of democracy and good government.

"I voted for the president because, when my foot was amputated, I was told to go to Tejan Kabbah to replace it. God has destined that I will suffer for his sake. That is why I decided not to let him down, but to be with him. I am confident that, if he stays in power, he will provide opportunities for us and alleviate our suffering."

— Mariatu, 18 years old,
Chair, Women's Committee,
Grafton Displaced Persons Camp



An amputee displaced woman casts her ballot at the Amputee and War-wounded Camp polling station.

D. GOVERNMENT POLICY AND PRACTICE

I. ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

As part of its Strategic Plan for 2001-2005, the National Electoral Commission (NEC), established by the government of Sierra Leone, mandated that women be included in the management of the election.²⁷ NEC officers were given specific instructions to encourage women to apply for all the positions. Women were recruited as permanent staff — elections officers, assistant elections officers, senior supervisors of elections and supervisors of elections. Two out of fourteen elections officer positions were filled by women; two women were named assistant elections officers; two out of four senior supervisors of elections were women; and a woman was named to one of four elections supervisor positions. Women were also recruited as temporary staff to be registrars, assistant registrars, registration officers, returning officers, assistant returning officers, presiding officers, polling assistants and demonstrators and hailers.²⁸ In the Western Area (where literacy among women is comparatively high), only half as many women as men were recruited for temporary positions. Some women were afraid to apply for permanent positions because they thought the elections could be marred by violence.

2 VOTER DEMOGRAPHICS

According to Sierra Leone's National Electoral Commission, no statistics are available regarding the participation of IDPs in the electoral process. The registration record itself does not show how many internally displaced persons registered to vote, given there is no provision on the registration form regarding migratory or conflict-related status. It indicates the district of origin of the registered voter; but this does not necessarily indicate internal displacement or other uprooted status.

Moreover, when this report was written — more than two months after the election — information on the overall number of women who voted was not available because there was no provision on the ballot indicating the voter's sex. It may never be part of the vital statistics of the NEC's public record for this election. Only a review of the currently classified registration record would reveal how many women voted nationwide.²⁹

“That is why we registered to vote; it is our right to help develop this country.... We are the mothers of those in the RUF, those in the APC, and those in the SLPP. No man can say that a woman didn't give birth to him. We the women are standing up now to let this country progress and that is why we are voting today. Today we were the first to vote in the queue, when the men pushed, we pushed them back.”*

— Chair, Women's Committee,
Grafton Displaced Persons Camp

* The SLPP is the Sierra Leone People's Party.

V • CONCLUSION

When the internally displaced women interviewed for this report said that they were voting for peace, security, survival and self-reliance, they were essentially setting the agenda for the post-conflict reconstruction and transformation of Sierra Leone upon which lies the hope for sustainable peace and prosperity. The displaced women's awareness of the stakes they have in the political and developmental processes of the country, despite all they have gone through, gives hope for Sierra Leone's future. The political participation that largely grows out of their personal experiences of conflict-related adversity is an opportunity that the Sierra Leone government should build upon to strengthen democratic participation at the grassroots level.

Before and on May 14, 2002, the Women's Commission witnessed the government of Sierra Leone take a step in the right direction by answering the United Nations Security Council's call “to adopt a gender perspective [post-conflict], including... [m]easures that ensure the protection of and respect

for human rights of women...particularly as they relate to the electoral system...,³⁰ thereby meeting the procedural challenge before it.

But the president, the executive and the parliament now have a critical, substantive challenge to meet. They and all stakeholders in Sierra Leone's future — including the international donor community — must meet the determination and expectations of the voting survivors interviewed by the Women's Commission on May 14 with action. They must join forces with these women to safeguard peace, provide personal security and ensure their survival and eventual self-reliance. The government of Sierra Leone could do more to help its internally displaced women, adolescents and children; but the international community could also do more to help the government of the most impoverished country in the world defend and promote the rights of its people. Following are some suggestions for how the Women's Commission thinks this could be done.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

GOVERNMENT OF SIERRA LEONE

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SOCIAL ACTION³¹ AND MINISTRY OF SOCIAL WELFARE, GENDER AND CHILDREN'S AFFAIRS

- 1) Ensure that essential humanitarian supplies and services — such as adequate food, shelter and free medical care — are provided to those displaced and returnee women who are indigent.
- 2) Rehabilitate or construct medical facilities in areas of return as a matter of priority and to avoid renewed displacement in search of health care.
- 3) Include agricultural and micro-credit assistance — e.g., a start-up fund or in-kind assistance — to foster uprooted women's self-reliance as they return to their communities.
- 4) In determining reconstruction priorities, recall the relationship between investment in children and young people³² and the prevention of future armed conflict.

