Religion, Tradition, and Restorative Justice in Sierra Leone

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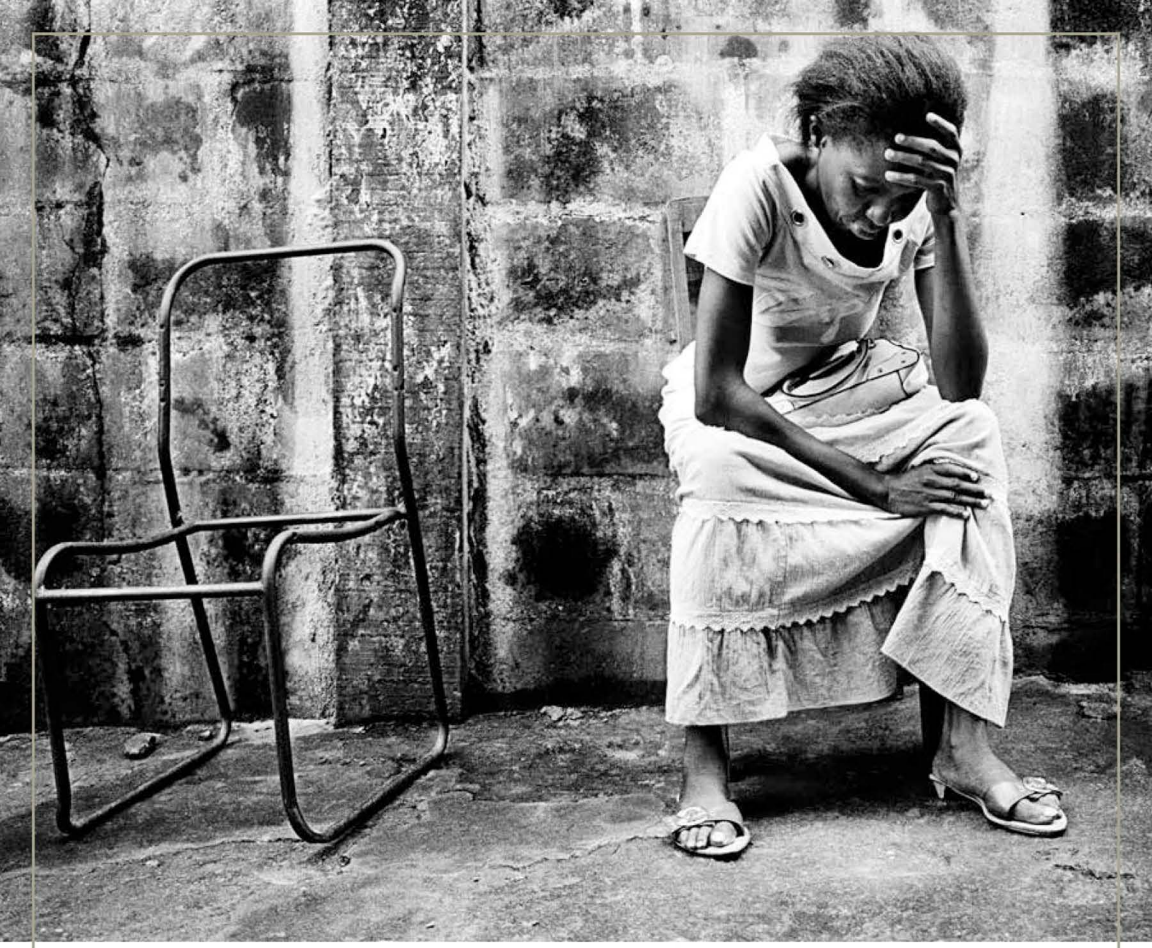

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Dedicated to the Honors Political Science Class of 2010
at Fourah Bay College: Mohammed Dukulay, Lindsay Ellis,
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CONTENTS

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PREFACE

When my book, subtitled with the unanswered question *Miracle or Model?*, on the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (SATRC) was published in 2002, Sierra Leone had just begun its path to truth and reconciliation, largely on the basis of the South African model, suggesting that the South African case had not been a onetime occurrence but would likely be replicated elsewhere on the continent.[1] The criticisms against the Sierra Leonean TRC, while not unlike those made against its South African predecessor, were moderated by the existence of the Special Court, operating at the same time, and thus met the objections of those who worried that human rights violations would take place with impunity unless there was also punishment. In short, and to simplify many different arguments, critics of the SATRC found its emphasis on reconciliation rather than on justice undesirable.

