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In Lugbu Chiefdom, about 85% of the male were initiated, some of them becoming initiates to avoid harassment. It is worth noting that after the Kamajors had taken control of an area, some people were initiated without the intention that they would become a fighter, in which case the initiation period was shorter. The general perception of the population and people who were initiated in this manner was that becoming a member was a protective measure, since people who were not members of the Kamajors could be suspected of being a “rebel” collaborator.

By 1997, Kamajors cleared Bagbe Chiefdom of an RUF presence and it appears that the AFRC regime did not affect Bagbe Chiefdom. In Badjia¹¹²⁸ and Boama Chiefdoms, the attitude of the Kamajors is described as having changed to become arrogant and disrespectful towards civilians. The Kamajors deposed the Chiefs, established their own courts and required people to give them food and money and to work in the Kamajors’ farms.¹¹²⁹

Once the Kamajors obtained control of Valunia Chiefdom, they operated checkpoints, where they issued travelling passes for Le 500 per day per traveller, described by the Kamajors as a war effort for their sustenance. Anybody wanting to move within this area had to purchase and, when required, produce such a pass. People who were suspected of being a member of the SLA were subject to interrogation, in some cases brief, and were punished and sometimes killed. Non-initiated civilians were required to provide them with food, which led many young adults to join the society. The Kamajors also took property from people passing through checkpoints. In one instance, one car that was seized was handed over to the Deputy Initiator, who was residing in Kongombahun in Niawa Langa village after she had fled Bo Town.

As mentioned, most of the Chiefs were deposed and the Kamajors took over their responsibilities. Civilians disobeying their orders or complaining about their authority would be punished. People were put in cages called a “kuliehun”, which was so small that it would not reach the height of a person’s knee. A common punishment inflicted was the use of FM rope, namely a nylon rope tied on two edges of a small stick around a person’s hands and tightened.¹¹³⁰ Thus, in December 2000, while in Bo, a man who declared on the radio that the nomination of the new Regent Chief for Wunde was not endorsed by the population was arrested by Kamajors, severely beaten for six days and threatened to be killed before being released following pressure from a human rights activist. Other opponents to this nomination were also arrested and taken to CDF headquarters in Bo, although no further information is available on what happened to them.

Fighting between the Kamajors and SLA forces began spreading from Libi Junction in Malen Chiefdom to Bathurst, south of Koribondo, in April-May 1997. In one incident, SLA soldiers were captured, although no further information is available on what happened to them after their capture.

¹¹²⁸ RUF forces left Badjia Chiefdom, in the north-east of Bo District, in 1996, which then remained under the control of patrolling Kamajors. No further details are available as to under what circumstances the RUF forces departed or any acts committed by the Kamajors in the chiefdom at this time.

¹¹²⁹ In addition, they tied people up and sometimes killed them, although no further details are available.

¹¹³⁰ This rope was called “FM”, meaning “frequency modulation”, because once tied with this rope, civilians spoke or confessed.



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During the AFRC regime, RUF/AFRC forces were mainly concentrated in Bo Town (Kakua Chiefdom) and Koribondo (Jama Bongor Chiefdom) and on the highway between Bo and Koribondo. During this period, Kamajors attacked Koribondo on several occasions¹¹³¹ and RUF/AFRC forces were driven out during the beginning of 1998.

Shortly after the Coup in May 1997, the Kamajors drove the AFRC out of Gerihun (Boama Chiefdom) and back to Bo Town. However, in June 1997, when Gerihun was attacked by RUF/AFRC forces, the Kamajors were unable to defend the town as they ran out of ammunition and up to six civilians were killed, including the Paramount Chief. Many houses were burnt down, including that of the former Vice President of Sierra Leone.

In June 1997, RUF/AFRC forces attacked ECOMOG troops based at Gondama twice. The first time, the combined forces were not able to challenge the heavy firepower of the ECOMOG forces. However, some refugees were killed, some by drowning in the river. During the second attack, running out of ammunition, ECOMOG forces found refuge at the Mil Camp at Gbaama. As RUF/AFRC forces were controlling all the access roads to Gbaama, the welfare of these ECOMOG members were at stake, so 11 days after the attack, the local Kamajor commander took the decision to rescue them using a helicopter. The sounds of helicopter and jet fighters were heard flying towards Gbaama and Kamajors arriving by helicopter landed on the field of the Roman Catholic School. It took them several trips to rescue all the ECOMOG forces and by the end, the school was completely damaged, apparently by the constant landing and taking off of the helicopter. In November 1997, RUF/AFRC forces attacked the township of Mamboma, to the north of Jamaa Bongor Chiefdom along the road from Telu, but were driven out by Kamajors coming from Gbaama.

RUF/AFRC forces based at Koribondo¹¹³² (Jama Bongor Chiefdom) patrolled the area and attacked Kamajor positions, killing both civilians and Kamajors. In June 1997, they attacked Bendu (Jama Bongor Chiefdom), a Kamajor base, again killing both Kamajors and civilians and burning some houses.¹¹³³ The practice of looting by RUF/AFRC forces was also widespread at this time. As the RUF/AFRC attacks intensified, the Kamajors of Gbaama, Tikonko and Lugbu Chiefdoms attacked the RUF/AFRC base at Koribondo but were unsuccessful.

After May 1997, the Kamajors of Gbo Chiefdom started hunting what they called "Junta collaborators" and killed some people, although it was more common for them just to punish people they suspected of having any contact with the AFRC forces, for example by tying people up and making them stay out under the sun. The Kamajors also took food from civilians. It was useless

¹¹³¹ During an attack that took place in June, eight civilians were killed. However, it could not be ascertained how those civilians were killed: <http://www.focus-on-sierra-leone.co.uk>.

¹¹³² For the most part, from 1991 to 1997, the SLA had a base at Koribondo and controlled the town. When the Coup took place in May 1997, SLA forces became members of the AFRC and so, in general, former SLA bases became RUF/AFRC bases.

¹¹³³ One report states that while eight Kamajors, 11 adult civilians and one child were killed, after this attack 16 bodies dressed in military uniform were found.



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to report these incidents, in particular the taking of food, to the CDF commander, who would reply by saying that his men were in the right, because they came to protect people.¹¹³⁴

A major incident took place in Tikonko Town (Tikonko Chiefdom) at this time. On 10 June 1997, the Kamajor's Chiefdom Ground Commander received a letter from the High Priest Initiator with the order to gather all Kamajors in Tikonko Chiefdom at Tikonko Town for the purpose of participating in an attack on RUF/AFRC positions at Bo Town. Approximately 200 or 300 Kamajors came from all directions of the chiefdom and two days later, more arrived. During their short stay, civilians were forced to feed them. These Kamajors engaged in stopping any RUF/AFRC movement southwards by blocking successfully the Bo-Mattru Jong (Bonthe District) road.¹¹³⁵

At this time, RUF/AFRC forces began to disguise themselves as Kamajors and attack towns in Tikonko Chiefdom. People were able to identify them as RUF/AFRC forces because they had RPGs, AK47s and grenades, whereas the Kamajors were armed with single barrel guns, cutlasses, sticks and knives. One incident took place on 25 June 1997, with some men dressed in full Kamajor attire came from the direction of Bo, riding Honda motorbikes. This was confusing to the people of Tikonko, because Kamajors never rode motorbikes and, at the same time, rumours were going round that RUF/AFRC forces were heading for Tikonko Town. Shortly after the arrival of these men, the sound of RPG fire was heard in the town. RUF/AFRC forces entered the town, taking property and killing people. All those who were trapped in their houses were killed, including 11 people in one house near the market and a woman who was disembowelled. One of the Kamajors based in Tikonko Town was beaten and tortured before being killed. Many Kamajors died in the forest along Lembema Road, north of Tikonko Town. A similar incident occurred in January 1998, when RUF/AFRC forces coming from Bo went to Towama, between Bo and Tikonko towns, saying it was a Kamajor base. Four civilians were killed, up to 25 houses were burnt and property was taken away. The RUF/AFRC forces went back to Bo and stayed there until ECOMOG forces arrived.

After reports had reached the CDF National Coordinator that the Kamajor commander who had rescued the ECOMOG troops at Gondama (Kakua Chiefdom) was harassing, maiming, ill-treating and killing civilians, this commander was replaced by another one, who became commander for Jiamia Bongor, Bagbe, Lugbu and Tikonko Chiefdoms. In the weeks that followed (July 1997), there was relative peace, although the Kamajors began to steal property.

RUF/AFRC forces again bombarded the ECOMOG position at Gondama on 11 October 1997; ECOMOG responded by bombing RUF/AFRC positions, using Nigerian warplanes.¹¹³⁶

¹¹³⁴ It is not clear who had control of the town at this point. While it appears that the Kamajors were in control, it is also said that at this time the CDF had been disbanded and the Kamajors were operating secretly.

¹¹³⁵ Sierra Leone Humanitarian Situation Report 22 July - 4 August 1997. It is, however, not clear when the Kamajors attacked the town, as the reports make no mention of this (these) attack(s). However, according to the Sierra Leone Humanitarian Situation Report 23 August - 01 September 1997, fighting continued between Kamajors and RUF/AFRC forces in the south of Bo Town, which may suggest that fighting already took place previously. Furthermore, it is clear that whatever battle may have taken place in the area between the RUF/AFRC and the Kamajors, the RUF/AFRC forces were still in control of the town.

¹¹³⁶ Sierra Leone Humanitarian Situation Report 1 - 13 October 1997.



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In December 1997, RUF/AFRC forces attacked Kamajors at Baiama (Gbo Chiefdom). A few days later, one man and one woman who were suspected of being relatives of an AFRC member were killed at Baiama Junction and their bodies remained lying there until they decomposed.

Operation "Black December" was declared in December 1997 by the CDF High Command in a bid to take control of RUF/AFRC positions and was implemented in Boama Chiefdom. As part of this operation, all the highways and roads leading to the villages were blocked, in order to prevent RUF/AFRC forces from attacking civilians. Due to this operation, Kamajors became increasingly dependant on civilians to obtain food and medication, as the supply routes were blocked. Nevertheless, the operation also successfully prevented RUF/AFRC movement and enabled the CDF to counter-attack the RUF/AFRC forces in Gerihun.

Events in 1998

In February 1998, fighting took place between Kamajors and RUF/AFRC forces all over the Southern Province, which led to the withdrawal of the combined forces. By early 1998, the Kamajors had regained control of Boama Chiefdom until the arrival of ECOMOG forces around 20-22 February 1998.¹¹³⁷

That same month, two boys came to Koribondo (Jama Bongor Chiefdom), their hands covered in blood. They told the people of Koribondo that Kamajors had shot their hands and that they were coming to attack Koribondo; indeed, the Kamajors did attack the town on 13 February. During this attack, two AFRC soldiers and two Kamajors died. Soon after, the AFRC forces withdrew from Koribondo, following the ousting of their government from Freetown in February 1998. The attitude of the Kamajors panicked people, who decided to move to Bo Town, where houses identified as occupied by Koribondo people were harassed. This situation lasted until ECOMOG arrived in Bo Town in February or early March 1998.¹¹³⁸

Around 16-17 February, there was a major battle between RUF/AFRC and ECOMOG forces in Bo Town;¹¹³⁹ hundreds of people fled the town. The town was set on fire, massively looted and bodies were left lying on the streets. RUF/AFRC forces looted three commercial banks, destroyed the telecommunications network and damaged the Bo-Kenema power facility serving the Eastern Province.¹¹⁴⁰ Shortly after, around 20 February, ECOMOG troops based at Kenema deployed in the north and east of the town, areas previously held by Kamajors and then in the town itself, where

¹¹³⁷ Key persons recognise that some atrocities were committed by Kamajors but tried to justify them, saying that anyway, there was no law or order and that these Kamajors were not trained for war as soldiers but took arms to defend democracy. They continued by stating that since most of them were not educated, you could not expect them to observe rules and regulations governing "warriors".

¹¹³⁸ It is not clear from the records when ECOMOG arrived in Bo Town. However, ECOMOG movements in the rest of the country, in particular in Port Loko, Moyamba and Tonkolili Districts, as well as their arrival date in Kenema District suggests that ECOMOG troops had to be in Bo Town by the very beginning of March at the latest. Some contingents of ECOMOG forces were however already deployed in the District at Gondama (it has to be remembered that the Gondama Camp since 1993 was placed under the protection of Nigerian troops).

¹¹³⁹ Open sources revealed that on 16 February, over 10,000 well-armed Kamajors entered the town from three different directions and "several junta soldiers and their sympathisers were killed or tried on the spot and handed over to anti-junta youths for execution [...]": AAP, 17 February 1998.

¹¹⁴⁰ AFP, 24 February 1998.



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Kamajors had been fighting RUF/AFRC forces.¹¹⁴¹ After RUF/AFRC forces had left the town, youths were searching for RUF/AFRC members and their “collaborators”, including people who were suspected of being Temne.¹¹⁴² Those suspects who were caught were killed, some hacked to death and others had tyres put around their neck, which were then set on fire.¹¹⁴³ Furthermore, a committee created for processing stolen property “discovered a large dockside area that had been used to take such goods out of the country”.¹¹⁴⁴

On their way out of Bo Town, civilians were thoroughly searched at Kamajor checkpoints. At one checkpoint on the way to Manguama, which lies north-east of Bo Town, some civilians were stripped naked, tied up and forced to sit on the ground, suspected of being “Junta” collaborators. These people were later killed. In another incident on 17 February, civilians coming in a truck were asked to show their passes at a checkpoint at Baiama junction (Gbo Chiefdom). Those who could not produce them were put into a cell made up of sticks and were beaten.

Kamajor harassment of the civilian population, including physical violence, looting and the burning of houses, continued throughout 1998. In one instance in Baiama (Gbo Chiefdom), a woman suspected of being an AFRC member’s wife was killed and her body was displayed at the checkpoint. In the villages where they had found refuge, people were harassed by Kamajors for food.

Around June 1998, a large number of Kamajors attacked Koribondo, looting and burning over 70 houses. Shortly after the town was set ablaze, the CDF National Coordinator came to Koribondo and held a meeting at the village square, at which people of the town were present. During this meeting, he allegedly thanked the Kamajors but reprimanded them from not having followed his instructions completely, as he had told the Kamajors not to spare any building except the church, hospital, mosque and the village square. It appears that this attack was partly done in retaliation for Koribondo people hosting SLA and RUF/AFRC forces. Following this incident, some ECOMOG troops arrived in Koribondo to investigate the matter and the Kamajor commander together with 20 of his forces were arrested and taken to Bo.¹¹⁴⁵

Kamajors went to the south of Kakua Chiefdom to villages including Baoma, Segbwema, Adala and Berehun. On three separate occasions in December 1998, they took people’s possessions, including cars, clothes and other valuable items, as well as any food they could find, including livestock. In addition, Kamajors targeted people suspected of being collaborators with both SLA and AFRC soldiers. One example is from the end of 1998, when the Kamajors drew up a list of the 25 “most wanted” people, who were suspected of having hosted soldiers in their houses. A letter was sent to Sembehun that Kamajors would attack the town to kill those 25 most wanted people and on the day they stated, a large group of Kamajors¹¹⁴⁶ came to Sembehun. Although nobody was killed, as the 25 people were nowhere to be found, a lot of houses were burnt down. A short while later, the CDF

¹¹⁴¹ AFP, 24 February 1998; BBC Online News Archive, 25 February 1998.

