

SIERRA LEONE:
COUP D'ETAT
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The Disaster

On Sunday 25 May Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, president of Sierra Leone, democratically elected 15 months ago, was overthrown during a coup d'etat. The United States, France, Lebanon and other nations promptly evacuated many of their own and other foreign nationals. Nigerian gunboats bombarded the capital Freetown on 2 June and dissident soldiers and rebels attacked Nigerian soldiers who were there under a defence accord. A widely anticipated Nigerian attack has not materialised.

Kamajor traditional hunters and soldiers loyal to new military ruler Johnny Paul Koroma have clashed in the eastern city of Kenema where Red Cross workers report heavy fighting and high loss of life. The increasing uncertainty throughout the country and the disruption of all public, social and economic activities has led to large population movements to safe areas within Sierra Leone and to nearby Guinea, Liberia and the Gambia.

Red Cross Action

The Sierra Leone Red Cross Society (SLRCS) is one of the few humanitarian organisations active in the country. As well as carrying on emergency activities related to the current situation, (treating the wounded, taking bodies to morgues, providing emergency first aid and sanitation) it is developing an action plan encompassing first aid/health services, institutional feeding and counselling.

Its first estimation of the funds needed to provide emergency services for a three-month period totals CHF 250,000, based on a target beneficiary population of 100,000. Some in-kind communication and logistics needs are also foreseen. A detailed plan of action and budget will be submitted to donors very soon, in consultation with the ICRC.

With the assistance of WFP, the National Society is providing food assistance (vegetable oil, bulgur wheat and lentils) to 84 children in orphanages in Makeni and to 63 patients at the local Leprosy Hospital.

Needs

Cash and in-kind support is required to assist SLRCS staff and volunteers to implement the following operations:

- SLRCS emergency first aid volunteers will provide first aid services in all zones in Freetown, Bo, Makeni, Kenema, Port Loko, Magburaka and Kono. They will continue to evacuate all injured to the nearest hospital and to pick up and convey the dead to the nearest morgue.
- SLRCS will set up clinics for the treatment of minor ailments and for administering vaccinations in Freetown and Kambia.
- The National Society will provide food items to identified vulnerable groups in Freetown, Bo Kenema and Makeni (exact numbers to follow). Mats, blankets, and domestic items will be distributed to displaced persons and returnees in Kambia, Port Loko, Bo, Kenema and Makeni, while seeds, tools and food-for-work will be provided to resettled groups in the Kenema and Tonkoli districts.
- The NS intends to open a rehydration centre in Freetown for the management of cholera cases. Training in diarrhoeal disease management, health education and environmental hygiene will be conducted by the SLRCS in Freetown, Bo and Kambia,
- Environmental campaigns will be carried out by the NS's volunteers at market places, slums and overcrowded areas in Freetown, Bo, Kenema and Kambia

At the request of the SLRCS a Federation Representative will be placed in Freetown to continue assisting the National Society and analysing the main areas for assistance in consultation with the ICRC. A Delegate will be assigned to Monrovia and will co-ordinate logistics for Freetown.

The Guinea Delegation will continue attending all strategic meetings in Conakry while the West Africa Regional Delegation in Abidjan will play an overall co-ordination role.

Funds are needed urgently to enable the SLRCS to carry out its lifesaving work. Contact Richard Hunlede, Desk Officer on ++4122 7304314 for more information.

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