“We told them that the first thing we wanted was for the government to put education on the agenda. We told them that, if our children were educated and knew their rights, they wouldn't go to the bush to fight against their compatriots.”

— Chair, Women's Committee,
Grafton Displaced Persons Camp

- 5) Ensure that the right to a primary education (at least) is guaranteed for all children, including the disabled.
 - o Ensure that primary education is provided free of tuition.³³
 - o Supply free materials and provide assistance in the purchase of uniforms, where necessary, to ensure attendance by the indigent.
- 6) Provide educational or job opportunities for youth,³⁴ particularly adolescent girls who have resorted to commercial sex work in the face of no alternative for adequate income generation.
- 7) Ensure that return (“resettlement”) is sustainable.
 - o Provide basic building materials and tools for those whose homes were destroyed.
 - o Promote non-discrimination based on sex as regards land rights for returning women and children — particularly single (including widowed, separated or divorced) women and girls — including through legislative reform and community education.
 - o In the case of single women or child heads of household, reconstruct or provide shelter outright.
 - o Provide adequate food assistance until the first successful harvest.

NATIONAL ELECTORAL COMMISSION

- 1) Make provision for the determination of the sex of the voter and ensure inclusion of the resulting statistics in electoral information released for public consumption.³⁵
- 2) Investigate ways to determine the uprooted status

of voters where relevant, and compare their participation with the rest of the population.

- 3) Do not allow this data to be culled or used in a manner that would threaten the confidentiality of the vote or the voters, including as regards their right to non-discrimination and personal security.

MINISTRY OF INTERIOR

- 1) Explore ways to enhance security for all displaced camps and returnee communities, thereby protecting them from armed robbery and physical harm, especially at night.
- 2) Work with the uprooted — including women, adolescents and children — to improve communications between the community and the local police, especially in emergencies.
- 3) Explore the formulation of community-based security mechanisms, including female guards, with police back-up.

PARLIAMENT

- 1) Investigate rejoining the Inter-Parliamentary Union, as well as actively participating in IPU's work on women and children, and ensure that these efforts are reflected in parliamentary activities in Sierra Leone.
- 2) Monitor the government's satisfaction of internally displaced women's expectations as set out in this report. Take action to ensure both results and accountability.

HUMANITARIAN AGENCIES (GOVERNMENTAL AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL)

- 1) Ensure provision or replacement of plastic sheeting for uprooted persons as a matter of urgency to reduce morbidity and alleviate suffering during the rainy season.
- 2) Provide and ensure timely delivery of essential supplies, such as food, to the uprooted communities.
- 3) Collaborate in designing and implementing programs for camp security, self-reliance and other areas of concern for displaced women.
- 4) Continue to support the government to meet the

needs of its constituents.

- 5) Disaggregate data on internally displaced women and girls by age along lines more relevant to their reality and needs, taking into consideration such factors as the age of majority (voting age) and child-bearing years.

INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY/DONORS

- 1) Continue to support the Sierra Leonean government in its efforts to consolidate and preserve the peace, as well as live up to its obligations under international law, by donating funds aimed at bridging the gap between emergency intervention and the long-term development needs of uprooted women and children, including adolescents. Start by enabling the government to meet the goals laid out in *Sierra Leone Resettlement Strategy: Enabling the displaced to rebuild their lives back in their communities with safety and dignity* (NCRRR/NaCSA, October 2001).
- 2) Monitor implementation — including through direct consultation of women and children — to ensure that fund disbursement is given priority.
- 3) Ensure gender- and age-equitable programming and, where necessary, earmark funds to meet the essential needs of war-affected women and children.

Annex I: Limitations on Information Concerning Voter Demographics

Although the election ballots did not indicate voters by gender, the registration record does reveal the overall number of women nationwide who registered to vote. Of the 2,329,714 people who registered to vote, 1,155,661 (49.61 percent) were women and 1,172,313 (50.32 percent) were men. The sex of 0.07 percent of registered voters was not stated. Such information cannot, however, be relied upon as an indicator of the number of women voting, or of the percentage of voters that they comprised.