¹¹⁴² The RUF leader was a Temne by tribe whereas the Kamajors were Mende.

¹¹⁴³ No more information could be obtained on this event.

¹¹⁴⁴ AFP, 24 February 1998.

¹¹⁴⁵ It is not clear from the records what happened to these Kamajors after they were taken to Bo.

¹¹⁴⁶ Records relate that “thousands” of Kamajors came to Sembehun on this day.



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commander based at Koribondo, who had control over Sembehun and who led the search in December, required the 25 people to come to Koribondo and pay Le 50,000 each, or they would be killed. The people did as they were told and then were allowed to leave.

Following the RUF/AFRC invasion of Freetown in January 1999, negotiations started between the Government of Sierra Leone and the RUF. A ceasefire was signed in May and a peace accord supposed to mark the end of the conflict and known as the Lomé Peace Agreement was signed on 7 July in the Togolese capital. An important part of the accord was that the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) process was to start within six weeks of its entry into force. This process, somehow delayed, was formally launched by the President of Sierra Leone on 20 October 1999 during a ceremony at Wilberforce Barracks, Freetown and began properly on 4 November. However, despite the calls of the RUF leader and ex-AFRC leader to their troops to disarm,¹¹⁴⁷ disarmament was implemented at a very slow pace, thus hindering the deployment of humanitarian aid in the country. The delay of the process was mainly due to the resumed fighting in the Northern Province and in Kono District.¹¹⁴⁸ In the meanwhile, the first UN peacekeepers arrived in the country and, in January, troops from the Ghanaian contingent arrived in Bo District.¹¹⁴⁹

In a bid to foster and enhance the DDR process, sites for new DDR camps were identified around 10 March 2000, one being located at Gondama (Kakua Chiefdom).¹¹⁵⁰ However, the disarmament process was stalled in May 2000, following the capture by RUF forces of over 300 UN peacekeepers in the Northern and Eastern Provinces. The process would be given a new start in November 2000 when the Government of Sierra Leone and the RUF signed a new ceasefire agreement in Abuja, Nigeria.¹¹⁵¹

On 31 January 2001, a CDF meeting was convened at the CDF District Headquarters in Bo Town in the presence of the UNAMSIL military observers (MILOBs) team for Bo, the resident Minister, the Deputy Defence Minister, the CDF District Administrator and the NCDDR (National Commission for the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration) representative. At this meeting, the problems caused by the CDF in the District were discussed, including the recent attack on the NCDDR office, the reorganisation of the CDF and CDF interference in police matters.

¹¹⁴⁷ On 10 January, the RUF leader, the ex-AFRC leader and the Deputy Minister of Defence and CDF National Coordinator stopped in Bo Town, as part of sensitisation trip on the disarmament campaign, aimed at exhorting combatants, namely ex-AFRC, RUF and CDF, to disarm: IRIN West Africa, 10 January 2000.

¹¹⁴⁸ In November 1999, only 1,500 combatants had disarmed out of the estimated total of 45,000 combatants: IRIN West Africa, 17 November 1999.

¹¹⁴⁹ The United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) was established by Security Council Resolution 1270 (1999), adopted on 22 October 1999. Six thousand peacekeepers were sent into the country and their number would increase over the coming months, following the security developments in the Northern and Eastern Provinces.

¹¹⁵⁰ The initial camps were located at Port Loko North, Port Loko South, Kenema Town and Daru (Kailahun District): IRIN West Africa, 17 March 2000.

¹¹⁵¹ The security situation in the Northern and Eastern Provinces prevailing in 2000 urged the Government of Sierra Leone to negotiate a ceasefire with the RUF in November 2000. On 4 May 2001, those parties would meet again in Abuja, Nigeria to review the ceasefire. Further to the meeting in May 2001, those parties would hold monthly tripartite meetings as the Joint Committee on DDR. The final meeting took place in January 2002 when disarmament was declared complete and the war over.



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During a separate meeting convened by the Deputy Defence Minister, the reorganisation of the CDF in the District was discussed, rather than its disbanding.¹¹⁵²

By 31 March 2001, the 14 chiefdoms of the District were declared safe for resettlement, thereby making the entire Southern Province safe, unlike the North, where humanitarian activities were not possible in three-quarters of the Province, and in the East, where the whole of Kono and Kailahun Districts (except Daru) and six chiefdoms in Kenema District were still considered unsafe.¹¹⁵³

Following the meeting in Abuja in May 2001, disarmament was carried out at different dates across the country. It was scheduled to start in Bo District by the end of September 2001¹¹⁵⁴ but was briefly delayed. However, during a symbolic disarmament ceremony in Gerihun (Boama Chiefdom) on 20 October 2001, over 80 CDF members disarmed in the presence of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) in Sierra Leone and were transported to the DDR camp at Gondama, where the SRSG addressed the now ex-combatants.¹¹⁵⁵

At the conclusion of the seventh tripartite meeting of the Joint Committee on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR), comprising representatives of the Government of Sierra Leone, UNAMSIL and the RUF held in Freetown on 8 November 2001, it was communicated that disarmament would be complete in Bo District on 10 November 2001.¹¹⁵⁶

3. Conclusion

The pattern of the conflict in Bo District followed to a large extent the one of the three other southern Districts. The RUF/NPFL incursion in Pujehun District in 1991 expanded in the bordering chiefdoms of Bo District. Successful SLA counter-attacks in 1991 and 1992 limited the RUF/NPFL attacks to a lower scale, mainly carried out by “pockets” of RUF/NPFL members for food finding purposes. The situation was similar in Bonthe and Pujehun Districts and would continue until the second phase of the conflict began in 1994.

As in the rest of the Southern Province, the conflict reached its peak in Bo District in 1994 and 1995, as RUF forces spread across the whole District. Their strong grip over the District would allow RUF forces to advance further inland towards the north-west (Moyamba District) and the south-west (Bonthe District), where most of the attacks in 1995 originated from Bo District through Moyamba District, unlike in 1991 when Bonthe District was affected by RUF /NPFL forces coming from Pujehun District. During this period, SLA forces were wholly unable to contain the RUF advance into the District and in the Southern Province as a whole, although (or because) their numbers increased greatly in 1994.

¹¹⁵² UNAMSIL press briefing, 31 January 2001.

¹¹⁵³ Sierra Leone Humanitarian Situation Report, 11 – 31 March 2001.

¹¹⁵⁴ IRIN West Africa, 13 August 2001; UNAMSIL press briefing, 14 August 2001. For example, in early August 2001, the Joint Committee on DDR declared disarmament complete for Port Loko and Kambia Districts.

¹¹⁵⁵ UNAMSIL press briefing, 23 October 2001.

¹¹⁵⁶ UNAMSIL press briefing, 09 November 2001. However, the target date of 30 November 2001 for the completion of the process in the whole country was not met and the disarmament was declared complete in January 2002.



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This RUF progression and stay in the whole Southern Province and in Bo District in particular was gradually stopped by the initiative of the Kamajors who started fighting alongside the SLA in 1996. The collaboration between those two forces however deteriorated rapidly and fighting between them reached its climax in early 1997. At this time, the Kamajors and the SLA were controlling distinct and separate areas of the District.

Following the ECOMOG intervention in Freetown and its deployment in different towns in the Provinces in 1998, the Southern Province became free of RUF/AFRC attacks and instead came under the total control of the Kamajors. Bo District was not affected by the retreating RUF/AFRC forces from Freetown, as they regrouped and concentrated on the main mining areas (Kono District and north of Kenema District) and those areas in which CDF members did not have established and constant control, mostly in the Northern Province.

Throughout the conflict, widespread violations were committed primarily by RUF/NPFL, RUF and RUF/AFRC forces, but also by SLA forces and Kamajors, especially once they firmly established their control and authority over the District. Those violations were directed against civilians and their property and included stealing and destruction of property, physical violence, sexual assault, killing and abduction for use as fighters, workers or "wives". Only a few cases of mutilation were reported for the District, as most of these incidents took place during a specific RUF/AFRC operation called "Operation No Living Thing" in the first months of 1998 and following the retreat from Freetown. Furthermore, while it hosted thousands of IDPs from other Districts, mainly Pujehun District, Bo District suffered less internal displacement of its own population.

b. Bonthe District

1. **Introduction**

Bonthe District is located in the south-west of the Southern Province of the Republic of Sierra Leone. It is the only District in the Southern Province that shares boundaries with the other three Districts in the Province, namely Moyamba and Bo Districts in the north and Pujehun District in the south and east. Bonthe District is bordered by the Atlantic Ocean in the west.

Although located on Sherbro Island,¹¹⁵⁷ its headquarter, Bonthe Town, is not part of the two chiefdoms of the island (Sittia and Dema Chiefdoms). Rather, its is part of another administrative structure, the Sherbro Rural District.

There are 11 chiefdoms in the District, two of which are located Sherbro Island:

Chiefdom	Headquarter
Bendu Cha	Bendu
Bum	Madina
Dema	Tissana
Imperi	Gbangbama
Jong	Mattru

¹¹⁵⁷ This island is commonly known as "Bonthe Island".



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Kpanda Kemo	Matuo
Kwamwbai Krim	Tei
Nongoba Bullom	Gbap
Sittia	Yonni
Sogbini	Tihun
Yawbeko	Talia

The presence of the water, whether it is the ocean, the rivers or the swamp, is the most striking natural feature of the District. The nine chiefdoms of the mainland are separated by the ocean from the two chiefdoms located on Sherbro Island. The south of the District, especially Nongoba Bullom Chiefdom is an area made up of swampland.

The two main rivers of the District, the Sewa River and the Jong River, both of them taking their source directly in the ocean, would affect the deployment of the forces throughout the conflict. They would be a substitute way of communications, especially in the south of the District where the road network is rather poor. The highway that links Bo Town to Mattru (Jong Chiefdom), via Sumbuya (Lugbu Chiefdom, Bo District) and Kpanda Kemo Chiefdom would allow rapid penetration into the north of the District from Bo District. From this highway, secondary roads extend into the neighbouring chiefdoms of Sogbini and Imperi.

The main economic activities include fishing, rice growing and palm plantations but the greatest revenue is generated by the rutile mining in the north of the District, particularly in Imperi Chiefdom. The north of the District and the south of Moyamba District, which advances into Bonthe District, are indeed renowned for the importance of their mining activities, which procured vital economic resources for the Government.

The ten years of conflict in Sierra Leone started in Bonthe District as early as April 1991, due to the fact that the District shares a border with Pujehun District, which was one of the entry points of the RUF/NPFL forces into Sierra Leone in March 1991. The National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) and Revolutionary United Front (RUF) forces entered the border chiefdom of Kwamebai Krim in May. This was the start of a long series of hostilities and atrocities committed against the civilians in the District, which lasted until the completion of disarmament in the District in mid 2001.

From this first incursion, Bonthe District was affected by the conflict through three discernable phases, the first one running from 1991 until the end of 1994. During the first attack in May 1991, RUF/NPFL forces settled in Kwamebai Krim Chiefdom for a short while before moving westwards to the neighbouring chiefdom of Nongoba Bullom. When entering a village, they would always proceed in the same manner: they gathered the civilians in the Court Barrie, introduced themselves as "freedom fighters" coming to redeem Sierra Leoneans from the corrupt APC regime and deposed and replaced local authorities. Defeated by the SLA forces some months later, they withdrew from Kwamebai Krim Chiefdom to their base in the south-west of Pujehun District. At the time of this first incursion, SLA forces were deployed mainly in Bonthe Town (Sherbro Island) but by the end of 1991, more bases in the east of the District were set up. RUF/NPFL forces occupied Bum



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Chieftdom for six months before being repelled by the SLA. Although RUF/NPFL attacks were still reported during the subsequent years of this first phase, they never succeeded in going further than the three chieftdoms of Kwamebai Krim, Bum and Nongoba Bullom. In 1994, RUF forces coming from Pujehun District re-entered the District and succeeded in controlling some areas in those three chieftdoms.

Each of the RUF/NPFL and, later, RUF incursions was marked by violence against civilians; indeed, from the very beginning of the conflict in the District, there were incidents of physical violence against civilians, who were also killed, raped and abducted for the purposes of using them as fighters or workers. Government authorities in particular were targeted. Those forces also stole civilians' property, mainly food and domestic animals, and destroyed houses and other buildings. The SLA forces also imposed harm on civilians in general and on "collaborators" in particular, killing those suspected of having collaborating with the RUF/NPFL and RUF during their stay in their villages. Civilians were also harassed for their food and other property. As the conflict continued, SLA violence heightened, with cases of killing, rape and use of civilians for forced labour being reported. By the close of this first phase, rumours of imminent RUF attacks in the other chieftdoms of the District were rampant.

The second phase encompassed 1995 to February 1998 and is characterised by the spreading of the conflict across the District. By February 1995, RUF forces controlled all of the northern chieftdoms of the District and proceeded southwards and westwards in an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to attack Bonthe Town on Sherbro Island. Training bases were opened across those chieftdoms under RUF control. This phase was marked by a clear increase in violence against civilians, as RUF forces settled in those areas. Physical violence, killings, rapes and the abductions of civilians, mainly to be trained as fighters and to work for the forces continued to be carried out on a scale much larger than during the first phase. Also during this period, a massive killing, which was scarcely reported in the media, took place in late 1995.

By the end of the year, the RUF were dislodged from most of their strongholds by SLA forces assisted by foreign troops and Kamajors, who had earlier emerged in Kwamebai Krim Chieftdom and subsequently developed in the other chieftdoms. During the subsequent years until the Coup in May 1997, Kamajors entrenched their control of the District, although some skirmishes with RUF forces were still reported. The Kamajors' initial collaboration with the SLA did not last long as tension and fighting erupted between the two factions.

Following the 25 May 1997 Coup, the RUF/AFRC were concentrated in Bonthe Town, from where the Kamajors had pulled out but maintained a covert presence around the town, allowing them to retake control of the town the day after the RUF/AFRC retreat in 1998. Civilians rapidly suffered at the hands of the Kamajors, who increased their demands on civilians, chased RUF collaborators and started regulating people's everyday life. The Chiefs, whose actions had been paralysed during the RUF stay, were again deposed and had no authority over their chieftdoms, as the Kamajors set up their own administrative structures and appointed their own Town Chiefs. Civilians were constantly harassed for food and other items; this harassment included physical violence and killing, mainly of alleged collaborators.



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The last phase ran from February 1998 to the completion of disarmament in late 2001. During this time, the Kamajors were in total control of the District, as no more RUF or AFRC forces were operating in the District. The brief return of RUF/AFRC forces to Bonthe Town following the invasion of Freetown did not much change the situation of the District, let alone Bonthe Town. The Kamajors continued to impose and affirm their authority in every aspect of life, deciding over administrative and private matters, chasing “rebel” and “Junta” collaborators and intensifying their havoc on civilians. This would continue until the completion of disarmament and the deployment of UN peacekeepers throughout the District in late 2001.