In particular, secular critics were suspicious of the use of religion and tradition in proceedings they believed should be governed by reason, law, and objectivity. One letter to the *Mail and Guardian* newspaper expressed the common complaint: "I understand how Desmond Tutu identifies reconciliation with forgiveness. I don't, because I'm not a Christian and I think it's grossly immoral to forgive that which is unforgivable."[2] A young woman opined, "What really makes me angry about the TRC and Tutu is that they are putting pressure on me to forgive. . . . I don't know if I will ever be able to forgive. I carry this ball of anger within me and I don't know where to begin dealing with it. The oppression was bad, but what is much worse, what makes me even angrier, is that they are trying to dictate my forgiveness."[3] Anthropologist Richard Wilson complained that, "Commissioners never missed an opportunity to praise witnesses who did not express

any desire for revenge. . . . The hearings were structured in such a way that any expression of a desire for revenge would seem out of place. Virtues of forgiveness and reconciliation were so loudly and roundly applauded that emotions of revenge, hatred and bitterness were rendered unacceptable, an ugly intrusion on a peaceful, healing process."[4]

Were these critics onto something? Did people harbor negative views about the process their leaders had chosen for them to deal with the past? Or was this religious-redemptive model broadly accepted by South Africans, who are also overwhelmingly Christians?

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the South African TRC's chairman, believes that reconciliation is not just biblically based but is also central to African tradition embodied in the notion of *ubuntu*. In African traditional thought, the emphasis is on *restoring* evildoers to the community rather than on *punishing* them. Tutu's own description of *ubuntu* is enlightening: "*Ubuntu* says I am human only because you are human. If I undermine your humanity, I dehumanize myself. You must do what you can to maintain this great harmony, which is perpetually undermined by resentment, anger, desire for vengeance."[5] *Ubuntu*, then, emphasizes the priority of *restorative* as opposed to *retributive* justice. Critics like Wilson who challenge this view argue that to view African tradition and law as completely excluding revenge is "wishful romantic naiveté."[6]

This debate fascinated me. To what degree were South Africans in particular, and Africans in general, more supportive of restorative approaches? Or was this approach pushed on people by religious personalities like Archbishop Tutu, when it did not actually resonate with their beliefs, understandings, and perspectives? While opinions about the success of the South African TRC are divided, and many people wish it had done more in the way of making reparations to victims, the basic supposition that acknowledging wrongdoing can promote reconciliation is not generally challenged (although most South Africans criticize how few perpetrators ultimately confessed their deeds).

If, in fact, Africans do support more reconciliatory processes, what might this mean for international jurisprudence in Africa, in light of the burgeoning role of the International Criminal Court on the continent? Do Africans prefer reconciliation over justice? Is any

such preference limited to the level of the religious elite, or is it more widely shared?

I hope in this book to begin to answer those questions through a case study of Sierra Leone's experience with transitional justice. Through interviewing religious leaders in 2006 and 2007 about their perspectives and preferences, and comparing their views with public polls taken over several years, I concluded that *ubuntu* is alive and well in Sierra Leone—and not merely among Christian and Muslim religious leaders. Both religious and traditional resources exist that push in the direction of a restorative justice approach favoring apology, forgiveness, and reintegration, which is at odds with the dominant paradigm of transitional justice, what Daniel Philpott terms *liberal peace,* favored by Western governments and international organizations such as the United Nations, which emphasizes a retributive justice approach.[7] What this will mean for future prosecutions by the International Criminal Court in Africa is problematic if international preferences are at odds with local values, as they clearly were in the case of Sierra Leone.

ABBREVIATIONS

AFRC	Armed Forces Revolutionary Council
APC	All Peoples Congress
CDF	Civil Defense Forces
ECOMOG	Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group
IRC	Inter-Religious Council
RUF	Revolutionary United Front
SATRC	South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission
SLPP	Sierra Leone Peoples Party
TRC	Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UNAMSIL	United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone

INTRODUCTION: POSTWAR TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE

In the aftermath of a brutal, decade-long civil war (1991–2002), Sierra Leone pursued both reconciliation and justice in a two-pronged process. Those persons "who [bore] the greatest responsibility" for crimes against humanity, war crimes, and other serious violations of humanitarian law were tried in the Special Court for Sierra Leone.[1] Others (both perpetrators and victims) were heard by a South African–styled truth and reconciliation commission. Methodist bishop Joseph Humper, chair of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), described the two institutions as "going to the promised land but by different roads."[2]

Different roads, indeed. The Special Court for Sierra Leone emphasized justice through punishment of perpetrators, while the TRC promoted reconciliation between perpetrators and victims through a process of acknowledgment, apology, and forgiveness.

