

Sierra Leoneans Share Testimonies of the Civil War

By Mohamed Sinneh Kamara

Foday Sesay, a builder living at Old Railway Line Wellington, said in January 6 1996 when the rebels entered Freetown, their area was a sensitive spot. City Road (Wellington) is a sensitive spot because lot of disaster took place in this area including burning of houses. Killing of soldiers by the rebels. Killing civilians etc. Just 9:00Pm on that day the rebels entered their community when they were outside. They had a group which is Civil Defence Unit (CDU) group. This group is a civil society group that was form in their community to protect and guide the community as well as to aid the Nigerian Soldiers in putting checkpoints during the curfew hours.

The rebels then came and started striking their way at night. “We saw lots of people with luggage coming from Calaba Town, Wellington etc approaching towards us. Just a few moments, we heard gun shots from the Wellington area. It was a fire tracer coming closer to us. It was later then that we realized that the rebels are approaching us. Foday Sesay said. People who were running from the rebels came to their house seeking help to stay. There were lots of them. Cars were burnt and people were shot. He continued by saying on January 6, 1996 when the rebels were moving up and down, to and fro and randomly, all they could do is shouting “we want peace, we want peace”. In January 15th 1999, a group of rebels came and beg for water to drink at the house of Foday Sesay. He gave them the water to drink when one among them said he likes Foday. They had to take him along without shirt on his body and gave him a lot of luggage to carry.

On their way going, Foday had to ask a question “where are you taking me?” A female rebel then said nowhere, is just that “if pa Kabba nor tell we waetin for tell we, we dae burn ya tiday” The rebel stated. They started burning houses and cars from Brima Lane Old Road onto City Road Old Road. They took him to Congo Water behind a lonely home and started hiding from the flying jet that was flying at the New Road. The rebels then made their way to the Old Road where Foday had the chance to escape from them. It was rather unfortunate that when he gets back home, their house was burnt down completely by another set of rebels that came after. Even though their house was destroyed, Foday was thankful because

his brothers and other family members had a chance to escape from the wrath of the rebels. The next day on the 16th January they had to beg a neighbour Mammy Fudia to be accommodated. He started selling water by gallon in his community City Road so he can sustain with his family. After a month, the NGOs came into existence. The NGOs are Oxfam, World Vision etc who then located at Approved School to offer building materials, foods and clothing. Foday and his family had to sustain through this because there's nothing left with them to start again.

According to Mohamed Salieu Kamara, Chairman of the Disabilities in Sierra Leone, when the war started in Sierra Leone, at first, they thought it was fun. They started asking rhetorical questions. Who are rebels? Do rebels have teeth? Until the arrivals of the rebels in Freetown, then they realized that rebels are human beings. " During the overthrowing of the Late President Joseph Saidu Momoh, it was during the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) regime.

There's a place in Rokupa called the Kabbasa Lodge. Eight men came to him seeking friendship and rescue. Mohamed aids them by providing foods and other necessities to them. When the rebels finally made their way in Freetown, these friends later told him that their time to move had finally arrived. They thank him by saying he's a good man.

These men later went behind his house and started digging out their weapons. The weapons were, RPG, LMG, AK-47, etc. They started destroying in his community Rokupa. He had to run away with his family due to the destruction that was going on in his community. These rebels were nicknamed "born naked, kaka scatter, the gina etc as mentioned by Mohamed Salieu Kamara. In January 6, 1999, lots of rebels started invading Freetown when they heard Musketeers, Born to Kill, Palala, Savage and others (Sierra Leonean soldiers turning rebels) have arrived. Mohamed relocated to the Old Warf Community. At Old Warf wellington, there were lots of massive killing and girls were raped. He then found his way to a place called Maferreh. Maferreh is located by Gbere where the rebels were hiding. It's the center of Okra Hill. This is the place where Mohamed Salieu Kamara and others were taken after being captured by the rebels. He then described the place as a place that had a big hole which was dug by the rebels, and it was designed with palm trees which eventually seems like it was a standing tree. That's the reason when the British soldiers made their way to that place, they couldn't find

the rebels except the rebels who were spotting them. He also spoke about the punishment and pain given to them by the rebels.

“An old man of sixty was ask to hold a pestle and hit five bags of rice in a mortar. The old man did it with a blood raining in his palm. After the rice had been cook, they’ll put their waste (toilet) and asked the captives to eat. Their urine is the water they’ll give to drink”. Mohamed Salieu Kamara said. He lost his house which was completely burnt by the rebels but thankfully he was alive to give these testimonies.

According to the TRC report, Chapter One Paragraph 26 of Phase II began when the RUF launched a guerrilla strategy, becoming less visible, less predictable, less consistent and less distinguishable. It expanded the scope and coverage of combat operations into every District of Sierra Leone. An RUF trademark was to carry out false flag attacks dressed in full SLA military uniforms. This tactic, combined with increased human rights violations by solders, led to the breakdown in trust between the civilian population and the SLA.

A Palace Coup saw a change in the leadership of the NPRC and eventually secured a transition to democratic elections in 1996. Although marred by violence, the electrons ushered in a new Sierra Leone Peoples Party (SLPP) Government headed by President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah. The Abidjan Peace Talks of 1996 were a false dawn (what is false dawn?) and the SLPP Government endorsements of the Civil Defence Forces (CDF) as an arm of the state security apparatus further antagonized the SLA. This phase ended in a collapsed peace process, violence with ethnic undertones by the CDF of the South and East, known as the Kamajors, and an embittered Army looking to exploit a volatile security situation.

This article is brought to you with support from the Africa Transitional Justice Legacy Fund (ATJLF) through the Media Reform Coordinating Group (MRCG), under the project ‘Engaging Media and Communities to Change the Narrative on Transitional Justice Issues in Sierra Leon.