2. Factual analysis

a) Events in 1991

In early April 1991, traders coming from Bo Waterside (Soro Gbema Chiefdom, Pujehun District) reported to inhabitants of Kwamebai Krim Chiefdom that unknown gunmen had crossed into Sierra Leone from Liberia.¹¹⁵⁸ Soon after, on 9 May 1991, RUF/NPFL forces coming from Gbandapi (Panga Kabone, Pujehun District)¹¹⁵⁹ arrived by canoes to Tei (Kwamebai Krim Chiefdom) in the south of Bonthe District, while civilians were conducting a ceremonial rite. These forces were allegedly led by some civilians from the chiefdom who had earlier gone to Gbandapi to bring them to Tei in search of the Paramount Chief.¹¹⁶⁰

On their arrival in Tei, one member of the RUF/NPFL forces shot a person in the leg, not knowing he was the Paramount Chief for whom they were searching. The Paramount Chief fled to the bush to hide from the forces. The RUF/NPFL forces asked civilians where they could find the Paramount Chief and when civilians revealed he was the man previously shot in the leg, the RUF/NPFL forces became more aggressive and beat people. The Paramount Chief was found behind his house, had his hands tied behind his back and was brought at the front of his house, where his property was taken away¹¹⁶¹ in his presence. He was then taken into his house and shot many times before the house was set on fire. His head was cut off and allegedly brought to Gbandapi. The RUF/NPFL forces appointed a man to be Town Commander of Tei and asked him to take care of the town in their absence.

In the same month, the combined forces entered Topain (north of Kwamebai Krim Chiefdom). There, they identified themselves as RUF fighting along side the NPFL from Liberia, who were mainly Burkinabes and Liberians. They assembled all the men and elderly people in the centre of the town and made them sit in the sun, on the accusation that they knew where the SLA forces and the

¹¹⁵⁸ Bo Waterside is the crossing point between Liberia and Sierra Leone and, by April, the RUF/NPFL had spread across Pujehun District.

¹¹⁵⁹ Gbandapi is located on the bank of Malemie River, which joins the Wanjei River that flows to Bonthe District. It is renowned for hosting weekly trade fares where slat is predominantly sold. The RUF/NPFL forces were based there for a while.

¹¹⁶⁰ Reports recount that a disgruntled man who had an argument with the Paramount Chief over a land issue went to Gbandapi to relate his fate to the RUF/NPFL forces. This has to be read in conjunction with the fact that the RUF/NPFL forces had been targeting Paramount Chiefs since they entered the territory of Sierra Leone, as the Chiefs represented the APC Government in the chiefdoms.

¹¹⁶¹ The property taken away included clothing, money earmarked for the mechanical cultivation of the rice the following year, two single barrel guns, rice and other personnel belongings.



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staff of the Paramount Chief were. Property was taken, including household items and livestock. People were abducted and forced to carry the loads.

The RUF/NPFL forces then headed for the town of Borleh, which is four miles from Topain. In that village a man was slaughtered and mutilated in his house. They went further south to Mass Kpanguma, where they carried out similar actions as they had done in Topain, to where they returned in the evening of the same day. Topain was at that time selected to be a training centre as it was on a flat land and reasonably close to their base at Gbandapi (Panga Kabone Chiefdom, Pujehun District). The young men of the town were taken aside and encouraged to join the RUF/NPFL forces since they claimed to be fighting against corruption and for the liberation of the people of Sierra Leone. The young men were then assigned to operate checkpoints established at the entrance of the town.

From Topain, the forces went on daily stealing and killing sprees in the neighbouring villages. Young and elderly people were forced to carry loads from neighbouring villages to Topain and onwards to Gbandapi. A load meant to be carried by three people was often given to one person to carry.

On one Sunday in May, RUF/NPFL forces attacked Kale (Kwamebai Krim Chiefdom), a town approximately 10 miles to the west of Topain. A lot of property was taken, including food items and livestock. The former Regent Chief was captured and seriously flogged before he was taken to Topain, where he was finally killed. His head was cut off and put at the main junction in the village for everybody to see.¹¹⁶² This killing was reported to the RUF High Command in Gbandapi, which led to the withdrawal of the troops based at Topain and to the court martial of the commander who had ordered the killing of the former Regent Chief. This commander was killed and replaced by another commander.¹¹⁶³ The forces continued stealing and killing in the surrounding villages and attacked the town of Benduma (Kwamebai Krim Chiefdom), three miles from Topain. The Chiefdom Speaker was captured there together with his three sons and some of his relatives. The RUF/NPFL forces took all of his property, then forced him and his sons to carry it for them to Gbandapi, where one of the sons and a relative were later killed.

Later in May 1991, the RUF/NPFL forces left Topain for Bonthe Town on Sherbro Island to launch an attack on the SLA forces based there. They gathered their forces from all their minor bases in and around Topain, abducted young men and elderly people to carry stolen property for them and took away all the canoes they could find from the surrounding villages. They continued to take property in the villages they passed on their way. There are reports of clashes between them and SLA forces along the way. A few days later, a heavy battle took place in the area surrounding Bonthe Town (Sherbro Island) between the RUF/NPFL forces and the SLA forces.¹¹⁶⁴ Most of the RUF/NPFL forces retreated to their base at Gbandapi while others were killed and the SLA forces at Bonthe Town also started to advance to Topain.

¹¹⁶² It is further revealed that to make it more fearful, a cigarette was placed into the mouth of the dismembered head. This killing led many civilians to flee to the bush.

¹¹⁶³ To a certain extent, the RUF adopted the internal structure and organisation of the Sierra Leone Army.

¹¹⁶⁴ However, attacks actually taking place on Sherbro Island were not reported. It is accordingly more likely that this battle took place somewhere between Kwamebai Krim Chiefdom and Bendu Cha Chiefdom, on the western edge of the mainland. No further information is available on this event.



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From their base at Gbandapi, the RUF/NPFL forces came at intervals to attack neighbouring towns and villages in Kwamebai Krim Chieftdom but this time, they did not follow the previous pattern of introducing themselves as “freedom fighters”. Rather, their attacks were allegedly carried out for reasons of reprisal, as they accused the civilians of supporting the SLA forces. Furthermore, they were poorly dressed and some were barefoot. For example, on 14 May 1991, RUF/NPFL forces entered Topain at 6.00am and fired continuously to scare people away. Civilians ran into the bush, leaving the RUF/NPFL forces free to take whatever property they could find. They also raped five young women, some under the age of 12. A three-month-old suckling mother was raped by many assailants.

Another attack was made on the town just one week later. This time not many people were found and the forces had to search for them in their hiding places in the bush. RUF/NPFL forces inflicted physical violence on the civilians and took away nearly all of their property, which consisted mainly of food items. Those civilians found hiding were severely beaten and their property was taken from them; some were brought into the town and forced to catch the remaining livestock for the forces. A woman was beaten with sticks until her skull cracked.¹¹⁶⁵ Another was seriously beaten all over her body on the accusation of having committed adultery with the fighting forces. Others had hot melted plastic dripped in their eyes. Two houses, two kitchens and the Court Barrie were burnt by the troops on that day before they left for neighbouring villages. They returned in the evening from the direction they had come, bringing a lot of young men and boys below the ages of 12 and 15.

As their base in Bonthe Town (Sherbro Island) was too far to enable them to fight the RUF/NPFL concentrated in the south-east of the District, the SLA made a base south of Topain at Massa Kpanguma (Kwamebai Krim Chieftdom). One hundred and fifty of them came to the chieftdom between June and July 1991, all in full military uniform and armed with new weapons including AK47s, RPGs, LMGs, mortar guns and grenades. From there, they went to Topain to open another base. Arriving in Topain, they gathered the young men¹¹⁶⁶ of the town and told them they must help the SLA forces in ensuring the security of the town, mainly by operating checkpoints.

At this time, the SLA forces had already begun to harass civilians; for example, anyone who refused to operate a checkpoint was severely beaten and/or arrested and put in detention. Women were sometimes raped by some SLA members while their husbands were kept in detention. Other civilians from neighbouring villages were captured and brought to Topain to work as labourers. Their wives and children were taken away to unknown places and nobody knows what happened to them. The situation was similar at Massa Kpanguma, where civilians were forced to feed the SLA forces even although these forces already had their own supplies of food.¹¹⁶⁷

After a month staying in Topain, the SLA forces commanded the civilians to arm themselves with sticks, cutlasses or any other potential weapon to be ready to fight the RUF/NPFL forces who were

¹¹⁶⁵ This woman reportedly had significant and permanent mental health problems following this attack.

¹¹⁶⁶ No further information is available about how young these people were.

¹¹⁶⁷ Every town or village was to contribute 24 dozen fish, a bag of rice, five litres of palm oil and Le 25,000 on a monthly basis.



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threatening to attack the town. An ambush was laid at Bandakor, a village close to Topain, but the RUF/NPFL forces did not come at that time.

Between June and July 1991, the RUF/NPFL forces attacked the town of Sohlon (Nongoba Bullom Chiefdom, which adjoins Kwamebai-Krim Chiefdom to the west). Dressed in country clothes with red bandanas tied around their heads, the forces came together with some of the inhabitants of the town and some people from Pujehun District, all speaking the Mende dialect.¹¹⁶⁸ Those civilians had allegedly joined the forces willingly and were leading them and indicating the places where they could find SLA forces, Lebanese businessman and Government authorities or their relatives. On their arrival, the RUF/NPFL forces summoned a meeting of all the people of the town and instructed the Section Chief to detain everyone until they came back from Yelewa (Nongoba Bullom Chiefdom). Two days after the attack of Sohlon, Yelewa was also attacked. The forces held a meeting with the civilians in the town and killed one prosperous businessman and native hunter after he was asked to produce his gun. His body was left in the open to rot, as the RUF/NPFL forces prevented people from burying it.

At around this time, the eight SLA members who had came to Gbap (Nongoba Bullom Chiefdom) from Bonthe Town asked civilians to help them construct an elevation at the jetty on which they could put their anti-aircraft gun. However, the SLA forces soon realised that the RUF/NPFL forces would overpower them and went back to Bonthe Town to obtain reinforcements from the SLA naval branch. Most of the RUF/NPFL forces left Yelewa after two days by boat, taking a lot of civilians with them, allegedly for use as protection against attack. Along the route for the headquarter town of Gbap (Nongoba Bullom Chiefdom) on the north bank of the river,¹¹⁶⁹ the RUF/NPFL forces reached the junction on the Sewa River at Yele, which has routes going both to Bonthe and Gbap. On their arrival, they were attacked by the SLA reinforcements coming from Bonthe, who killed many of the RUF/NPFL forces. Civilians who were travelling with the RUF/NPFL forces had to dive and swim underwater to the other side, where they hid themselves until the battle was over. The SLA forces then went back to Gbap and from there to Bonthe Town (Sherbro Island).

The remaining RUF/NPFL forces (about eight of them) who were not part of the crossing went to Daama (Nongoba Bullom Chiefdom) where they took civilians' property, mostly clothes, food items and a box of tobacco, and forced a woman to cook for them. The troops then went to Mecca (Nongoba Bullom Chiefdom), where they abducted two men to bring the stolen property across the river to Yele before letting them go and telling them to go back to Mecca. The forces then withdrew from the chiefdom and retreated to Kwamebai Krim Chiefdom.

Some civilians and SLA forces who were left at Bandakor (Kwamebai Krim Chiefdom) were attacked in November 1991 by RUF/NPFL forces coming from the Gbandapi route. The SLA forces were forced to retreat to Topain before going on to their base at Mass Kpanguma. After two days, they returned to Topain and launched a counter-attack that successfully repelled the

¹¹⁶⁸ Those RUF/NPFL forces probably came directly from Pujehun District, using the Wanjei River, which flows almost parallel to the Ocean.

¹¹⁶⁹ The natural features of Nongoba Bullom Chiefdom are very unique, as the Sewa River separates the mainland on the north from the south edge, composed of a long strip of swamps and bordered by the Atlantic Ocean.



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RUF/NPFL forces from Bandakor. More civilians were brought from neighbouring villages to Massa Kpanguma and used as labourers by the SLA forces. However, RUF/NPFL forces attacked Massa Kpanguma two weeks later, killing a lot of civilians. Defeated, the SLA forces pulled out of the town¹¹⁷⁰ and when the SLA forces based at Topain heard of this attack, they also left the area. The surviving civilians fled to the bush but the RUF/NPFL forces did not settle in the town, destroying houses and taking livestock as they left the village. The day after the battle at Massa Kpanguma, the SLA forces who had pulled out passed by Korankor (Kwamebai Krim Chiefdom); at a nearby village they tried to stop all the civilians at a checkpoint but as the fleeing population grew, they let them go.

Civilians at Mano (Nongoba Bullom Chiefdom), at the border with Kwamebai Krim Chiefdom, abandoned the town and boarded a patrol boat together with the SLA forces to safer areas. No sooner had they left than the RUF/NPFL forces entered the towns of Korankor and Mano. Civilians who had fled Korankor described discovering bodies when they returned to the village, mostly the elderly and children who could not find their way in the bush. They also found a lot of dwellings burnt, including the mosque, the Bondo society house and the Court Barrie. Civilians were also abducted to carry the stolen property.¹¹⁷¹ This incident forced civilians to abandon the town for the bush where they made makeshift camps. Food and medicine were difficult to get while in the bush, which led to many deaths, especially of children.

SLA forces who later entered the towns of Mano and Korankor after the RUF/NPFL attacks took civilian property, such as building materials and household utensils. The forces then burnt down the remaining two houses in Korankor when leaving the town. After this incident, SLA troops went from town to town identifying civilians they alleged to be “enemy collaborators”, who they executed in public without any trial.¹¹⁷²

In November 1991, approximately 25 armed men entered the town of Kanga Oil Mill (Bum Chiefdom), at the border with Bo District (Bagbo Chiefdom). Civilians suspected those armed forces, who were carrying talisman and other charms, were NPFL forces, because they were all speaking in Liberian dialect. They were proved right as the men introduced themselves as NPFL forces who had come to liberate the people of Sierra Leone from the then APC government. The civilians cheered them and the night passed without incident, the forces leaving the next morning for Madina. On their way to Madina, they came across a commercial vehicle and took it to continue their journey. As in Kanga Oil Mill, their arrival in town passed without incident and they left to go

¹¹⁷⁰ This battle at Massa Kpanguma was also reported as taking place in July 1991. As this information could not be reconciled with the attack on Bandakor, which allegedly took place in November, it has to be considered that all these actions were carried out in the same period of time, between broadly July and November 1991.

¹¹⁷¹ It is reported that the RUF/NPFL forces went back to the direction of Soro Gbema Chiefdom (Pujehun District). This action, although carried out by an important number of RUF/NPFL forces that forced SLA to escape, was probably not part of a wider movement to advance into the District, as at this time, the SLA forces had repelled most of the RUF/NPFL forces out of Bo and Pujehun Districts.

¹¹⁷² Although one report mentioned that at this time, RUF/NPFL forces were based in Topain, it seems that RUF/NPFL forces were no longer settled in Kwamebai Krim Chiefdom and launched their attacks from Pujehun District.



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back to Bo District. However, at some point on their way, they killed a Lebanese businessman, drank his blood and threw his body into a river.¹¹⁷³

One month later, NPFL forces together with RUF forces again entered Bum Chiefdom in Madina, where they abducted the Paramount Chief and took her to an unknown destination.¹¹⁷⁴ They recruited a large number of the town's inhabitants, including young boys and girls, into the fighting forces, which swelled from 50 to about 200. During their stay in Madina, they forced civilians to carry loads, raped young girls and women in the town and flogged elderly men and women. Town Commanders and secretaries were appointed in villages and towns in the chiefdom to carry out directives from the RUF/NPFL forces, disregarding any other authority in the chiefdom.

