



Refugee Documentation Centre (Ireland)
LEGAL AID BOARD

Sierra Leone - Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on Monday 19 September 2016

Information on culture/customs of the Poro including consequences for those who don't want to be involved

In May 2013 the *United Nations Human Rights Committee* notes that:

“The Poro Society is a male secret society and as such women and non members do not have any form of access to the Poro Bush” (United Nations Human Rights Committee (16 May 2013) *Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 40 of the Covenant : International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights : initial reports of States parties due in November 1997 : Sierra Leone*, p.20).

A compilation of research issued in March 2009 by the *Country of Origin Research and Information* includes a source which states that:

“The Poro society is a long established cultural institution in Sierra Leone¹ it is present throughout the country and in Liberia and Ivory Coast...Membership is restricted to men...in Sierra Leone members come from several ethnic groups including the Mende (Southern and Eastern Provinces) and Temne (Northern Province)...” (Country of Origin Research and Information (6 March 2009) *Sierra Leone: Fear of forced initiation into the Poro Secret Society in Freetown*, p.1).

Bloomberg in January 2015 notes that:

“Initiation into the Poro society for boys and Bondo for girls is an important mark of success in Sierra Leonean society, and many influential people are members” (Bloomberg (14 January 2015) *Ebola Forces Secret Societies to Curb Circumcision Rites*).

In June 2015 *28 Too Many* points out in a report that:

“Traditionalists believe that birth, puberty, marriage and death link the unborn to their ancestors. Rituals and rites conducted by the Poro and Bondo secret societies, such as sacrifice and initiation, call on the ancestral spirits for protection from evil and for their assistance” (28 Too Many (June 2015) *Country Profile: FGM in Sierra Leone*, p.45).

In August 2016 *Awoko* states:

“The Local Unit Commander of the Mattru Police, Bonthe Division, Amadu Turay, has confirmed the arrest and detention of 14 people in connection with the recent riot in Bonthe, which left two people dead and several injured when a rampaging ‘Poro’ mob clashed with soldiers of the Bonthe naval base” (Awoko (1 August 2016) *Sierra Leone News: Over the recent Bonthe riot... 14 people in custody as investigation continues*).

No further information on this issue could be found among sources available to the RDC.

References

Awoko (1 August 2016) *Sierra Leone News:Over the recent Bonthe riot... 14 people in custody as investigation continues*

<http://awoko.org/2016/08/01/sierra-leone-newsover-the-recent-bonthe-riot14-people-in-custody-as-investigation-continues/>

Accessed Monday 19 September 2016

Bloomberg (14 January 2015) *Ebola Forces Secret Societies to Curb Circumcision Rites*

<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-01-14/ebola-forces-secret-societies-to-curb-circumcision-rites>

Accessed Monday 19 September 2016

Country of Origin Research and Information (6 March 2009) *Sierra Leone: Fear of forced initiation into the Poro Secret Society in Freetown*

<http://www.refworld.org/docid/49db6ccb2.html>

Accessed Monday 19 September 2016

28 Too Many (June 2015) *Country Profile: FGM in Sierra Leone*

<http://www.refworld.org/docid/54bce6334.html>

Accessed Monday 19 September 2016

United Nations Human Rights Committee (16 May 2013) *Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 40 of the Covenant: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights : initial reports of States parties due in November 1997 : Sierra Leone*

<http://www.refworld.org/docid/52a9aa754.html>

Accessed Monday 19 September 2016

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

Sources Consulted

Amnesty International

BBC News

Electronic Immigration Network

European Country of Origin Information Network

Freedom House

Google

Human Rights Watch

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

International Crisis Group

IRIN News

Lexis Nexis
Minority Rights Group International
Online Newspapers
Refugee Documentation Centre E-Library
Refugee Documentation Centre Query Database
Reliefweb
Reuters
United Kingdom Home Office
United States Department of State
UNHCR Refworld