



**Sierra Leone – Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 6 February 2019**

**Information on the relationship between the All Peoples Congress Party (APCP) and Sierra Leones People Party including attacks on APCP members; Information on attacks of extreme violence by Sierra Leones People Party in Freetown including on youth officers**

An Agence France Presse report states:

“Sierra Leone's electoral commission sounded the alarm on Saturday over a wave of violence between rival groups ahead of a run-off presidential vote later this month.

Opposition leader Julius Maada Bio, from the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP), took 43.3 percent of votes in the first round on March 7, while Samura Kamara of the incumbent All Peoples Congress (APC) took 42.7 percent.

Violence was reported between SLPP and APC supporters in the southern city of Bo, as well as several other cities where some lodgings were burned.

Staff of the National Electoral Commission were attacked and injured in Bo, the commission said.” (Agence France Presse (17 March 2018) *Violence fears ahead of Sierra Leone run-off vote*)

An article from UK newspaper The Guardian states:

“The results of the first round of elections in Sierra Leone have set off a spate of political violence amid accusations of tribalism made against both main parties.

Police have sent an extra 4,000 officers on to the streets and diplomats have called for an end to ‘tribal rhetoric’ after at least five violent incidents involving beatings, stone-throwing and arson, and after politicians had criticised voters for ‘regionalism’ – seen as a euphemism for tribalism – in deciding how to vote.

The main opposition, the Sierra Leone People’s party (SLPP), won slightly more votes than the ruling All People’s Congress (APC) in the first round of a historically peaceful election on 7 March and the two parties have been trying to win over voters ahead of the runoff next week, causing growing tension in the west African country.

After the presidential spokesman Abdulai Baratay suggested on state radio last week that more SLPP supporters than APC ones had voted along tribal lines – language he later denied using – there was an increase in the number of violent incidents.

The APC candidate, Samura Kamara, said that supporters of the SLPP candidate, Julius Maada Bio, had thrown stones at him and that when he stopped at a bar en route to a rally last week they burned it down shortly after he had left.

Police confirmed that there had been street brawls between supporters of the APC and the SLPP in the capital, Freetown, and that candidates from both sides had had their houses and cars set on fire by 'youths'.

Ibrahim Tawa Conteh, who won an SLPP seat in west Freetown, said that he had been attacked twice while campaigning but the police had stood by and done nothing, even after he had taken a suspect to the police station." (The Guardian (21 March 2018) *Sierra Leone: Violence fears as tense election reaches runoff*)

A report from the Freetown-based newspaper Concord Times states:

"Campaign for Human Rights and Development International (CHREDI) has strongly slammed the rising spate of political violence and intimidation in the country before and after the just concluded general elections.

There were reports of political intimidation and violence just after the announcement of Rtd Brigadier Julius Maada Bio as winner of the March 31 presidential run-off election against supporters of the opposition All People's Congress (APC).

Several innocent people have been severely injured, buildings, including the office of the APC at Taiama Junction burnt down with a few losing their lives as a result of the waves of attacks.

According to the Chief Executive, Abdul M. Fatoma, such despicable behaviour was fast becoming a growing trend in the public space, with threats of violence or actual violence against party supporters, politicians and activists.

'We believe these acts of political 'gangsterism' are aimed at intimidating the democratic contestation of ideas and silencing dissenting opinions. The trend is worrying, particularly with the looming transition of power from one political party to another. Such unruly and criminal behaviour, if left unchecked will inevitably escalate to outbreaks of political violence across the country,' he said.

He stated that although the police have made some arrests, prosecutions are rare; most of the cases of political violence remain unresolved." (Concord Times (10 April 2018) *Sierra Leone: CHREDI Slams Political Intimidation, Violence*)

An article from the New York Times states:

"Mr. Bio, 53, from the Sierra Leone People's Party, received 51.8 percent of the vote in the runoff on Saturday, narrowly defeating Samura Kamara from the governing party, the All People's Congress, who won 48.2 percent, according to the Electoral Commission.