RUF/NPFL forces, around 45 in number, also reached Kanga Oil Mill, firing randomly while entering the town. Civilians were gathered at the Court Barrie and detained there while the forces took away property and food items. They introduced themselves as "freedom fighters" who had come to liberate the people of Sierra Leone from the APC misrule. They carried with them sophisticated weapons, large quantity of arms and ammunition. During their first night, they raped young girls, most of whom were between 12 and 13. During their stay in the town,¹¹⁷⁵ RUF/NPFL forces deposed all the chiefdom authorities, appointed Town Commanders and Town Mothers and passed laws for the civilians, saying they had come to settle in the area.¹¹⁷⁶ While no incidents of mutilation, killing or destruction of property were reported, the RUF/NPFL forces forced civilians to work for them, raped women and girls, beat people and inflicted punishments such as frog jump¹¹⁷⁷ and rolling on the ground. Youths were encouraged to join the RUF/NPFL forces. Old as well as young people were forced to carry loads for the forces. After they ate all the livestock of the village, they taxed civilians to supply them with fish or meat in turns. It was later observed that the forces came into the town in batches of 25 every two months. At this time, one commander was very notorious in trafficking civilians and training them to be fighters for the forces, often shooting those who tried to resist, and for taking civilians' property away.

Sometime in December 1991, SLA forces made a base in Gbap (Nongoba Bullom Chiefdom), from where they went on routine checking missions in the surrounding villages.

b) Events in 1992

Between January and February 1992, SLA forces entered Sohlon (Nongoba Bullom Chiefdom), where they took civilians' livestock. The matter was reported to their High Command at Gbap, who warned them against such acts, as it did not present a good image of the SLA. These actions stopped for three months, during which time civilians hid all their livestock. However, on or around 15 May

¹¹⁷³ The exact location of this incident could not be ascertained.

¹¹⁷⁴ She would be released in 1993 in Pujehun District.

¹¹⁷⁵ This group stayed six months in the village before being dislodged by SLA forces in July 1992.

¹¹⁷⁶ Some of these laws were as follows: everyone's personal property is meant for everybody; no civilian should steal or would be killed and every civilian was to deposit his money to the RUF/NPFL forces or face arrest for carrying illegal property.

¹¹⁷⁷ To "frog jump" or to "pump" is done by first holding on to the earlobes with two hands – the left hand holding the right ear lobe and vice versa – after which the person is required to jump up and down continuously on their haunches. This form of punishment was both physically and psychologically painful, because it is a punishment meted out mostly to children and it is considered shameful for an adult to be made to "pump".



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1992, the livestock was stolen from these hiding places with the help of one of the inhabitants of the town, who was a vigilante at the time.

Around August 1992, the town of Gbap was attacked by RUF/NPFL forces who successfully dislodged the SLA forces from the town. The SLA forces retreated temporarily to an island, labelling it "F.M".¹¹⁷⁸ Civilians staying at Sohlon, a few miles away from Gbap, moved to the neighbouring town of Nyandehun, four miles from Sohlon, which became a "safe haven" for many civilians in the chiefdom. Realising that their villages were not affected by the RUF/NPFL forces and that the living conditions in the camp at Nyandehun were deteriorating, civilians decided to resettle in their houses.

In the middle of the year,¹¹⁷⁹ on hearing the rumours that SLA forces were close to Bum Chiefdom, RUF/NPFL forces left the chiefdom and made their way to Pujehun District.¹¹⁸⁰ The SLA forces did in fact enter the chiefdom later and made a base at Madina.¹¹⁸¹ After a few days, all the Town Commanders and their secretaries were gathered and interrogated by the forces on how they were helping the RUF/NPFL forces. Those people that the SLA forces considered had taken active part in aiding the RUF/NPFL were killed, while those they considered having taken lesser part were detained for a certain number of days and given manual jobs to do before they were released. Apart from the Town Commanders and their secretaries other civilians who were considered collaborator of the enemy forces were also killed. A boy of 18 was tied to a stick head downwards and fire set under him. He was then tortured to death by the heat of the fire. Sometimes civilians from other villages like Tarsor and Kassie (both of Bum Chiefdom) were alleged to be "rebel" collaborators, because they came from areas where RUF forces were known to be, and were killed by firing squad without proper investigations. In addition, civilians were forced to harvest the oil palm and process it for the SLA forces. Plantains, fish, bananas and other commodities were either seized or bought cheaply from civilians; indeed, the SLA appeared to be more interested in trading these items than in ensuring the security of the chiefdom or the District.

The SLA forces also settled at Moyia, which gave some respite to the people at first. However, not long after, the SLA forces gathered together all the Town Commanders, their secretaries and all other alleged collaborators. An unspecified number of them were killed on the basis that they had encouraged the RUF/NPFL forces to stay in the town and were helping them in their activities. Some people were forced to dig their own graves and lie down in them. They were then shot at afterwards and left there; some people were buried while they were still alive. Harassment of civilians, stealing of property and killing was taking place on a daily basis. People were grossly intimidated as the SLA forces frequently fired their weapons and made people frog jump. In addition, the SLA forces made the people work for them, processing the palm oil fruits, fishing and engaging in many other activities.

¹¹⁷⁸ The RUF/NPFL forces did not however stay in the town but it could not be ascertained when the SLA forces came back to Gbap.

¹¹⁷⁹ This may have occurred either in July or in October/November.

¹¹⁸⁰ No more information could be obtained on this movement of forces.

¹¹⁸¹ As the RUF/NPFL forces had already left the chiefdom, no confrontation was reported. The SLA forces would have control over the chiefdom for two years, until the middle of 1994 when RUF forces came back.



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In November, one Saturday afternoon, most of the SLA forces the civilians had seen the year before at Massa Kpanguma (Kwamebai Krim Chieftdom) entered Topain and took away civilians' property in a manner described as "much like the RUF/NPFL forces". Women were raped and livestock was taken away the same day. They came back the next day and spent a night in the town, during which they fired their guns to frighten people out of the town. However, the inhabitants stood their ground and the SLA forces soon left the way they had come.

c) Events in 1993

In June 1993, another SLA officer was sent to command the SLA forces deployed at Madina (Bum Chieftdom). They occupied the house of a civilian who later demanded payment of rent for the period. The troops not only refused to pay but also imprisoned one of the civilians after severely beating him up, accusing him of having been a "rebel" collaborator. The villagers were then forced to build more huts for the troops deployed in the town. Those who refused or tried to escape were caught and severely flogged.

In around July 1993, some SLA forces came to their base at Gbap (Nongoba Bullom Chieftdom) in order to expand their number in the area. They dispatched some troops at Yele (Nongoba Bullom Chieftdom) and at Massa Kpanguma (Kwamebai Krim Chieftdom); in August, others were sent at Sohlon (Nongoba Bullom Chieftdom), on the other the bank of the river.¹¹⁸² Young men were asked to be vigilantes at various locations in Gbap Town. The fishermen were required to put the Sierra Leonean flag on their fishing boat, to allow the SLA to monitor and control the movement of boats on the river. At this time, the SLA only required civilians to provide fish for the troops and there were no reported incidents of physical violence or ill-treatment. At one time, when the civilians could not give them fish, the SLA took some livestock away from the people of the town and prepared it as food for the forces. However, this stopped when civilians told the forces that they would complain to their commanding officer.

In October 1993, SLA forces from Bonthe Town (Sherbro Island) visited Tissana (Nongoba Bullom Chieftdom) on a security tour. The troops harassed the civilians by forcing them to contribute money for their feeding. Those who failed to pay were beaten up and a teacher who incited the people not to pay was imprisoned. SLA forces also took away some property of the civilians, including fish and livestock. Civilians were detained at a Court Barrie while the SLA forces searched their homes and took away what they found.

Also in October 1993, a small group of armed men travelled along the Wanjei River and stopped in Baoma Section, west of Nongoba Bullom Chieftdom. They were all dressed in country clothes and had masks covering their faces. One of them who was speaking Liberian dialect told the civilians they were from Burkina Faso. They took away some food items and alcohol they found in the town and forced civilians to carry this load to a crossing point, where they were released. Burkinabe

¹¹⁸² This deployment was probably done to allow SLA to have control over the river, which leads to the ocean in the west, thus preventing the RUF forces not only from making incursions in the chieftdom but also from advancing towards Bonthe Town.



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mercenaries also entered Mecca (Bendu Cha Chiefdom, west of Nongoba Bullom Chiefdom),¹¹⁸³ where they took the property of civilians and forced elderly people to carry loads for them. A man who had never drunk any alcohol before was forced to drink wine to excess by one of the forces. It appeared that those armed men had come from Pujehun District and were on a raiding tour of villages in Nongoba Bullom and Bendu Cha Chiefdoms. At one point, SLA forces from Bonthe Town were informed about those armed men and laid an ambush in Nongoba Bullom Chiefdom, where many of the armed men were killed and some captured. A civilian was arrested and taken to Bonthe Town together with the captured forces for interrogation; they were all killed in Bonthe Town.¹¹⁸⁴

d) Events in 1994

Throughout 1994, RUF activities were mainly reported in the eastern chiefdoms of Bonthe District, in Kwamebai Krim, Bum and Nongoba Bullom Chiefdoms.¹¹⁸⁵

In the first week of May 1994, SLA forces based at Bonthe Town (Sherbro Island) entered Mina village and ambushed some RUF forces on their day patrol. The SLA forces attacked the first loaded boat of the RUF troops heading for the town in the early morning hours. Forty-seven of them were killed, including five women, and 12 were seriously wounded. On their way back to their base the RUF forces entered Mano (Nongoba Bullom Chiefdom) and captured a girl of 11 years old, whom they raped. They further went to Topain where they established a base. When the SLA forces realised that the RUF forces had left Mass Kpanguma, they immediately re-established a base there. They later attacked and dislodged the RUF forces at Topain, occupying that town as well.

Pelewahun was attacked by the RUF forces on 14 May 1994 and several people were killed in the town, including elderly people and children as young as seven, some of them being hacked to death. People who remained in the town had absolutely nothing to survive on as the forces took all the property in the town. After a month, in June 1994, Mass Kpanguma was attacked. At the time of the attack, the town was full of displaced people from the neighbouring chiefdoms of Pujehun District. The attack did not appear to be a surprise to the SLA forces based there, as some of them had already left the town the previous day with their relations.¹¹⁸⁶ During the attack, the remaining SLA forces were overpowered and some were killed. Immediately afterwards, civilians in the neighbouring villages fled their houses and went into hiding in the bush, sometimes in neighbouring

¹¹⁸³ Although it is not specified when in 1993 those mercenaries reached Bendu Cha Chiefdom, we can infer from the information collected in Nongoba Bullom Chiefdom that they reached Bendu Cha Chiefdom around the same time.

¹¹⁸⁴ It cannot be ascertained whether those arrested men went through any kind of process before being killed.

¹¹⁸⁵ In 1993, most of the NPFL forces had been recalled by their leader to fight in Liberia as the United Liberation Movement for Democracy in Liberia (ULIMO), a fighting faction that emerged in May 1991, started to defeat them in various areas in Liberia. Thus, the troops that entered Sierra Leone in 1994 were mostly composed of RUF forces whose number had considerably increased from the 250 men at the beginning of the conflict, due to the conscription that had been carried out.

¹¹⁸⁶ The day before the attack, SLA forces based at Massa Kpanguma came to Tei and told civilians they were going to Bonthe Town to get their salaries. They however told their relatives to pack quickly things they could lay hand on and to leave Tei for a safer area. It can however not be inferred from this information that the SLA acted in concert with the RUF forces during the attack. It rather seems that, having heard about the incoming attack, the SLA deserted the area.



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chiefdoms like Bum Chiefdom.¹¹⁸⁷ This control over strategic towns in Kwamebai Krim District would allow the RUF to continue its advance in the District.¹¹⁸⁸

On 17 July 1994, the RUF forces made a move to recapture Bum Chiefdom from the SLA forces,¹¹⁸⁹ following the Sewa River and arriving from Tormabum, on the main road to Madina. Four truckloads of SLA forces together with their families and some vigilantes retreated from the chiefdom without putting up any resistance to the RUF/NPFL forces, because the SLA forces were far outnumbered. As a result, by August 1994, the RUF forces had taken control of the entire chiefdom and settled in almost all the villages, making Madina their administrative town. The forces had limited number of Liberians among them at this time and were mainly Sierra Leoneans who came through Tormabum along the Sewa River. Their behaviour towards civilians was different from the previous years, as it was reported they were violently hostile to every civilian they came across, killing unspecified numbers whenever they entered a town. At this period, the RUF forces were dressed in such a way¹¹⁹⁰ that suggests they had been living in the bush for quite some time.

RUF forces attacked the town of Kanga Oil Mill (Bum Chiefdom) during the night to recapture it from the SLA forces based there.¹¹⁹¹ They met no resistance from the SLA forces, as they killed a lot of civilians even before they entered the town. Houses were burnt and many people killed in the town. In the first two weeks after they recaptured the town there was indiscriminate killing of civilians because they regarded everyone to be the "enemy". Civilians were forced to abandon the town for camps in the bush. They were later hunted and brought back into the town by the forces; those who refused to come were killed in the bush. This forced the civilians to return to the town, particularly following an incident where RUF forces killed two people in the bush to underscore their threats. Furthermore, it is worth noting that most of the RUF members were inhabitants of the chiefdom, who had earlier been abducted by the RUF forces. Raping and killing of civilians was an everyday occurrence. More young men and women were conscripted and people were forced to carry loads for the forces.

After two months in Madina, during which time they went on patrol missions, the RUF forces entered the village of Mami, a fairly large village situated six miles south of Madina. The RUF forces were engaged in a house-to-house search in the village when they saw some military uniforms in one of the houses. The inhabitants were all gathered to explain why military uniforms should be found in the village. The chief and his wife were first called upon to explain; when they failed to do so they

¹¹⁸⁷ It however seems that the RUF did not settle in the area for a long time as in December 1994, civilians who had fled their villages went back and did not encounter any RUF activity.

¹¹⁸⁸ The control over Mass Kpanguma would give access to the Wanjei River, which merges with the Sewa River in Nongoba Bullom Chiefdom.

¹¹⁸⁹ Early in 1994, RUF forces dislodged the SLA forces that had been in Bagbo Chiefdom (Bo District) for two years, thus allowing the RUF to attack Bum Chiefdom, knowing the SLA would not be reinforced by those who used to be based at Momajoe (Bagbo Chiefdom, Bo District), a few miles from Madina Town. Bum Chiefdom adjoins the southern part of Bagbo Chiefdom (Bo District).

¹¹⁹⁰ These forces were roughly dressed in jeans and t-shirts, with slippers on their feet and very few military boots, although their attire improved as they stole more clothes from civilians.

¹¹⁹¹ Although the report mentions that the town was attacked in December 1994, it is clear that it took place shortly after Madina town was attacked and prior to the incident in Mami (see below) took place. Accordingly, it probably took place earlier than December.



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were both shot dead. A woman in the front row was then picked to explain and when she could not, she was told to undress. Her son was called upon and told to do the same. He was then told to have sex with his mother in the presence of everybody. Shocked and panicked, he could not do it and they were both shot dead. Another woman was picked from the crowd and shot in the head. Although the troops were only three in number, the people were so terrified that they were unable to escape. Four more people were killed that day, making a total of eight. Four girls were raped on the same day and 17 more were abducted. Property was taken and removed from the village on the same day.