Have these institutions complemented each other, or have their goals and methods been at cross purposes? Which institution has enjoyed more public support? Which one will have the greatest impact? Finally, given the important place that religion holds in Sierra Leone—60% of the population is Muslim, 30% is Christian, and 10% is animist (practitioners of traditional African religions)—what role did religion play in these processes?

This book will first examine the significant role that religious leaders played in brokering the Lome Peace Accord that ended the war. The efforts of the Inter-Religious Council (IRC), an umbrella group of Muslim and Christian leaders established in 1997 as a chapter of the World Conference of Religions for Peace, were crucial. Its members served as mediators, acted as neutral arbiters, and convinced both sides to stay at the bargaining table. Enjoying the confidence and respect of the people, the IRC stood out during the civil war "as the most highly visible and efficient non-governmental bridge builder between the warring factions."[3]

Next, Christian and Muslim religious support within Sierra Leone for a truth commission that aimed at promoting reconciliation will be examined. It was through the IRC-supported Lome Peace Accord that amnesty was granted and a truth commission was authorized. Religious leaders' opinions on the contributions of the TRC, which formally concluded in October 2004 with the publication of its final report, will be probed. For interviews with religious leaders from the IRC, I employed the format of Chapman and Spong, who interviewed religious leaders in South Africa on the efficacy of the SATRC after its conclusion. They sought the views of thirty-three religious leaders as a component of a comprehensive evaluation of the SATRC conducted by the Science and Human Rights Program of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, in collaboration with the Johannesburg-based Center for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation.[4]

Like those interviewed by Chapman and Spong, the interviewees for this book were questioned about their understanding of reconciliation and its relationship to forgiveness, the contribution of the TRC to reconciliation and the value of its work to survivors, the role of

religious communities in furthering the goals of the TRC, and the differences between religious and secular approaches to reconciliation.[5] It became clear during the interviews that the question about differences in religious and secular approaches to reconciliation made no sense to the respondents. A more fruitful question would have been whether a religious approach differed from a traditional one. Both religion and tradition provided resources that had the potential to bring about reconciliation, and both are more compatible than antagonistic in their views on acknowledgment, confession, forgiveness, and reparation. Religion in Sierra Leone is marked by syncretism; Islam and Christianity have been influenced by and incorporated into local cultures, and vice versa. For that reason, this book includes a chapter on traditional approaches to conflict resolution in Sierra Leone, exploring in particular the work of Fambul Tok, an indigenous organization that assists localities to conduct reconciliation ceremonies in their communities.

The arguments of scholars who have criticized truth commissions as too Western and not culturally appropriate, and questioned their continued use in postconflict African nations, will be addressed. Tim Kelsall and Rosalind Shaw, for instance, have argued that local understandings of reconciliation in Sierra Leone do not support the kind of truth commission set up by the government. Shaw rejected the notion that truth-telling before a truth commission is healing for victims and questioned the assertion that vocalizing one's pain is an appropriate way to heal one's memories. Noting that the recounting of verbal memories and trauma is part of Western psychotherapeutic practice, Shaw contended that it may not be particularly relevant to West African communities. Her research on memories of the slave trade in Temne-speaking areas of Sierra Leone showed that the past is remembered in tacit forms ("in the landscape, ritual practices, and visionary experience") rather than in verbal form.[6] She believes that healing has taken place locally through a process of social forgetting (similar to the conclusion of Honwana, who argued that reconciliation in Mozambique depended on the willingness of victims to forget, not remember, and certainly not to articulate their suffering).[7] Social forgetting is the refusal to give the violence social reality, to reproduce

it through public speech. Shaw wrote that communities seemed less concerned with what perpetrators have said (formal apologies) than with changes in their behavior, a "cool heart," which after all defines true repentance.[8]