These statistics nevertheless demonstrate an improvement over the 1996 electoral process, when there was no provision for indicating the sex of the registered voter. In the absence of exit poll surveys or a

voting technology that automatically reveals the sex of the voter, electoral information released for public consumption should, in the future, include general data on the sex of voters. Rather than compromising confidentiality, collection and release of such data would, *inter alia*, allow a numerical assessment of women's political power. Further, it would inform strategies aimed at strengthening women's political voice. When combined with information regarding migratory or conflict-related status, such data could be used to inform elected officials on the political participation and influence of internally displaced and returnee women, as well as to highlight the political voice of women in general.

* * *

Annex II: Interviews with Chairladies of Three IDP Camp Women's Committees

INTERVIEW WITH CHAIRLADY AT THE AMPUTEE AND WAR-WOUNDED, DISPLACED CAMP

Q. How is the voting going?

A. It is going on fine. We have been looking forward to this day to vote. Some people were afraid to come out and vote because of the RUF and APC threat to kill people on Saturday. But I went around and encouraged them to come out and vote.

Q. What was on your mind as you went to the polls to vote? In other words, why did you vote today?

A. For us, the amputees, voting means a lot...because, when the rebels amputated our limbs, they told some of us to go to Tejan Kabbah³⁶ to replace our limbs. This is why we are taking our right to vote very seriously.

Q. Do you think the candidate of your choice will win?

A. Yes, we are quite sure that he will win because he is a good man. He is for peace and that is the main reason why we voted for him.

Q. You said you voted mainly for peace, did you

vote for any other reason?

A. Yes. Let me tell you quite frankly that we voted for Tejan Kabbah because we feel that our fate is tied to his; our limbs were amputated for his sake. We believe that he is the only one who can understand our plight and sympathize with us. We are afraid that if he does not win the elections, the next person who will succeed him may say that he is not responsible for our suffering. That is why we are praying for him to succeed.

Q. You keep saying "we" instead of "I" when you respond. Are you talking for all the amputee women?

A. I am talking for the vast majority of amputee women. I am their chairlady and we have been talking about the elections and even today when we were in line we were talking about these issues.

Q. You said that your candidate is the only one who can understand your plight and sympathize with you. What do you mean?

A. I mean that, as amputees and displaced women, we have a lot of problems. We don't have money to

educate our children and we want to be self-reliant.

INTERVIEW WITH CHAIRLADY OF THE GRAFTON DISPLACED CAMP

Q: Did many displaced women at this camp vote?

A: Yes, many displaced women voted, even the ones that had just arrived at this camp. Their votes were transferred here and they all got to vote. We had no complaints regarding the voting officers, the observers or the presiding officers. However, later on, reports came to me that a certain man was harassing women.

Q: What was he doing?

A: He was trying to intimidate the women into voting for a particular candidate.

Q: Did you solve that problem?

A: Yes, we called the UNAMSIL personnel and they immediately removed the man from the polling station.

Q: Before he was removed, did he succeed in influencing a lot of the women to vote for the candidate he wanted?

A: No, he did that to the first lady and I think the second lady refused and she made the complaint.

Q: As a displaced woman, what concerns of yours do you want the president-elect to address? What kind of assistance do you want when you return to your area and while you are here at this camp?

A: We, the displaced women, are sure that the party we voted for will win and, so, when this government is in place, we want it to address the concerns we have as displaced women. Regardless of whether you are a refugee³⁷ or not, we want the government to address the issues that women have to deal with. We want free education for our children. We are uneducated; but we want our children to be educated. Secondly, we need work; we want our husbands to have employment. We also want help with agriculture, because most of us have lost our husbands as a result of the war. We want the government to help us, the war-affected women; we want micro-credit and we want agricultural help, so we can be self-reliant. We don't want money handouts from the government. Of course, if they give us, we will accept it. But more importantly, we need support with things like agricultural inputs, so we can depend on ourselves. Now that we are going back to

homes, we know that our land is fertile; so we know that we will be able to grow our own food.

Q: Tell me about the problems you will face in regard to shelter when you return.

A: We who are going back to the provinces know that a lot of destruction has taken place there. We want to go back to our homes; we have just been waiting for the elections. When we go back, we want the government to build shelters for us — not permanent shelters, but somewhere we can stay temporarily until we build our own homes. We would like to be given items like corrugated zinc sheets and nails and we will provide the labor. We will also need food to be provided while we work. All of us have to join hands and work together so we can assist our government and develop. It is not the government only that has to do things; we also have to do things. The government needs to support us with the materials that we need, and we will do the work so our country will develop. Our most important needs are shelter and agriculture. If we are helped with agriculture we will have food for ourselves and what is left over we can sell.