Mr. Bio succeeds President Ernest Bai Koroma, who is stepping down after serving a second five-year term. His tenure was punctuated by tragedy, including an outbreak of the Ebola virus and a deadly mudslide, in a country that is still recovering from a civil war that ended in 2002 after the deaths of more than 50,000 people.

In recent days, the candidates exchanged accusations of tribalism and even charges of attempts at "ethnic cleansing." Sierra Leone, a former British colony with a population of nearly seven million, has long been divided along tribal and regional lines.

Several episodes of violence were reported at political rallies this year, and at least one death and several injuries were recorded. A gunshot was heard close to Mr. Bio's home after polls were closed on Saturday. For a time, internet service was suspended, as well as international phone service.

Andrew Laval, the executive director of the Institute for Governance Reform, an independent research group in Sierra Leone, said the presence of heavily armed soldiers in the capital, Freetown, and elsewhere, created an atmosphere of fear and intimidation for many voters." (The New York Times (5 April 2018) *Sierra Leone Swears In New Leader After Tumultuous Election Season*)

An article published on The Conversation website states:

"Sierra Leone recently held peaceful presidential elections. But you would not know it from the media, which suggested that the country was frequently overwhelmed by violence during this period.

The first round results were announced in mid-March, which concluded that no single party had the required majority. The results of the run off between the two main parties, the incumbent All People's Congress and the opposition Sierra Leone People's Party, were announced on 4 April.

The opposition party won, making it only the second time the country has had a peaceful transition between parties since the end of the civil war in 2002. It's also the fourth time since the end of the war a peaceful democratic election has taken place in the country.

During the campaigning period between the two elections there were reports of violence, 'tribal rhetoric' and ritual killings across the country.

But even after the elections were finished and power had been successfully transferred, a New York Times article focused on violence, even alluding to 'ethnic cleansing'. This was a particularly absurd phrase to use given that there has never been any significant ethnic violence in Sierra Leone. Even the civil war didn't have an overt ethnic dimension." (The Conversation (22 April 2018) *Coverage of Sierra Leone's election reflected stereotypes, not reality*)

A report on the March 2018 elections from the European Union Election Observation Mission, in a section titled "Election Campaign", states:

“The convoys of both the APC and the SLPP presidential candidates were stoned by supporters of the other party. The SLPP’s press release that this was an assassination attempt was inflammatory, as was a further claim, later retracted, that there was a plot to kill Brigadier Bio by senior members of the military. The leadership of all of the political parties could have done more to calm their supporters and take action against those of them who were creating fear and perpetrating violence. As a consequence of the climate of fear in some parts of the country, the opposition parties were at a distinct disadvantage nationally. The APC also claimed to be a victim of intimidation in the South and East.” (European Union Election Observation Mission (13 June 2018) *EU EOM Sierra Leone 2018 Presidential, Parliamentary and Local Council Elections - Final Report*, p.23)

An article from the Nigerian online magazine The Next Edition states:

“Less than 24 hours after opposition Julius Maada Bio was sworn-in as President of Sierra Leone, some of his supporters have engaged in violent activities.

The violence erupted in the eastern Sierra Leonean district of Kenema, after the installation of Bio as the country’s fifth president.

Reports out of the town on Thursday suggested running battles between irate youths and the police.

A police station was reported to have come under attack.

Reports also indicated multiple injuries, some as a result of gunshots.

A source in Kenema told APA that jubilating supporters of the Sierra Leone People’s Party (SLPP), whose candidate Bio was declared winner of the presidential election, went on the rampage trying to attack the residence of a minister in the outgoing government.