In a small village called Tarsor (Bum Chieftdom) located near a stream, the decomposed bodies of two RUF child combatants who had earlier gone missing were found on the seashore. Around 30 people who were found in the village were quickly gathered and asked to explain by the RUF forces. No one knew anything about the death of the boys and could not explain anything to the satisfaction of the RUF forces. Six people were immediately shot and killed and the other people were tied up and made to lie in the sun. Rubber was melted and dropped in their eyes. This was done to both young and old, including babies. Fifteen houses were burnt in the town and the farmhouses were destroyed, at which time seven more people were killed. At Bisoa, at the boundary with Kwamebai Krim Chieftdom, RUF forces burnt six houses at night and killed 18 people on the grounds they were harbouring SLA forces.¹¹⁹²

Madina was made a training base for the abducted young men and boys; drugs were allegedly given to them during the course of the training that took place at the school compound, during which young girls were also trained as fighters. Although not all of them were given weapons after the training, these new recruits were used to attack SLA positions in Pujehun and Bo Districts. RUF forces also had a training base at Torma, where conscripted civilians were sent for training. The training was carried out in two phases. Training to fight was done during the first phase and then trainees were drugged during the second phase. Most of the boys that were trained in this way were below 15 years of age and they were usually sent on looting patrols called "mission" for their commander.

During their stay in Bum Chieftdom in 1994, the RUF did not face any counter-attack by government troops. This firm control over Bum Chieftdom would only be the prelude for further incursions into the District in early 1995 from Bo District.

In November and December 1994, six months after the SLA established a navy base in Bonthe Town, those navy forces patrolled the waters in Sittia and Dema Chieftdoms on the pretext that they were chasing away illegal foreign trawlers, despite the fact they never met any trawlers during their patrols. Their visits were sometime announced to the Chiefs in advance, who consequently taxed the civilians to contribute money for the feeding of the SLA members. On one occasion, the SLA forces called the people and local authorities at Tissana (Dema Chieftdom) to a meeting at which they demanded that they should be supported financially so they could protect the lives and properties of the civilians. Women were required to give Le 1,000 and men had to give Le 1,500. One civilian, who incited the others not to give this money, on the grounds that the SLA was already paid, was arrested and put in a cell. This meeting concluded with a token by the Paramount Chief of Le

¹¹⁹² It was however revealed that this village did not host SLA forces.



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500,000;¹¹⁹³ once the SLA forces had sufficient money and food, they released the civilian who had earlier been detained.

Around this time, rumours of impending RUF attacks were spreading across almost the entire District and in late December, a Catholic priest of St. Ambrose Parish who was travelling from Rutile (Imperi Chiefdom) to Mattru (Jong Chiefdom) ran into armed RUF men. He was flogged by them and given a letter for the people of Mattru together with the sum of Le 6,000. On his arrival in Mattru, he informed the Chiefs and other civilians what had happened and gave them the letter. Most people abandoned the town for bigger towns like Bo and Freetown on account of this while others went to villages like Blama, Kabati, Wongifor, Bisao and Nyandehun all in the neighbouring chiefdoms. Furthermore, three RUF members who disguised themselves as State Security Division (SSD) officers were arrested at a dance organised by the people of Mattru (Jong Chiefdom) on 25 December 1994. They later confessed that they were RUF spies.

e) Events in 1995

On 19 January 1995, RUF forces attacked the Sierra Rutile Company in the north of Imperi Chiefdom.¹¹⁹⁴ In the morning, three groups of RUF forces¹¹⁹⁵ passed in succession by Moriba, heading to the plant-mining site where they were to gather. With them, they had abductees from the Sieromco Bauxite Mining Company in Mokañji (Banta Chiefdom, Moyamba District), which they had attacked the day before.¹¹⁹⁶ They did not shoot while they were going to the mining site but took with them a large number of people of all ages and both sexes. The whole population was in panic but the RUF told them that they were not here for them but for the SLA forces so that they should join their movement, which some civilians did. They arrested all the junior staff at Kpanguma, 100 yards from the mining site. When they arrived at the senior staff quarters at Mobimbi, they started shooting and arrested some of the staff, including foreign workers. Soon after, they were in control of the mining site, where they fired their weapons for some time and took almost all the property from the area, including vehicles, money, fuel, engines, medicines, food, livestock and other items taken from the company itself. RUF forces started giving food to civilians, which once more convinced civilians to join them.

¹¹⁹³ As a very rough guide, five hundred thousands Leones is approximately equivalent to 250 USD. This should be placed in the context of Sierra Leone's position at the bottom of the Human Development Index: between 1991 and 2000, 57% of the population lived on less than 1 USD (2,000 SLL) per day and 74.5% lived on less than 2 USD (4,000 SLL) per day: see UNDP Human Development Report 2003, http://www.undp.org/hdr2003/indicator/cty_f_SLE.html, last visited on 30 December 2003.

¹¹⁹⁴ The Sierra Rutile was the world second largest producer of rutile, used in paints; before the war, the rutile extracted from this site represented 50% of Sierra Leone's total exports and 3,000 people were employed at the mining sites: AFP, 11 March 1997. At the time of this attack, the mine was in the middle of a major expansion program: Africa Review World of Information, 1 September 1995.

¹¹⁹⁵ Numbering 40, 80 and nearly 100 men in the respective groups, the RUF forces were equipped with AK47 and RPGs.

¹¹⁹⁶ This Swiss-owned mine was the world's largest producer of bauxite. These mining areas in Moyamba and Bonthe Districts were the two most important economical sectors after Kailahun and Kono Districts had fallen in 1992 and 1993, thereby depriving the Government of significant resources coming from the mining of diamond and the cultivation of cash crops like coffee and cacao.



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At the time of the attack, foreign troops¹¹⁹⁷ and SLA forces were deployed in the area; members of the SSD (Special Security Division) were in charge of the security of the company. SLA and foreign troops made attempts to dislodge the RUF forces and finally succeeded on 30 January, at which time the RUF retreated to areas not far from the mining site. Doubts were raised among the civilians on the role played by the SSD and especially its commander in the overrun of the mining site by the RUF.¹¹⁹⁸

At the end of January 1995, RUF forces attacked and captured Matru (Jong Chiefdom) without much resistance, as it seems the SLA had already pulled out of the town. While the bulk of these forces most likely came from Imperi Chiefdom, it is possible that some of these forces came from Lugbu Chiefdom (Bo District)¹¹⁹⁹ through Gbonge, stopping at the crossroad between the main road going west to Matru and a southern one going to the chiefdom headquarter of Tihun (Sogbini Chiefdom), at which time they decided to attack Matru. When they entered the town, the RUF forces did not kill people or destroy property, informing civilians that they were only against the NPRC government and the government soldiers.¹²⁰⁰ As they settled in the town, they put in place structures to administer the town and the chiefdom, including the appointment of Town Commanders and Town Mothers. They also appointed adjunct clerks who, in charge of the control of movement in the chiefdom, were responsible for issuing passes allowing civilians to go from one area to another. They encouraged civilians to join them by giving them food, medicine, clothes and other items. However, this behaviour was not to last long and soon they began to act in a manner contrary to their words.

During the first weeks of their stay in the town,¹²⁰¹ they lived on the food and other items they had taken away from the Sierra Rutile but as they run out of those items, they forced civilians to work for them, notably by repairing and maintaining the ferry on the Jong River that allowed RUF forces to use the direct road to Sierra Rutile, where they had a lot of stolen property stored. Vehicles from civilians were used for this purpose. Civilians were also required to undertake other tasks; everyday, the young men each had to bring a bag of cassava and women had to bring vegetables, water and wood, as well as cook the food. Failure to carry out these tasks brought punishments, like being beaten or tied up and laid under the sun; the most severe punishment was death, for example if a civilian refused to give vegetables from his or her garden or if a civilian was caught hiding in the bush, like one woman who was shot at Luawa, near Matru, in April. People were also brought from other towns and villages and killed for similar reasons at the RUF headquarter in Matru. Youths, mostly between the ages of eight and seventeen, were also brought from the surrounding towns and villages to be conscripted.

Two bases were established in the chiefdom, one at Matru and the other at Gambia Oil Mill. The RUF forces stole the supply of medicine and other items at the government hospital in Matru and

¹¹⁹⁷ The records mention ECOMOG but this refers to either Nigerian or Guinean troops.

¹¹⁹⁸ The commander would have carried arms and ammunitions for the RUF at the mining site, once the RUF had overrun it and would have gone in surrounding villages

¹¹⁹⁹ Lugbu Chiefdom adjoins Kpanda Kemo Chiefdom on the east. Its headquarter town, Sumbuya, is on the main road that leads to Matru (Jong Chiefdom). Since 1994, Lugbu Chiefdom had been under RUF control.

¹²⁰⁰ Matru was the hometown of the Vice Chairman of the NPRC and two Government Ministers.

¹²⁰¹ RUF forces would occupy the town for eight months before being dislodged by the SLA in October.



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turned the hospital into a training base. The base at Gambia Oil Mill, nine mile from Mattru, was called “Camp Lion”¹²⁰² and hosted the more mature and top ranking members. To build the camp, the RUF forces unroofed houses in the surrounding villages. The new recruits who were trained in Mattru were presented to the commander at Camp Lion for approval to be sent at the war front.

The RUF forces also burnt down many houses in the town, including the entire compound of the Paramount Chief as well as houses that were allegedly empty. Occupied houses were also burnt and in one incident, two civilians who went back to their burnt house to gather some of the things that had not been destroyed were stopped by the RUF forces; one was killed and the other mutilated. Throughout the chiefdom, civilians’ property, including furniture, clothing and money, was taken away, which led civilians to hide some of their belongings. When the RUF forces discovered that civilians were hiding property, they would take a member of the family, who would be forced at gunpoint to show them the hiding place. As at that time condiments and tobacco were only to be found in areas under SLA control, any civilian found with those items would be killed. Radios were also not allowed, to prevent civilians from hearing independent news about the war. During the time of their stay, both young and old women, including girls as young as 10, were sexually assaulted, sometimes in public and by more than one RUF member. People who escaped in to the bush were later hunted down and brought back into the town; some people were killed in the bush and their property taken.

RUF forces settled in many areas in the chiefdom, such as in Blama, south-east of Mattru, and Biawo, north-east of Mattru. When they settled in these villages, they carried out the same actions as previously described, including forcing civilians to work, to go hunting and to carry the load and conscripting children. In addition, they deposed existing authorities and installed their own structures, including the appointment of Town Commanders and Town Mothers, and established the “pass” system. At Blama, the Town Commander was sent to Camp Zogoda to be trained.¹²⁰³

On 3 February 1995, a very large number of RUF forces entered the headquarter town of Tihun (Sogbini Chiefdom). Over 1,000 people were in Tihun at the time the RUF forces entered it, at which time they gathered all the civilians they met in the town, including the Town Chief. Gathering the inhabitants at the Court Barrie, the RUF forces asked the civilians who identified themselves as members of the Bio family (relations of the then NPRC Deputy Head of State, Brigadier Julius Maada Bio) to step forward. Many civilians did step forward, even if they did not belong to the family, thinking that the RUF forces were doing this to protect them; however, everyone who stepped forward was then killed.¹²⁰⁴ Other civilians were killed on that day, including two girls and an elderly woman. Over 34 houses were also burnt down in the town, a large amount of property was taken and a lot of people were captured.

The following day, the captured civilians, including the Town Chief, three white foreigners taken from the Sieromco Company in Mokanji (Moyamba District) and hundreds of others captured from

¹²⁰² This was a generic name for training bases and other Camp Lions existed in the country, notably in Makeni (Bombali District).

¹²⁰³ This Camp Zogoda, although it is a generic name, probably refers to the important camp located in Koya Chiefdom (Kenema District).

¹²⁰⁴ It is estimated that around 300 people were killed during this incident.



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Mattru, were marshalled towards the town of Senjehun (Kpanda Kemo Chiefdom), near the Sewa River.¹²⁰⁵ They stopped at a junction near Senjehun, where the abductees, who were carrying stolen property for the RUF forces, were divided into five groups. The Town Chief was told that the troops were heading for their base at Camp Zogoda in Kenema District (Koya Chiefdom), where the RUF leader used to stay. These forces further explained that they had captured some elderly men, as the RUF wanted elderly people advise the parliamentarians they would have once they seized power in the House of Parliament. Some civilians, headed by the Town Chief of Tihun, were then told to go back to Tihun under an RUF escort while the others proceeded to Senjehun carrying the stolen property, crossed the Sewa River at Borleh and headed for Madina (Bum Chiefdom), from where the RUF said the civilians from Madina would continue the journey to Camp Zogoda.

Soon after this attack, SLA troops were sent to secure the town of Tihun. On 11 February 1995, the RUF attacked the town but faced stiff resistance from the SLA forces based there. Several other unsuccessful attempts were made by the RUF to recapture the town between 11 and 18 February, when the SLA forces were dislodged from the town by a strong and fierce attack. A lot of civilians were killed; young men, women and girls were abducted; and several houses were burnt. Children got lost in the battle and a lot of property was taken and carried away by the RUF forces, who left the town on the same day of the attack.¹²⁰⁶ They went to neighbouring villages like Moyorgbo, Gerehun, Bauya Junction and Karleh, where they took away and destroyed civilian property and abducted several people. In each village or town they visited, they deposed the traditional chiefs and appointed Town Commanders, Town Mothers and clerks, who assumed administrative responsibilities and the running of the towns and villages. As in other places, a system of “passes” was established and civilians caught travelling without their pass were severely beaten.

When they entered Bauya Junction, RUF forces wrote “RUF” on the doors of civilian houses before leaving for the nearby village of Semabu, two miles from Bauya Junction. People in Bauya fled into the bush as soon as the RUF forces left the town. That same night, the RUF forces returned from Semabu, together with a large number of young men who carried property the RUF forces had taken from the people of Semabu. Some of the RUF forces then took the property to “Camp Charlie”,¹²⁰⁷ returning four days later. They asked the civilians to return to the towns and stop sleeping in camps in the bush. They also imposed laws on civilians preventing them from travelling to Bo Town (Bo District) without permits; people caught travelling without the permit would be killed. Indeed, movement from one place to the other could only be done with a “pass”. The forces elected administrative leaders in the town and surrounding villages. Often, people accused of coming from Bo by the RUF forces were shot dead without questioning. People were also killed if they were found with tobacco or food items like fish and any manufactured goods, as this was considered to be proof that they had gone to areas controlled by SLA forces, which were the only areas such items were available.

¹²⁰⁵ Information from Kpanda Kemo Chiefdom confirms that this chiefdom was used as a transit chiefdom for RUF forces, who did not settle there but used it to transport their stolen property, including televisions, bags of rice, corrugated iron sheets and food items, across the Sewa River and through Sumbuya (Lugbu Chiefdom, Bo District) to Camp Zogoda in Kenema District.

¹²⁰⁶ Although it is not certain whether RUF forces came back to the town, it is clear that SLA forces did not launch any counter-attack the following months.

¹²⁰⁷ There was one famous “Camp Charlie” near Mile 91 (Yoni Chiefdom, Tonkolili District).



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This continued for up to three months, when the RUF forces introduced another system known as “Man Power”, by which civilians were forced to carry loads for distances of about 50 miles. At that time, wives of civilians forcefully became the “wives” of the RUF forces and the husbands were to thank them whenever they had intercourse with their wives. Civilians were also forced to have sexual intercourse with their relatives in public and those who refused to do so were killed.