Q: Did you choose the candidate that you voted for because you believe he will be able to implement these things that you are talking about?

A: Yes, I chose my candidate because of that and, in fact, he spoke to us, the displaced women. I am sure that my candidate will win because we have seen the changes already; we are not children.³⁸ All the political parties have been here to campaign and we have heard what they have said. We made our choice based on what the political parties told us. We chose our candidate because of what he said, and we trust that he will fulfill the things that he said. We didn't choose our candidate because of tribe; in fact none of the presidential candidates are from our tribe. They say the eye cannot carry a load but it knows which load is heavy.

Q: So are the displaced women more aware of their rights now? You mentioned that there was a huge turnout among the women here at this camp.

A: Yes, we women are now aware that whatever men can do we can do and we can even do more. We aren't challenging men; but we know that, if they can talk, we can talk more. The party we voted for has female parliamentary candidates and we have told them that they should help us. We didn't choose them because they are female; we looked at the capabilities of the people contesting the elections. We

have told them that they will be there for five years. If they don't do what they promised to do, we will remove them from office, because we won't vote for them next time around. There are women now who want to run for office, but haven't done so yet. They are also capable of filling those positions. That is why we registered to vote; it is our right to help develop this country. There are many reasons; for example, all that has happened in our country recently. We are the mothers of those in the RUF, those in the APC and those in the SLPP.³⁹ No man can say that a woman didn't give birth to him. We, the women, are standing up now to let this country progress and that is why we are voting today. Today we were the first to vote in the queue; when the men pushed, we pushed them back.

Q: Did they make the pregnant women and the aged vote first at this camp?

A: Yes, mothers with young children, those who are pregnant, the old women and those with disabilities were made to vote first.

Q: Tell me about the war-affected women, like the widows, what special kind of programs would you like the government to put in place for them?

A: We had said before to the political parties when they came to campaign that there are now more women than men. We told them that we had lost our husbands; some of us have disabled husbands. So we asked them, "You want us to vote for you? When you win, what will you do for us?" We told them that the first thing we wanted was for the government to put education on the agenda. We told them that, if our children were educated and knew their rights, they wouldn't go to the bush to fight against their compatriots. Secondly, we told them that we had lost our husbands; but we could now do the same jobs our husbands used to do when they were alive. We have told them that, as soon as they win, they should put in place programs for us the women. We would like the widows and the old women to be given micro-credit. Those younger women with sons who have matured should be included in any agricultural programs.

Q: What about the adolescent girls?

A: There are a lot of these girls and some of them say they don't want to go to school. So, we would like them to be taught some skills. We don't want tie-dyeing because when you make it, someone has to buy it, and it has become far too common now. I

think that soap making is more important because every day people use soap.

Q: What about tailoring? Is that useful?

A: We have also looked at that option. It is also too common. People sell secondhand clothes here and they are bought; so I think many people don't sew anymore. You can buy a T-shirt for Le: 2500.⁴⁰

Q: So, apart from soap making, what other skills do you think it will be useful for these adolescent girls to have?

A: I think these girls should be given adult literacy skills and, within that program, they can be taught business skills as well. Before you start a business — for example, micro-credit — you have to know how to run your business and what kind of business you want to start. Then you will be able to sustain it. You can't be here, for example, at this displaced camp and then just start a business like that. It won't work. I have seen that many times. You have to know how to do your business before you can successfully run it. We want them to teach these girls business skills and soap making and literacy, so at least they will be able to write their own names. It isn't only boys that should learn; girls have to learn, too. They say, if you educate a girl, you educate a nation. We want the government to make it compulsory for girls to receive an education. Now we have voted and we think that we have finally got a lasting peace, we want the government that will come to support us, not to give us money.

INTERVIEW WITH CHAIRLADY OF THE APPROVED SCHOOL DISPLACED CAMP

Q: What would you like the winning candidate to do for you? For example, what kind of problems do you have here at the camp?

A: We haven't received our two months' supply of food and our booths⁴¹ are leaking. We want the winning candidate to bring us peace; we want the interests of the poor people to be advanced; and we want our country to develop. We want the price of food to come down so poor people can afford it. At least they should be able to buy rice and, if the price of goods comes down, more poor people can engage in trade.