The source said the SLPP supporters later resorted to attacking defenceless APC supporters and destroying their market stalls.” (The Next Edition (6 April 2018) *Violence erupts after inauguration of Sierra Leone’s president*)

An article from the Sierra Leone newspaper Cocorioko states:

“The political situation preceding the Sierra Leone March 31st Presidential runoff is becoming nerve-racking by the day as post-election violence continues in an unprecedented modus. The Sierra Leone election, which saw the country’s main opposition Sierra Leone Peoples Party (SLPP) then beating the their incumbent counterpart, the then ruling All Peoples Congress (APC) Party in one of the most tightly-contested elections ever in the history of the West African Country a little over a week ago is experiencing the worst post-election violence ever in its political history.

The violence, which is mainly perpetrated by supporters of the now ruling Sierra Leone Peoples Party (SLPP) mainly in the South and Eastern regions of the country where the party has the bulk of its supporters, has seen the destruction of many lives and properties and displacement of thousands.

In Bo, Moyamba, Kenema and most disturbingly Kono, several houses and properties belonging to opposition supporters are burnt down and destroyed while also physically attacking and victimizing peaceful individuals or groups that are believed to be supporters of the All Peoples Congress (APC) Party.” (Cocorioko (13 April 2018) *Post-election attacks create over 2,000 refugees in Sierra Leone*)

An Agence France Presse report states:

“Violent clashes erupted during a local by-election in Sierra Leone leaving a teenager dead and prompting the cancellation of the ballot, police and election officials said Sunday.

The incident occurred on Saturday at a polling station in a school in the northern Kambia district, where a ballot box was destroyed, sparking an altercation between supporters of the ruling Sierra Leone Peoples Party (SLPP) and the opposition All Peoples Congress.

But the confrontation quickly turned violent with a teenager killed in the clashes, police told AFP.

‘The intensity of the clashes resulted in the death of a boy,’ a police source said.” (Agence France Presse (30 September 2018) *Teen killed as violence hits S.Leone by-election*)

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research and Information Unit 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.

## References:

Agence France Presse (30 September 2018) *Teen killed as violence hits S.Leone by-election*

<https://www.lexisnexis.com>

(Accessed 6 February 2019)

This is a subscription database

Agence France Presse (17 March 2018) *Violence fears ahead of Sierra Leone run-off vote*

<https://www.lexisnexis.com>

(Accessed 6 February 2019)

This is a subscription database

Cocorioko (13 April 2018) *Post-election attacks create over 2,000 refugees in Sierra Leone*

<https://cocorioko.net/post-election-attacks-create-over-2000-refugees-in-sierra-leone/>

(Accessed 6 February 2019)

Concord Times (10 April 2018) *Sierra Leone: CHRD Slams Political Intimidation, Violence*

<https://www.lexisnexis.com>

(Accessed 6 February 2019)

This is a subscription database

The Conversation (22 April 2018) *Coverage of Sierra Leone's election reflected stereotypes, not reality*

<http://theconversation.com/coverage-of-sierra-leones-election-reflected-stereotypes-not-reality-95322>

(Accessed 6 February 2019)

European Union Election Observation Mission (13 June 2018) *EU EOM Sierra Leone 2018 Presidential, Parliamentary and Local Council Elections - Final Report*

[https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/eu\\_eom\\_sl\\_2018\\_final\\_report\\_3.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/eu_eom_sl_2018_final_report_3.pdf)

(Accessed 6 February 2019)

The Guardian (21 March 2018) *Sierra Leone: Violence fears as tense election reaches runoff*

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/mar/21/sierra-leone-political-violence-tribal-rhetoric-rival-parties-face-runoff#img-2>

(Accessed 6 February 2019)

The New York Times (5 April 2018) *Sierra Leone Swears In New Leader After Tumultuous Election Season*

<https://www.lexisnexis.com>

(Accessed 6 February 2019)

This is a subscription database

The Next Edition (6 April 2018) *Violence erupts after inauguration of Sierra Leone's president*

<https://nextedition.com.ng/2018/04/06/violence-erupts-inauguration-sierra-leones-president/>

(Accessed 6 February 2019)

### **Sources Consulted:**

All Africa

Electronic Immigration Network

European Country of Origin Information Network

Google

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

Lexis Nexis

Refugee Documentation Centre Query Database