Also in February 1995, RUF forces entered the headquarter town of Matuo (Kpanda Kemo Chiefdom), killed two civilians and burnt down 16 buildings including the Court Barrie. At Senjehun, a town used as a crossing point on the Sewa River, the forces terrorised the civilians by killing several people, burning down several houses and destroying the boats they found at the waterside in the town, on the grounds that civilians were using the village as an escape way to Bo District and other places.¹²⁰⁸

During that month,¹²⁰⁹ SLA forces based in Bonthe Town regularly patrolled the sea route in the north-west of Bonthe District between Dema Chiefdom and Gbangbatoke (Banta Chiefdom, Moyamba District). Civilians were banned from going to sea for fishing in this area, as the SLA feared that RUF forces might attack them and use their boats to continue their advance in the District. Civilians however continued to travel to Gbangbatoke, at night and SLA forces started to chase them and once captured, took away their fish and sometimes killed the faulting civilians.

On 25 February, the RUF made a successful counter-attack at the rutile mining site (Imperi Chiefdom), dislodging the SLA forces based there. During their stay, their behaviour was not as friendly as during their first stay. On the contrary, they told civilians that because civilians in the area had taken the side of the Government when the RUF was dislodged on 30 January, they would not spare any soul in the area. On that day in Imperi Chiefdom, in villages such as Mogwemo, Kpanguma and Moriba, the RUF forces ransacked villages, indiscriminately killed civilians, forced civilians into houses and set fire to them, destroyed and burnt houses, raped women and girls, conscripted young people into their movement and forced civilians to work for them. As in other places, any civilian caught with condiments or tobacco would be accused of going to areas under SLA control, where those items could be found, and would be killed.

Following the recapture of the mining area, RUF forces scattered throughout almost the entire chiefdom, taking control of the area for over eight months before being dislodged by SLA forces in November. For example, RUF forces entered Gbangbama on 20 February 1995, where they stole a lot of property, killed two people and captured many others. One week later, on 27 February 1995, the forces attacked the nearby village of Foinda. They took a lot of property, killed one civilian and abducted many others, who were forced to carry the stolen property to Mobimbi, which was previously the headquarter of the senior staff of the Sierra Rutile Company and became the RUF headquarters when they re-captured the town. Another example is Gaidema, which was attacked

¹²⁰⁸The same forces also entered Lawana (Bumpeh Chiefdom, Bo District) where they burnt down five houses and stole a lot of civilian property. They also killed four old people who were unable to escape from the attack. The town was attacked because of rumours that diamond mining was going on and a big diamond had been found there.

¹²⁰⁹ It is likely that this was a practice that was carried out for a number of months around February 1995.



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on 1 March 1995. RUF forces invaded the village in the north of the District with heavy gunfire. They remarked that civilians were ungrateful to them, as they had laid down their lives to fight against the dictatorship government of the NPRC, which had earlier toppled the APC government. They described the NPRC government as selfish, not transparent and unaccountable. The RUF forces attacked the village from its landlocked side, leaving the direction to the river open; accordingly, people fled from the continuous gunfire into the river where some, who were unable to swim, drowned while others were shot. In the village, RUF forces captured civilians, killed some and conscripted others. These forces also took a lot of property, which they then transported to their headquarters.

These continuous attacks on the villages in the chiefdom led the majority of the population to leave Imperi Chiefdom and to find refuge in more secure areas like Bonthe Town on Sherbro Island. Their control of the chiefdoms in the north of the District, where the strategic roads spreading through the rest of the District originate, allowed RUF forces to proceed further southwards to Yawbeko, Nongoba Bullom and Bendu Cha Chiefdoms. In these chiefdoms, most of the civilians were already living in camps in the bush, after they heard about the attacks in the north of the District. Furthermore, it is believed that the attack on the mining company, which led hundred of civilians jobless, resulted in increased favourable public opinion for the expansion of the Kamajors in the chiefdom.

The situation for Kwamebai Krim Chiefdom was, however, slightly different as it seems that the first RUF attack in the chiefdom, which took place in February 1995, originated from Pujehun District.¹²¹⁰ Civilians ran into the bush leaving behind children and elderly people who were unable to run. Those forces, dressed in military attire,¹²¹¹ identified themselves as RUF forces based at Sulima (Soro Gbema Chiefdom, Pujehun District). Young girls who were caught were raped in front of their parents, including a 10-year-old girl, who was severely traumatised and remained ill for a long time. A lot of civilians were appointed as labourers to carry property as far as Dama, some 11 miles from Topain, where they were released and ordered to return back to Dama. People abandoned the town and stayed in the bush, where life rapidly became unbearable. Several visits were made to the town by the RUF forces in the following days but no one was found in the town so they stopped going there.

Most of their activities were then carried out at Bandakor, from where they raided the neighbouring villages. Tei was also attacked in February, at a time when most of the people had gone to their farms or fishing, leaving the youngest and eldest in the town. The RUF forces burnt down the whole town, including the school, the UBC church and the Town Barrie and took away property such as fishing nets, canoes, seed rice, livestock and poultry. Five civilians were killed, among them an 85 year-old man, and some young people were abducted and forced to carry the load.

During one of their raids on the villages, three young men at Kale resisted the attack and killed two of the RUF forces. Civilians in the neighbouring towns and chiefdoms were informed and they

¹²¹⁰ Although RUF forces were reported to be in the chiefdom in 1994, it seems that an important attack was carried out on the chiefdom from Pujehun District.

¹²¹¹ Starting in 1992, RUF forces acquired uniforms from the SLA, often taken after a battle. Some of those uniforms also came with SLA members who deserted their ranks to join the RUF.



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immediately formed civilian-fighting groups or local militia to defend themselves, since the SLA forces was no longer able to contain the RUF advance. This group was composed of Kamajors, a Mende word for hunters. Civilians started contributing to the support of this civil force, donating single barrel guns and money for the purchase of cartridges. Other weapons like knives, spears and machetes were made by blacksmiths in the chiefdoms as part of their contributions.¹²¹² The main place for initiation was at Kaileh Wanjama (Kwamebai Krim Chiefdom) but, as the group expanded, it was further divided into sections with its headquarter base at Kale, south of Topain.

On 21 March 1995, around 120 RUF members coming from Jong Chiefdom, dressed in new combat attire with red cloth tied around their necks, entered the town of Baoma (north-east of Nongoba Bullom Chiefdom) as they had heard SLA forces were in the area. The RUF forces made civilians they met in the town lead them to the farmhouses, where they took civilians' property, including food items and livestock, and captured a lot of civilians to be trained as fighters. They then went north-east to the town of Gambia (Jong Chiefdom) with all the stolen property. The attack was reported to the SLA forces based at Gbap, south-west of Baoma. They came to the town two days afterwards, took the remaining food items and livestock and returned to Gbap. On hearing about SLA troop movements, a large number of RUF forces came back to the town on 27 March 1995. One man who was asked whether he had informed the SLA about the first attack was tied up and stripped naked, as was another man. The first man was hit with a bladed weapon on his neck until he died while the second one had his genital organ cut off before being hacked to death. On the same day, RUF forces went looting in the surrounding villages, burnt down houses and came back to Baoma with captives carrying their load before leaving the town for Gambia (Jong Chiefdom).

Two members of the RUF re-entered Baoma about a week later, on 5 April 1995. They encouraged an old man they found in the village to call all the civilians who were hiding in the bush to return to the town, as there was no other person in the town, but nobody responded to the old man's appeal. A few days later, the RUF forces raided the camps of the civilians in the bush and burnt down several huts and destroyed other property. They threatened to kill all those who failed to return to the town, as a result of which civilians returned to the town a few days later. Town Commanders were appointed and arrangements were made for the support of the forces while they were in the town. However the Town Commanders were fearful for their lives, having heard that SLA forces killed civilians appointed as Town Commanders and those who stayed with the RUF on the grounds that they were collaborators, so they advised the civilians to escape back into the bush.

The RUF forces continued to harass civilians in the neighbouring towns and villages. Also in April, the RUF forces dislodged the SLA from Gbap, where civilians had already fled the town. The retreating SLA forces went to Bonthe Town before coming to the chiefdom between May and June and settle at Yele, south west of Gbap. From Yele, the SLA exhorted the civilians to leave the Baoma area, as they were going to launch an offensive on the RUF. The SLA did not however succeed in dislodging the RUF forces who themselves launched a counter-attack on SLA position at Yele five days later. During this counter-attack, RUF forces killed a large number of civilians and a

¹²¹² The support of the force was voluntary at the beginning but as time went on it became compulsory and also included provision of food and other essential materials for the Kamajors.



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few SLA forces. The few remaining SLA forces left for Bonthe Town and the RUF went back to Baoma, burning down some houses before leaving.

Around April, RUF forces attacked and settled in many villages in Yawbeko Chiefdom, in the centre of the District, including the chiefdom headquarter of Talia.¹²¹³ The pattern they followed in the villages they entered was similar to what they had done so far in the north of the District. Local authorities were particularly targeted, deposed and replaced by Town Commanders and Town Mothers. Some of the local authorities were also molested and killed.

RUF forces coming from Jong Chiefdom reached Bendu Cha Chiefdom in May 1995.¹²¹⁴ Their arrival was accompanied by severe brutality towards civilians and instances of killing, often with bladed weapons, raping, burning of houses, stealing of civilians' property and abduction of civilians were commonplace. For example, in May 1995, RUF forces reached Tigbe from Jong Chiefdom and shoot and killed two fleeing civilians. The forces cut off the dead men's genital organs, which they placed in the mouths of the bodies and left the mutilated corpses on the road. They then burnt down 10 houses before proceeding to another village, Tisama, where they beat a man with sticks almost to the point of death. Also in May, some RUF forces on their way to Malama passed by Molamdeh. They burnt a house in which a sick woman was lying in bed, allegedly because she did not give them water as they had asked. Once in Malama, they took a lot of property, including food items, which they forced captured civilians to carry to their base at Baoma (Nongoba Bullom Chiefdom). They also killed a petty trader who refused to give them money.

Fighting between the RUF on one hand and SLA forces assisted with Kamajors on the other hand continued in Kwamebai Krim Chiefdom. On 25 May 1995, RUF forces located the hidden camp at Taifa, where civilians from Tei had found refuge, and attacked it. The SLA and the Kamajors fought the RUF forces and a big battle took place at Tamgbassi, two miles from Taifa. About 50 RUF forces were killed while 10 SLA members and two Kamajors died.

Another heavy battle took place at Bombokor (Kwamebai Krim chiefdom) on 7 June 1995 as a result of which the RUF forces were dislodged; about 25 of them killed while five were captured alive. There were no civilian fatalities reported to have been committed by the SLA, as their commander¹²¹⁵ ordered his forces not to shoot civilians. The SLA commander also returned the stolen property left behind by the retreating RUF forces to the civilians.¹²¹⁶ On their way back to their base after the defeat at Bombokor, the RUF forces, apparently in retaliation, raped, beat and killed civilians with bladed weapons, including young children. Nevertheless, the RUF forces were driven entirely from the Kwamebai Krim Chiefdom. As such there was great influx of civilians from

¹²¹³ The date of their arrival in Talia could not be determined with precision. More details will be added for Yawbeko Chiefdom.

¹²¹⁴ Bendu Cha Chiefdom is a small chiefdom on the western edge of mainland Bonthe.

¹²¹⁵ This SLA officer who used to be based in the Nongoba Bullom Chiefdom favoured the idea of these local militia fighting alongside the SLA to bring the war to a speedy conclusion in the District.

¹²¹⁶ However, this action of the commander made his men dissatisfied and they became disgruntled. Shortly after, the SLA forces were over powered by the RUF during an encounter in the west of the Chiefdom; it was said the SLA forces could not face this battle, mainly due to the loss of morale following the episode of looting at Bombokor. Those RUF forces required that the commander identify himself and one junior SLA member pointed out the commander, who was then killed by the RUF forces.



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the other chiefdoms into Kwamebai Krim, which caused a lot of hunger, starvation and disease, as there were not enough food and medicine.

However, RUF forces maintained control over chiefdoms in the centre of the District and continued their actions against civilians. For example, sometime in June 1995, RUF forces entered the village of Ghaloh (Bendu Cha Chiefdom), captured civilians, flogged some and later killed some of them. They also entered Bormimahun village but found no one in the town. They burnt down all the houses and traced the footprints of people to the camp in which they were hiding, where they killed some civilians and abducted the rest. As they were about to leave, they set fire to seven houses in the town. Kanga village was also raided and eight houses were burnt down and several civilians were abducted, including a 15-year old girl together with other women. The following month, civilians made another camp between the boundary of Jong and Bendu Cha Chiefdoms in the northwest of Bendu Cha Chiefdom.¹²¹⁷ At some point during the month, this camp came under the attack of the RUF forces at about 6.00pm. A baby boy was hit with bladed weapons by the RUF forces. Several people were captured and girls were raped and abducted.

Again in Bendu Cha Chiefdom, on 30 August 1995, RUF troops coming from Baiama (Jong Chiefdom) attacked Momaya, where they abducted civilians, including one man whom they recruited into their fighting force and some young girls, who they made their wives. The RUF forces then headed to Bawoma and Kpetema (both in Jong Chiefdom). On their way they killed two civilians. On or around 15 September, the Muslim festival day of Eid al Adha, RUF forces attacked civilians who had moved out of their camps to observe prayers around Mindohun village. Civilians were captured in the mosques and abducted; two men were killed, allegedly because they did not properly carry out a task the RUF forces had asked them. On their way out, they encountered a young man of about 30, who they suspected of being an SLA member, so they tied him to a stick, poured petrol over him and set him on fire.

As RUF forces were progressing and affirming their control of the District, except Sherbro Island, and the SLA were increasingly unable to defend the District, rumours about the Kamajors began to reach Bonthe Town. This consisted of information about the development of Kamajors, armed with cutlasses and knives and rumoured to have mystical powers, who were coming together to restore peace in their villages in Kwamebai Krim Chiefdom. At this time, Bonthe Town was full of displaced people and the local authorities decided to send around 300 youths to the area where initiations were being performed.¹²¹⁸ Once initiated, the Kamajors went back to various areas in the District, engaging the RUF forces and, initially, working hand in hand with the SLA.

On their return from their initiation, a group of Kamajors engaged the RUF forces based at Baoma (Nongoba Bullom Chiefdom) with heavy firing between September and October 1995. About 22 members of the RUF were killed and several of them and their wives were captured. They were taken to the Kamajor base at Karleh Wanjama (Kwamebai Krim Chiefdom). Following the attack, the RUF completely left Baoma but one week later they regrouped and launched a counter-attack.

¹²¹⁷ Civilians were leaving the camp during the day to go farming or fishing and were coming back after their activities.

¹²¹⁸ The local authorities asked the representatives of the chiefdoms, who had found refuge in Bonthe Town, to present a number of their young men.



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They succeeded in dislodging the Kamajors and burnt down the remaining houses in the town. On 5 November 1995, Kamajors also launched a fierce counter-attack on the RUF forces at Baoma. They finally succeeded in ousting them out of Baoma and Gbap and entirely chased them out of the Nongoba Bullom Chiefdom. This was the final battle between the RUF forces and the Kamajors in the chiefdom. Civilians returned to resettle in the various towns and villages in the chiefdom and also in the neighbouring Yawbeko Chiefdom.