Q: They have started returning people to their villages. What kind of assistance would you like to see

the government giving them?

A: We want new houses for those whose homes have been burnt down. They should be given money to restart their lives. We want our children to be educated. For example, I haven't been educated and I don't have any skills. That's why I am going through these difficulties. We want our children to be educated. We also want employment for the young men

and women. People who are occupied with their jobs or businesses will be productive members of society and they won't have time to create problems.

Q: Do you have the confidence that the person you voted for will achieve those things?

A: I have the confidence that anyone who wins will do those things.

NOTES

- 1 Cairo, 16 September 1997, para. 4, <<http://www.ipu.org/cnl-e/161-dem.htm>>. The Inter-Parliamentary Council is composed of two representatives — generally of different political persuasions — from each of its 142 member parliaments. Although Sierra Leone’s parliament was affiliated with the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) between 1964 and 1967, and then again between 1969 and 1982, it is not currently a member of IPU.
- 2 Kono is the major diamond mining town in Sierra Leone located in the country’s eastern province. Sierra Leone’s capital, Freetown, where these women are currently displaced, is on the western tip of the country.
- 3 See notes accompanying select text below for an illustrative enumeration of Sierra Leone’s domestic commitments and international legal obligations regarding these women’s priorities.
- 4 Figures for camps visited in relation to the nationwide IDP population are as follows: Grafton 4.3%; Approved School 4.1%; National Workshop 2.2%; Trade Center 1.3%; Amputee 0.4%; Mandela 0.2%.
- 5 See Annex I for an explanation of the limitations of electoral statistics in Sierra Leone.
- 6 See Annex II for transcripts of the interviews with the chairladies of the Amputee, Approved School and Grafton Camps. The chairladies of the Mandela, National Workshops and Trade Center Transit Camps were not available at the time of the election day interviews.
- 7 “Given that women have been particularly victimized during the war, special attention shall be accorded to their needs and potential in formulating and implementing national rehabilitation, reconstruction and development programmes, to enable them to play a central role in the moral, social and physical reconstruction of Sierra Leone.” Art. XXVIII (2), Peace Agreement between the Government of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front, Lomé, 7 July 1999. <<http://www.sierra-leone.org/lomeaccord.html>>
- 8 “Every human being shall be entitled to respect for his life and the integrity of his person.... Every individual shall have the right to liberty and to the security of his person.” (African [Banjul] Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, adopted June 27, 1981, OAU Doc. CAB/LEG/67/3 rev. 5, 21 I.L.M. 58 (1982), entered into force October 21, 1986, Arts 4 and 6, in pertinent part, ratified by Sierra Leone on September 21, 1983.) “Every human being has the right to liberty and security of person.” Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (Guiding Principles), Addendum to the Report of the Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Francis M. Deng, E/CN.4/1998/53/Add.2, February 11, 1998, Principle 12.1. “The Principles reflect and are consistent with international human rights law and international humanitarian law. They restate the relevant principles applicable to the internally displaced, which are now widely spread out in existing instruments, clarify any gray areas that might exist, and address the gaps identified in the [Special Representative’s] Compilation and Analysis [of Legal Norms relevant to the needs and rights of the internally displaced].” (Id., para. 9.)
- 9 In the 17 group interviews performed, note was taken of responses that seemed to reflect consensus of the group, not individual responses. Other issues were noted with no discernible order of priority.
- 10 “States Parties shall ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child.” (Convention on the Rights of the Child [CRC], adopted by General Assembly resolution 44/25, 20 November 1989. Entry into force September 2, 1990 Art. 6.2. Ratified by Sierra Leone June 18, 1990.)
- 11 “At the minimum, regardless of the circumstances, and without discrimination, competent authorities shall provide internally displaced persons with and ensure safe access to: (a) Essential food and potable water; (b) Basic shelter and housing... and (d) Essential medical services and sanitation.... Special efforts should be made to ensure the full participation of women in the planning and distribution of these basic supplies.” (Guiding Principle 18, in pertinent part.) “States Parties recognize the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child’s physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.... States Parties, in accordance with national conditions and within their means, shall take appropriate measures to assist parents and others responsible for the child to implement this right and shall in case of need provide material assistance and support programmes, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing.” (CRC, Art. 27.1 and .3.)
- 12 Of the 62 women interviewed individually about their top priorities and expectations from their newly elected (or re-elected) officials, 48 mentioned shelter; 45 mentioned food; 39 mentioned education; 34 mentioned health care; and 27 mentioned income-generation. All the groups consulted brought up the issues enumerated in this report, except for two: One group at the Amputee Camp and another at the Mandela Camp did not mention education.
- 13 “Every individual shall have the right to the respect

of the dignity inherent in a human being...” (Banjul Charter, Art. 5, in pertinent part.)

- 14 Despite this humane policy, the Women’s Commission has observed and received reports of a worrying strategy in practice by the former NCRRR (National Commission for Reconstruction, Resettlement and Rehabilitation), now the National Commission for Social Action, or NaCSA. In the Approved School Camp, for example, both women and a representative of the one nongovernmental organization still there, the Islamic Relief Organisation (IRO), confirmed to the Women’s Commission in June 2002 the dismantling of the tarpaulin “booths” upon individual IDP returns. In dismantling the booths, the IRO, under instructions from NaCSA, perpetuated the practice to date of requiring two or more families to live in one room in order to fill the remaining booths to capacity: eight per room — essentially the number of bodies required to carpet the floor area. The Women’s Commission expressed its concern about such undignified, unhealthy and potentially volatile living conditions to the director of programs for NaCSA on 7 June 2002, who promised to investigate the situation.
- 15 The NCRRR strategy paper essentially supports this woman’s view: “Female-headed households face considerable challenges in returning to their resettlement areas and rebuilding their lives, particularly those who don’t have extended families or able-bodied children to support them. Special attention needs to be given to them for re-establishing their basic requirements, such as shelter, rebuilding their livelihoods and protecting them from sexual violence. Agencies will be encouraged to target this group. Close monitoring by the Resettlement Working Group...of their ability to cope during this transitional process is crucial.... Ways should be found to ensure that those who cannot build on their own will be provided assistance to do so.” (Pp. 10-11 and 20.)
- 16 When asked to explain what kinds of problems the women were experiencing in the camp, the Chairlady of the Approved School Camp said, “We haven’t received our two months’ supply of food and our booths are leaking.”
- 17 Such complaints are not new to the Women’s Commission, which — since first opening its doors in Sierra Leone in February of this year — has been documenting and reporting to the agencies responsible cases of irregular food supply and its consequences for uprooted Sierra Leoneans’ welfare.
- 18 “Every individual shall have the right to education.” (Banjul Charter, Art. 17.1.) “To give effect to this right for internally displaced persons, the authorities concerned shall ensure that such persons, in particular displaced children, receive education which shall be free and compulsory at the primary level.... Special efforts should be made to ensure the full and equal participation of women and girls in educational programmes.... Education and training facilities shall be made available to internally displaced persons, in particular adolescents and women, whether or not living in camps, as soon as conditions permit.” (Guiding Principle 23, in pertinent part.) “States Parties recognize the right of the child to education and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular...[m]ake primary education compulsory and available free to all....” (CRC, Art. 28.1(a).)
- 19 “Every individual shall have the right to enjoy the best attainable state of physical and mental health.... States parties...shall take the necessary measures to protect the health of their people and to ensure that they receive medical attention when they are sick.” (Banjul Charter, Art. 16.) “All wounded and sick internally displaced persons as well as those with disabilities shall receive to the fullest extent practicable and with the least possible delay, the medical care and attention they require, without distinction on any grounds other than medical ones. When necessary, internally displaced persons shall have access to psychological and social services.... Special attention should be paid to the health needs of women, including access to female health care providers and services, such as reproductive health care, as well as appropriate counselling for victims of sexual and other abuses.” (Guiding Principle 18.1-2.) “States Parties recognize the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health. States Parties shall strive to ensure that no child is deprived of his or her right of access to such health care services.... States Parties shall pursue full implementation of this right....” (CRC, Art. 24.1-2. See Art. 24 in its entirety for a practical breakdown of Sierra Leone’s obligation to protect this right.)
- 20 Such conditions include sporadic, inadequate and inappropriate food supply; poor medical facilities; unhealthily close living arrangements and shelters that leak during the rainy season.
- 21 “Every individual shall have the right to work under equitable and satisfactory conditions....” (Banjul Charter, Art. 15, in pertinent part.)
- 22 “Some people were afraid to come out and vote because of the RUF and APC threat to kill people on Saturday. But I went around and encouraged them to come out and vote.” Words of the Chairlady of the Amputee and War-Wounded Displaced Camp. The RUF is the Revolutionary