In late October, rumours of imminent SLA attacks¹²¹⁹ and sounds of heavy gun firing coming from the Bo road led some of the RUF forces based at Mattru (Jong Chiefdom) to leave the town for Senehun, in the south-west, and Gbonge (Kpanda Kemo Chiefdom),¹²²⁰ although those based at Camp Lion refused either to leave or to release the civilians. On 25 October, a group of SLA Forces known as "Special Task Force" and composed mainly of ULIMO forces entered Mattru with heavy gunfire. They were accompanied by two jets, which were clearing the way for them before they entered the town. The RUF forces who had stayed in Mattru deserted their base as soon as the members of the Task Force arrived in the town, after killing many civilians who were with them. The following day, the Task Force attacked the RUF at Camp Lion in the north of Mattru Town. A lot of civilians including men, women and children were killed during that attack and the survivors were all brought into Mattru Town. Civilians in neighbouring villages were also requested by the Task Force to come and live in Mattru Town. While bringing civilians from the villages to Mattru, the Task Force faced pockets of resistance from the RUF but continued to defeat the RUF forces who, while retreating, imposed great havoc on the population, burning down houses wherever they were dislodged and killing many civilians. For example, in Kale Kowama, RUF forces retreating from Blama came across a family (parents and two small children) and killed the two parents. Civilians brought to the town undertook a massive brushing and cleaning of the town and surrounding villages but soon, started to lack food and other necessary items.

In one of their patrol to bring civilians to Mattru, members of the Task Force went to Njahun and Senjahun (Sogbini Chiefdom). On hearing this, the RUF forces at Bauya (Sogbini Chiefdom) gathered the civilians and told them to wait for a while and all the civilians would go to Mattru. More civilians, some from neighbouring chiefdoms, came to Bauya, either brought by the RUF forces or arriving of their own free will, hoping to find a safer haven in Mattru. Therefore, thousands of people were gathered at Bauya when the RUF forces divided them in two queues, one for men and one for women. The civilians were told to sing a song and the RUF forces started to take one person after the other and killed them either with a gun or a bladed weapon. When they realised what was happening, the civilians started to flee to the bush. RUF forces fired on the fleeing crowd, killing hundreds of people. The RUF forces also ambushed the town to catch and kill

¹²¹⁹ Starting in August, SLA forces, who had just received military training from the South African mercenaries company Executive Outcomes, who were contracted by the Government of Sierra Leone, engaged in "mopping up" operations in the Southern Province, dislodging the RUF forces from various strongholds in Bumpeh Chiefdom (Bo District) and the mining area around Mokañji (Banta Chiefdom, Moyamba District).

¹²²⁰ At this time, Kamajors from Kwamebai Krim Chiefdom, in the south of the District started to have successful confrontation with RUF forces and went as far as Gbap (Nongoba Bullom Chiefdom). This strong grip on the south east of the District probably explains why the RUF forces did not move south, using the Sewa River and Wanjei River, that flow in Nongoba Bullom and Kwamebai Krim Chiefdoms but rather retreated to Gbonge, a hilly area in Kpanda Kemo Chiefdom.



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escaping civilians.¹²²¹ The surviving civilians went back to their camps in the bush, where RUF forces chased them, killing everyone they found, including young children. At Licono for example, they gathered the civilians they found in the Court Barrie, hacked some of them into pieces, opened the stomach of one pregnant woman and threw the foetus in the fire. Some civilians found refuge at Bahoi, on the Sewa River east of Kpanda Kemo Chiefdom, and were rescued by Kamajors from Senjehun who came and took them to their base. Around 200 RUF forces attacked the Kamajor base at Senjehun but were defeated by the Kamajors stationed there, who were assisted with civilians equipped with sticks. After this attack, the RUF forces went to the Gbonge hills from where they raided villages in Kpanda Kemo Chiefdom, burning houses, taking away property, killing and abducting civilians. Senjehun did not however sustain any further RUF attacks.

In November, SLA forces dislodged the RUF forces from Imperi Chiefdom and settled in the mining area, at Kpanguma and Mobimbi.¹²²²

Around October/November, Kamajors repelled the RUF from Yawbeko Chiefdom. To strengthen their positions, the Kamajors established more training bases in other chiefdoms than Kwamebai Krim Chiefdom, so that they could spread over wider areas of operation. Many young men and boys, some aged below 15, enlisted to be trained, calling themselves "Black December". One such base was at Talia (Yawbeko Chiefdom). Another base was at Gambia (Jong Chiefdom) where young men and boys initiated were called "Avondo".

On 13 November, Kamajors from Kwamebai Krim Chiefdom entered the village of Kpankpa (Bum Chiefdom) and killed 19 civilians on the allegation that they were accommodating the RUF forces in the village. The bodies were dragged into the river flowing by the village. The Kamajors who carried out this action were around 15 in number, only two of them had shotguns and all the others had cutlasses. After this incident, the Kamajors went back to their base at Karleh Wanjama (Kwamebai Krim Chiefdom) before returning in the same month to attack RUF positions in Bum Chiefdom. The RUF forces' position at Mami was attacked and they were dislodged from the town. They regrouped at Madina, where they faced a serious confrontation with the Kamajors. The RUF forces were again dislodged from their Madina base but burnt down 25 houses and killed several civilians before leaving the town. Eighteen RUF members were killed during the encounter. The RUF left towards the north and went in the direction of Sumbuya (Lugbu Chiefdom, Bo District).¹²²³ As they were retreating, the RUF forces killed civilians they came across, abducted a large number of people and took with them all the young girls they found. In December, RUF forces launched hit and run attacks on the chiefdom from Bagbo Chiefdom (Bo District), north-east of Bum Chiefdom, but following their retreat from Madina they no longer settled in Bum Chiefdom, where more and more young men were initiated within the Kamajors society.

¹²²¹ This event resulted in the death of hundreds of civilians. In 1998, over 1,000 human skulls were discovered at Bauya Junction: AFP, 10 March 1998.

¹²²² No information on fighting with RUF forces was recorded. Those SLA forces would be joined by some ULIMO-K forces for a short while in January 1996.

¹²²³ Information gathered for Bo District reveals that in December 1995, RUF forces arrived in Bagbo Chiefdom from Bonthe District, repelled by Kamajors.



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At a general meeting held in Mattru on 27 and 29 November 1995, civilians who had formerly served the RUF forces in various ways were identified and condemned to death. Some were later freed after investigations proved that they were innocent. At around this time, some of the Task Force members engaged in cannibalism, cooking and eating the bodies of RUF members they had captured and killed. In one incident, one child member of the RUF and known by the civilians for making "unruly" statements about the government forces was arrested by the civilians, who brought him to the Task Force members. Those shot him, removed the organs and left the body, asking civilians to dump it in the river.

As food was lacking, civilians living in Mattru were authorised by the SLA to go back to their villages in December with an SLA escort. The civilians were divided into groups depending on the area they were from and taken to their villages in order of the directions of the compass, with a group from the north going out one day, a group from the east when the first group returned and so on.

Towards the end of the year, the RUF were still to be found in Bendu Cha Chieftdom. In an incident that took place around October or November, RUF forces came to Gordana, approaching it from the river side. Two civilians who had earlier been captured in the chieftdom were with these forces. They were mainly interested by food products and told civilians that the war was not over and that the rumours that they did not have any more ammunition were not true. Before leaving, they forced civilians to carry the property they had taken to the south of Jong Chieftdom.

f) Events in 1996

In January 1996, civilians continued to resettle in Jong Chieftdom and engaged in commercial transactions with SLA members from the navy branch and coming from Bonthe Town.¹²²⁴ This period is referred to by civilians as "being calm".

Since RUF forces had been repelled from the boundaries of the chieftdom in 1995, the inhabitants of Kwamebai Krim Chieftdom did not sustain any more RUF attacks. After the February elections, however, the Kamajors started subjecting civilians to physical violence, sometimes killing people, and stealing people's property. For example, the Kamajors erected a detention cage made of thorns at every checkpoint in the chieftdom, which they used to punish people who did not have proper papers or for other reasons. Civilians were targeted for a variety of reasons and were often ill treated.¹²²⁵

Many civilians, particularly adult males, sought initiation into the Kamajor society not because they wanted to go to the war front but to protect themselves and their families from mistreatment by the Kamajors. One specific example of this occurred at the beginning of 1997 in Nongoba Bullom Chieftdom. A civilian who was selling tobacco in the chieftdom came across Kamajors at Torma Gbangbahun, who took his tobacco. As he wanted to talk, they threatened to beat him. On his

¹²²⁴ The SLA forces were bringing condiments, tobacco, clothes and radios that the civilians in the chieftdom could buy or exchange for gari, cassava or palm oil.

¹²²⁵ No further details are available on this information.



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return to Sohlon, some Kamajors he knew advised him to be initiated, because it would stop this kind of harassment. Accordingly, the man went to Talia (Yawbeko Chiefdom) for initiation.

The Kamajor presence expanded across the whole District, gaining control over areas previously under RUF control. They started settling in the various chiefdoms and putting in place local structures. The collaboration with the SLA rapidly became problematic as tension, amounting sometimes to fighting, erupted between the two forces. Indeed, most of the activities reported for the year concern the Kamajors and the SLA, as the RUF forces were gradually being repelled from their positions across the whole District. While RUF forces were still present in some areas, they were more likely to be acting in small groups and looking for food rather than in large numbers and on the offensive. For example, RUF forces were coming from time to time to Bendu Cha Chiefdom, chasing civilians in their camps in the bush, especially in the coastal area of Tisagbe, where they burnt down houses and took away a lot of property.

In January 1996, Kamajors joined the SLA forces based at the mining site in Imperi Chiefdom. The ground commander for the Kamajors kept his men within the rules of the Kamajors and punished the few Kamajors who harassed civilians. On one occasion, for example, he ordered the arrest of one Kamajor who had seized a whole lorry of gari from a civilian. The Kamajor was put in a culvert pipe for sometime and had to pay a fine.

Kamajors also settled in Tihun (Sogbini Chiefdom), which became an initiation centre where the High Priest and Chief Initiator performed initiations. A big camp was built behind the health centre, where the ceremonies were performed. Before being initiated, Kamajors had to bring money for initiation fees (Le 10,000) and other items like oil, old country clothes and razor blades. In Tihun, Kamajors and civilians together gathered the remains of civilians killed by the RUF forces and buried them in a grave dug in a graveyard.¹²²⁶

In January 1996, Kamajors based in the Nongoba Bullom Chiefdom held a meeting with the civilians at Baoma, where they appointed a chief or PRO they referred to as "AG" (Action Group). At the meeting, several laws were made regarding how the civilians were to behave, requiring them to observe the practices of the Kamajors, of whom there were 33 based in the town. The Kamajors took over all civil authorities in the town and surrounding villages, taking on the responsibility for judging all cases and settling disputes. Several restrictions were put on the civilians, who were forbidden to pound anything in a mortar¹²²⁷ and to hit a Kamajor with a broom. Contravention of these laws would lead to loss of life and the fine of demolition of the offender's dwelling house. The civilians were also tasked with feeding the Kamajors. In or around March, a woman violated one of the laws by pounding in a mortar and, as the Kamajors were chasing her in order to catch and kill her, she ran to the AG for rescue. The AG pleaded with the Kamajors, who demolished part of the woman's house as a fine. A civilian was also imprisoned on allegations that he was a rebel

¹²²⁶ It is not clear when the RUF was dislodged from Tihun and whether the SLA carried out this operation alone or in conjunction with the Kamajors. On 20 November 1995, the Government claimed the SLA had retaken control over the town but this information could not be confirmed by independent sources: Xinhua News Agency, 20 November 1995.

¹²²⁷ This particular law did not fit in the pattern of civilians' life, where pounding was the basis of food preparation, be it pepper, cassava leaves or rice.



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collaborator. On 7 August 1996, some Kamajors from Gambia (Jong Chiefdom) sent by the High Priest Initiator, took a lot of food items from the civilians at Baoma, which was also an initiation centre for the Kamajor society in the chiefdom. In a separate incident, civilians were molested and beaten when one of the initiators fell from his motorbike after hitting a stick that was lying across the road. The people of Motefoe village, where this incident happened, were brought to Baoma, where they were punished. The commander ordered the people to pay for the parts that were damaged on the motorbike. The people who had been brought to Baoma, together with the authorities of Baoma, paid the money.

SLA forces based in Bonthe Town and equipped with two gunboats (101 and 201) were working together with the Kamajors, entering the mainland to chase RUF forces. At this time, a lot of civilians labelled as RUF collaborators were brought from the mainland to Bonthe Town by both the SLA and the Kamajors, were killed and buried along the seaside, on the road opposite the military naval base. On one occasion, a man from Gbap (Nongoba Bullom Chiefdom) accused of being a collaborator, as he cooked for the RUF, was brought to Bonthe town and killed. In a separate incident, a man from Bendu (Bendu Cha Chiefdom) was also brought to Bonthe Town, accused of being an RUF collaborator and was killed.

On 15 February, Executive Outcomes reached the District and deployed at the rutile mining site (Imperi Chiefdom). They held meetings with the civilians, SLA and Kamajors on strategies to protect the chiefdom. These three forces had different bases in the area and Executive Outcomes worked together with the Kamajors but not with the SLA, whose behaviour towards civilians was "not cordial". Indeed, the SLA engaged in taking away civilians' property and in chasing RUF collaborators. In one incident, the Town Chief of Mogwemo was killed without much questioning, accused of being an RUF collaborator.

Some SLA troops came to Jong Chiefdom from Bo road, as a support body for the Task Force in February 1996. The SLA forces occupied places captured by the Task Force from the RUF forces but, after staying in the chiefdom for a while, started to take civilian property, including zinc and palm oil, and began to beat up civilians who refused to work for them. In the meanwhile, Kamajors had deployed at Gambia,¹²²⁸ east of the chiefdom, equipped with cutlasses, knives, shotguns, sticks and FM ropes.¹²²⁹ In the town, they appointed a chief (AG). Information gathered from Jong Chiefdom reveals the general laws the Kamajors had to abide by. For example, newly initiates could not have relations with women, could not lie on beds, could not bath and could not eat nut oil during the two weeks following their initiation. Kamajors were also not allowed to sit on mortar, to eat unscaled food or to stand at doorposts. It was believed that any Kamajors breaking those laws was no longer protected and would be killed by enemies during battles. To strengthen the force of the Kamajors in the chiefdom, more initiation began to take place at Gambia.

In a bid to control the chiefdoms where they were deployed, Kamajors established checkpoints and issued passes to civilians, thus regulating the movements of the population. In Bum Chiefdom,

¹²²⁸ It was allegedly a lack of ammunition that prevented Kamajors from attacking the RUF stronghold in Mattru in 1995.

¹²²⁹ This rope, one foot long with small sticks at its edge, was used to tie people at the ankle by their backs. "FM" means "frequency modulation", because when somebody was tied with such a rope, he would talk and reveal a lot.



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civilians coming to any village without such a pass were beaten, made to lie on the floor or forced to beat the back of their fingers on concreted floor, a practice referred to as “typing”. They also appointed civilians as Town Chiefs (AG) and GS clerk,¹²³⁰ to deal with administrative issues. At this time, the Kamajors’ attitude towards civilians started to become hostile, as the villages were taxed in order to feed the Kamajors and, above all, summary executions of alleged RUF collaborators were carried out. On 27 January, Kamajors from Bum Chiefdom attacked Torma, killed some civilians, took away some property and vandalised the quarters and offices of the swamp rice project.

Sometime in 1996,¹²³¹ Kamajors from Kwamebai Krim Chiefdom attacked RUF forces who had retreated from Mattru and re-established in the Gbonge Hills (Kpanda Kemo Chiefdom). Sixty-eight civilians were rescued from the RUF, although 23 died in the crossfire. Seventeen RUF forces were killed and the Kamajors recovered the property the RUF had previously taken away.¹²³²

On 26 April, a serious fight broke between the Kamajors and the SLA forces based at Mabaka (Imperi Chiefdom), which resulted in some SLA members being killed.¹²³³ Following this encounter, the SLA withdrew from Mabaka and went to their main headquarter at Mobimbi. Sometime in 1996, reports of actions carried out by “lawless” SLA forces reached the military headquarter in Freetown and those forces were removed from the mining site and brought by helicopter to Camp Charlie, an SLA base near Mile 91 (Yoni Chiefdom, Tonkolili Chiefdom). Those forces who escaped this evacuation were believed to have gone to the Mekanji area (Banta Chiefdom, Moyamba District).

A few months after the 1996 general elections,¹²³⁴ a conflict arose between the SLA and Kamajors in Kpanda Kemo Chiefdom. The SLA forces fell in a Kamajor ambush at the village of Kebawana, where one of the SLA members was killed. In revenge, the SLA forces killed seven Kamajors at Kebawana and displayed their bodies on the Mattru-Bo highway. Two days later, the Kamajors regrouped and attacked the SLA forces. However, the SLA forces defeated them, killing 40 Kamajors and burying them in a mass grave in Mattru. The two groups continued to live as enemies for another month until an SLA officer came and settled the conflict.

Local authorities were among the people harassed by the Kamajors. In March 1996, the Paramount Chief of Sittia Chiefdom went into hiding, opposed to the Kamajors deployment in his chiefdom and their behaviour towards civilians. This did not go down well with the Kamajors who chased them, severely beating one of his relatives to know about his hiding place. The Kamajors eventually found him, seriously beat him, went to another relative of the Paramount Chief who had hosted him and fined her Le 300,000, which she subsequently did not have to pay due to a reverend’s intervention. However, the Paramount Chief was so severely beaten that he was transported for medical treatment to Freetown, where he allegedly died.

Sometime in May 1996, the Kamajors continued to harass civilians, particularly businesswomen and other civilians who often went in search of food in Sittia Chiefdom on Sherbro Island. Some of the civilians were punished by being forced to carry loads for the Kamajors or were beaten and

¹²³⁰ Those GS clerks fulfilled the same kind of tasks as the clerks appointed by the RUF.

¹²³¹ This attack probably took place early 1996, before May.

¹²³² This attack may have been carried out by Kamajors deployed in different chiefdoms.

¹²³³ This was however not the only conflict between Kamajors and the SLA in Imperi Chiefdom.

¹²³⁴ The exact date of this event could not be ascertained.



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sometimes killed. People deserted the towns and villages to go into hiding in camps. However, the Kamajors followed them to the camps and forcefully brought them back to the towns. In the same month, the Kamajors attacked the village of Mobayeh (Sittia Chiefdom), where civilians were hiding. They burnt down the whole village and killed three people, namely one old woman who had given notice to the inhabitants of the village of the Kamajors coming was tied up and left to burn in one of the houses; a pregnant woman, whose womb was slit open; and that woman's four year-old daughter.

In June 1996, the Kamajor ground commander of Sogbini Chiefdom ordered the killing of four people on the grounds that they were enemy collaborators, who were arrested at night, taken to Talia (Yawbeko Chiefdom) and killed.

In September 1996, Kamajors, who were mainly from Imperi Chiefdom in the north of Bonthe District, arrested 28 civilians and killed many of them in Sittia Chiefdom. There were cases reported of human flesh being cooked and eaten by the Kamajors. SLA forces were given notice about these civilians held captive by the Kamajors and went to attack them and free the captives. In retaliation, Kamajors laid an ambush for the SLA at Mbockie (Sittia Chiefdom). During the attack, some civilians who ran to the river and could not swim across it were drowned, while others were burnt in their houses by the fire sparked by fragments of RPGs. Two members of the SLA were also killed by the Kamajors. Over 50 Kamajors attacked the town and overpowered the 10 SLA soldiers who were based there. A large amount of stolen property was loaded into boats and carried away to Gbangbatoke (Banta Chiefdom, Moyamba District) by the Kamajors.

By the end of the year, the main Kamajor base was at Talia (Yawbeko Chiefdom). After the 25 May events, it would be called "Base Zero".

g) Events in 1997

By 1997, the Kamajors together with the SLA forces had succeeded in removing the RUF forces from most of their strongholds in the District. This notwithstanding, there were several clashes between the Kamajors and the SLA forces. The Kamajors also wrecked a lot of havoc on the civilians, as the SLA and RUF had done previously and continued to do.

SLA forces continued to mistreat civilians in the few areas in the District where they were deployed. A group of SLA forces from the navy branch posted at York Island used to take food and other non food items away from civilians. Civilians accused of committing crimes like killing or raping were punished by the SLA forces without many investigations into the truth of these accusations. The main punishment was to tie the suspect up, hang them upside down from the roof of a house and beat them. The most senior SLA member in command used to mete out this type of punishment. Cases of sexual violence against women by SLA members were also reported, including harassing civilians in order to take their wives. In one incident, some SLA members locked a woman in one room of her house and assaulted her sexually. As they heard her husband was coming home, they went outside the house and fired in the air to make people flee the area. Those SLA forces however



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withdrew from York Island and went to Bonthe Town as reinforcements following the Coup in May 1997.¹²³⁵

In March 1997, a combined force of Kamajors and SLA from Bonthe Town launched a fierce attack on the RUF position at Bendu, the headquarter town in the west of Bendu Cha Chiefdom. The combined forces had about 20 to 25 wounded, who were taken to Bonthe Town for medical treatment.¹²³⁶ The RUF forces continued to occupy the town and sent several messages to the SLA forces and the Kamajors in Bonthe Town threatening to attack them and the town. Nevertheless, despite this collaboration, fighting between the two factions continued. In one incident, an SLA member who had come to an area under Kamajor control was killed at Foinda-Madina (Imperi Chiefdom).

In May 1997, the military overthrew the Government and put in place a military regime called the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC). This brought a total change in the attitude of the SLA forces based in Bonthe Town and its environs, who then joined the AFRC government. Civilians were continuously harassed, property was taken and a large number of people were killed on the allegation that they were Kamajors. The RUF forces, then referred to as "Peoples Army", joined the AFRC forces and the combined forces continued to attack and mistreat civilians in the Town.¹²³⁷ The Kamajors in Bonthe Town moved out of Bonthe Town, which is part of the Sherbro Urban District, to Sittia Chiefdom and to Bendu (Bendu Cha Chiefdom), where they regrouped to attack the AFRC forces now in Bonthe Town. Furthermore, Kamajors had been deployed since 1996 in all the villages along the river from Mattru down to York Island, three nautical miles to Bonthe Town. Accordingly, the RUF/AFRC forces were surrounded by Kamajors.¹²³⁸

Following threats of attack by the Kamajors on Bonthe Town, the AFRC forces mounted checkpoints at various locations in the town around July/August. Civilian movement was restricted and all boats and other vessels were grounded. Fishing nets and boats were seized from the civilians by the RUF/AFRC forces. Civilians were beaten, molested and deprived of their daily food. The AFRC commanders often sent their forces to attack villages occupied by Kamajors and to kill civilians. Sometimes civilians, suspected of being Kamajor collaborators, were arrested and brought to Bonthe Town, where they were imprisoned; those who could not be identified were shot and buried by the seaside opposite the naval base.

People were evicted from their homes to accommodate the RUF forces when they began to arrive in Bonthe Town in May 1997 and were harassed. At this time, the actions carried out by the RUF/AFRC members were masterminded by the AFRC forces, because the RUF forces, who mostly came from outside the District, did not know the area.

The Kamajors occupied SLA and RUF positions in Bendu Cha Chiefdom soon after the overthrow of the Government in May 1997. By July 1997, RUF/AFRC forces were shooting at civilian locations in the area. People in villages like Momaya were under serious attacks and during one

¹²³⁵ They would however come from time to time to patrol the island.

¹²³⁶ Casualty figures for the RUF forces could not be ascertained.

¹²³⁷ This would be the only time RUF managed to get a grip on Bonthe Town.

¹²³⁸ The Kamajors were however not deployed in York Island.



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attack, a 15-year old girl was killed. People abandoned their villages in the area for camps in the bush. Those attacks carried out by RUF/AFRC forces also prompted many young people in the chiefdom to join the Kamajor society, in Nongoba Bullom Chiefdom and at Talia (Yawbeko Chiefdom). Reports however mention that as their number grew larger, they became out of control and created more havoc on civilians.¹²³⁹ In November 1997, two young boys from Bonthe Town coming to Bendu to bring their relatives to Bonthe Town were arrested at the wharf by the Kamajors posted at Bendu checkpoint. When they admitted they were coming from Bonthe Town, they were accused of being “junta” collaborators and were killed with cutlasses.

Kamajor harassment and violence against civilians was reported in almost all the chiefdoms where they were deployed. In Bum Chiefdom, they targeted businessmen, especially if they were Fullah or Temne by tribe, and killed them.¹²⁴⁰ In one instance, one man from Moyia who was coming back from Bo District with food items was intercepted by Kamajors at Moyia who took away his food, locked him up in a guard room and subjected him to punishment, as a result of which he died. Punishments included starvation or tying the elbows behind the back and projecting the chest forward. The harassment of civilians increased when an embargo was imposed on Sierra Leone. At the checkpoints they mounted, Kamajors from Bum Chiefdom used to take whatever property the civilians had. If they resisted, civilians were beaten and put in a 2” x 2” cage made of thorns. In Kwamebai Krim Chiefdom, Kamajors were forcing civilians to work for them and were also taking away their property. They would load vehicles with the property they had stolen and take it to Talia (Kwamebai Krim Chiefdom). On another occasion, a group of Kamajors in Matru amputated the ears of one civilian. He was also severely wounded on the arm and later died of the wound. Another Kamajor killed two civilians at the Keiga checkpoint (Imperi Chiefdom).

The situation for the civilians in Bonthe Town worsened when RUF/AFRC forces imposed an economic embargo on the civilians in Bonthe Township. No one was allowed to leave Bonthe Town for Freetown and those who attempted were beaten and molested. Civilians therefore found themselves caught between the Kamajors and the RUF/AFRC forces, with the RUF/AFRC forces threatening them for being relations of Kamajors and the Kamajors threatening them for being “rebel” collaborators. This situation became unbearable by August 1997, so the elders of Bonthe organised a peace deal between the Kamajors and the RUF/AFRC forces. The peace was initiated after the peacemakers met with the Kamajor High Priest and Chief Initiator who was based at Talia (Yawbeko Chiefdom). Their trip to Talia was, however, accompanied by many obstacles, most of them being the Kamajors checkpoints all along the road to Matru. Those civilian peacemakers were severely molested at a checkpoint at Momaya (Bendu Cha Chiefdom), where Kamajors opened fired into the air.¹²⁴¹ They were also molested by Kamajors on their arrival at Talia. Nevertheless, they met the High Priest and Chief Initiator, who gave them a message for the RUF/AFRC based at Bonthe Town. In that message, the Chief Initiator asked those forces to stop killing civilians and Kamajors and, in return, he promised he would try to stop his men from launching attacks on Bonthe Town.

¹²³⁹ Around this period, it was suggested that there was “[...] a clear difference between newly-recruited Kamajors, who have access to automatic weapons and apparently operate outside the authority of chiefdom representatives, and the traditional Kamajors who are carefully screened and respect traditional chiefdom structures”: Sierra Leone Humanitarian Situation Report 29 October – 18 November 1997. REG. NO. 97/0390.

¹²⁴⁰ It has to be remembered that the Kamajors were Mendes.

¹²⁴¹ This checkpoint was called “the gate of hell”.



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The peacemakers went back to Bonthe, escorted by some Kamajors responsible for the security of the High Priest, and the RUF/AFRC agreed to the peace plan.

However, the AFRC forces soon undermined the peace deal several times by attacking the positions of the Kamajors. For example, a few days after the return of the peacemakers from the negotiations, the RUF/AFRC forces attacked the Kamajor position at Gbangbatoke (Banta Chiefdom, Moyamba District). They were defeated and two members of the RUF/AFRC forces were killed. In September 1997, the RUF/AFRC forces attacked the Kamajors at Pembihun, north of Bonthe Town. The RUF/AFRC forces were again defeated and the Kamajors killed a lot of their number, including a very top RUF member. Soon after, the RUF/AFRC made another attack on Kamajor location in Bamaba, west of Bonthe Town, and were again defeated by the Kamajors. The RUF/AFRC forces continued to harass the civilians and killed people they suspected of being Kamajor collaborators in Bonthe Town. Dema Chiefdom, east of Sittia Chiefdom, was also affected by these attacks, as in December 1997, AFRC members went to Moyema by sea, over powered the few Kamajors posted there, looted some houses and a store and burnt down some houses before leaving.¹²⁴² The AFRC members left for Bonthe Town but one of them proceeded to the village of Mokutu (Dema Chiefdom) and killed a youth, who allegedly tried to be "defiant". This AFRC member was later arrested on his way to Tissana and killed by Kamajors.

In the middle of 1997, newly initiated Kamajors settled at Mokossie (Nongoba Bullom Chiefdom), where they convened a meeting with the civilians to explain the new laws civilians would have to obey. These laws included no whistling in the town, no sitting on motorbikes by women, no trousers for women and no use of mortars at night. The penalty for the breach of one of these laws was the destruction of the civilian's house. The Kamajors decided on cases and tied people with a FM rope for various reasons.

Around 10 and 11 September 1997, the AFRC commanders ordered that all the important personalities in Bonthe Town be arrested, in particular those who initiated the peace talks, alleging they did not negotiate in the interests of the AFRC. The arrested people were, however, released in the evening. On 15 September, the Kamajors launched an attack on Bonthe Town, which was unsuccessful, as the RUF/AFRC forces had a large amount of weapons in the town. Several Kamajors and a lot of civilians were killed during the battle, which lasted for four hours. The dead Kamajors were buried in a mass grave dug by the RUF/AFRC forces. After the battle, the RUF/AFRC forces conducted a house-to-house search in Bonthe Town, looking for Kamajors. Civilians were advised not to host any Kamajor and to report any case of a civilian harbouring a Kamajor. Information of imminent Kamajor attacks on the town continued to arrive in Bonthe Town, through the businessmen travelling back and forth to Sittia Chiefdom. This led many RUF/AFRC forces to leave the town on gunboats for Freetown, taking with them a lot of property they had previously stolen. Few civilians were authorised to board the RUF/AFRC gunships on that occasions but on subsequent trips and during a transfer to the boat, the sea car they boarded capsized and many civilians drowned in the ocean.

¹²⁴² During the period of 1997 to 1999, Dema Chiefdom administration was entirely in the hands of the Kamajors, who presided over cases and served as chiefdom police sub chiefs and as Paramount Chief.