- United Front. The APC is the All Peoples Congress.
- 23 This statement is based on the National Electoral Commission's comments after election day and on a Women's Commission consultation with the Principal Elections Officer.
 - 24 Binta Mansaray, "Women Against Weapons," in *Bound to Cooperate: Conflict, Peace and People in Sierra Leone* (Anatole Ayissi and Robin-Edward Poulton eds., UNIDIR/2000/19, 2000).
 - 25 "Resettlement" is the term used in Sierra Leone to refer to the return of internally displaced persons, refugees and ex-combatants to their places of origin or former habitual residence. (See, e.g., NCRRR Strategy, p. 5, pt. 1.2.1.)
 - 26 President Kabbah was re-elected on May 14.
 - 27 From the NEC Strategic Plan 2001-2005: Strategic Goal 1 (CONDUCT OF ELECTIONS) Objectives: bullet point 13: "By 30 November 2001, election day personnel will have been recruited and trained, with special emphasis on the inclusion of women and the disabled." Strategic Goal 2 (REGISTRATION) Objectives: bullet point 4: "By 31 August 2001, registration personnel will have been recruited and trained, with special emphasis on the inclusion of women and the disabled." Strategic Goal 3 (RESOURCE CAPACITY AND RESTRUCTURING) Objectives: bullet point 3: "By 30 June 2001, additional permanent staff will have been recruited and appointed, with special emphasis on the inclusion of women and the disabled."
 - 28 In the context of elections in Sierra Leone, "demonstrators" are people who go from community to community prior to any electoral event to demonstrate electoral procedures, such as registration, exhibition and polling, to facilitate the participation of the electorate. "Hailers" are people who travel from community to community to announce the date, time and place of important events such as registration, exhibition and polling. Women's Commission interview with principal elections officer, September 11, 2002, Freetown.
 - 29 See Annex I.
 - 30 Res. 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (October 31, 2000), para. 8(c).
 - 31 Otherwise known as NaCSA, and formerly known as the National Commission for Reconstruction, Resettlement and Rehabilitation, or NCRRR.
 - 32 The Women's Commission defines children in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Art. 1, i.e., anyone under the age of eighteen. It defines young people in accordance with the World Health Organization as persons 10-24 years of age. (See, e.g., *Untapped Potential: Adolescents Affected by Armed Conflict* [Untapped Potential], Women's Commission, January 2000, p. 10.)
 - 33 According to the NCRRR Strategy paper, "[F]ree schooling will be provided for grades 1-6, following the national policy." According to a Women's Commission consultation of NaCSA, all IDP camps had lower elementary schools (class 1-3). Upper elementary school (class 4-6) children have access to community schools.
 - 34 The Women's Commission uses the World Health Organization definition of "youth" to indicate persons 15-24 years of age. (See, e.g., *Untapped Potential*.)
 - 35 See Annex I.
 - 36 The incumbent president, re-elected on the election day under review.
 - 37 By "refugee," the Chairlady means "internal refugee," or internally displaced person.
 - 38 The Chairlady is talking about Kabbah, the incumbent, who was indeed re-elected on May 14.
 - 39 The RUF, or Revolutionary United Front, is the movement that launched the civil war in 1991 that raged for 11 years. The APC, or All Peoples Congress, is the party that ruled Sierra Leone for over 20 years, from the late 1960s to the early 1990s. The SLPP, or the Sierra Leone People's Party, is the party that won the country's first democratic elections in 1996 and has been ruling the country since.
 - 40 US\$ 1.25.
 - 41 "Booths" are temporary buildings comprised of four rooms, with mud or plastic walls and plastic sheeting for ceilings, some of it very old and porous. In the Approved School Camp, at least, the government and its implementing NGO partner require that each room house as close to eight people as possible — essentially, the number of bodies required to cover the dirt floor — even if it means lodging two unrelated families in close and very intimate confines. No room ever seen by the Women's Commission at the Approved School Camp has had more than one bed, thereby requiring the majority of its occupants to sleep on the floor.

Women's Commission
for Refugee Women and Children
122 East 42nd Street
New York, NY 10168-1289

tel. 212.551.3111 or 3088
fax. 212.551.3180
wcrwc@womenscommission.org
www.womenscommission.org