Kelsall similarly argued that ritual may be more important to reconciliation than truth, suggesting that one can bypass the truth-telling step. Kelsall observed that, while the public testimony at the TRC was delivered unemotionally to a seemingly indifferent audience, the ceremonies of repentance and forgiveness after the district hearings struck a deep chord among victims, even when they were unaccompanied by the truth (actual confessions). Seeing evidence of remorse was therefore more important to victims (and hence to the reconciliation process) than hearing the truth.[9]

If Kelsall and Shaw were correct in saying that traditional methods are more appropriate than a "Western-styled" truth and reconciliation commission, what indigenous methods of reconciliation and rituals were available yet underused? Were localized understandings of reconciliation at odds with the public-hearing format relied on by the TRC? Or had local rituals been undertaken at the conclusion of the war, making further efforts unnecessary? This book will explore the issue of how and to what extent truth commissions should take local understandings into account, and will examine the question of whether the teachings of the great religions should trump traditional views, assuming there are variations. Wilson, for example, argued in the South African case that the township residents he interviewed were much more vengeful and eager for retribution than the *ubuntu*-preaching Archbishop Desmond Tutu had imagined. For Wilson, the "religious-redemptive" approach was coercive and clashed with the retributive notions of justice routinely applied in local townships and in chiefs' courts.[10] However, as I have argued elsewhere, while an ideal of restorative justice did dominate under Tutu's tutelage, it was not at odds with Africans' (especially the rural poor's) conceptions of reconciliation.[11]

Along with extracts from interviews with elite religious leaders, this book includes a chapter that highlights the work of scholars who conducted public opinion polls both before and after the war to

gauge people's attitudes about reconciliation and justice and in particular to learn their views of the Special Court and the TRC. Of special interest were the ways in which the opinions of religious leaders might have diverged from those of ordinary Sierra Leoneans. Was the notion of reconciliation—and the need for confession and forgiveness, in particular—at odds with local understandings but nevertheless thrust on a vengeance-seeking population by the elites? Or are religion and tradition mainly complementary, in Africa generally and in Sierra Leone in particular? Do religion and tradition work in tandem toward restorative justice, whereas law privileges retributive justice?

Luc Huyse and Mark Salter, in their wonderful book of case studies of African traditional justice experiments, argued that there is a continuum ranging between the opposite poles of "legal retaliation" and "ritual reconciliation."[12] They offered a host of reasons why African postconflict countries may prefer the latter approach: it is informal, ritualistic, and communal as opposed to trials, which are formal, rational, and individualistic. Individual trials, though often promoted by the international community, may destabilize a fragile peace and also fail to get at the broad sweep of events, since their aim is to emphasize individual guilt and not societal patterns of atrocity. Erin Daly and Jeremy Sarkin argued that while trials focus more on perpetrators and their intent, restorative justice mechanisms such as truth commissions focus more on victims and their feelings.[13] Such restorative approaches might do more to promote healing, restore relationships, and reintegrate communities than a trial can ever hope to accomplish.

Archbishop Tutu, it will be recalled, promoted the notion of *ubuntu* as a traditional concept on which South Africans—and all Africans, in his view—could draw. In *No Future without Forgiveness*, he wrote of the "healing of breaches, the redressing of imbalances, the restoration of broken relationships. This kind of justice seeks to rehabilitate the victim and perpetrator, who should be given the opportunity to be reintegrated into the community he or she has injured by his or her offense."[14] Tutu has been joined by a host of scholars who agree that restorative justice approaches are more fruitful than retributive ones, especially in times of transition.[15]

My own study of traditional conflict resolution methods employed in Sierra Leone found enormous similarities between the precepts of religion—to confess and to be forgiven—and cultural understandings that likewise are based on (vocal) acknowledgment, apology, and forgiveness. I am therefore not persuaded by Kelsall's and Shaw's argument that the culture of secrecy, summed up in the Krio expression *Tok af, lef af* (talk half, leave half), makes verbal acknowledgment unimportant to Sierra Leoneans.

Finally, given the wide array of recommendations made by the TRC (and mostly ignored by the government), what do religious leaders see as their roles relative to reforms and reparations? Does a prophetic ministry exist, or has the mantle moved on to other civil society organizations? In other words, does religion remain relevant as the country rebuilds, reconciles, and repairs the damage from the past?

CHAPTER I

ROLE OF THE INTER-RELIGIOUS COUNCIL

THE UNCIVIL WAR

The Sierra Leone civil war officially began on March 23, 1991, when a band of rebels calling themselves the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), led by a former corporal named Foday Sankoh and backed by Charles Taylor, invaded the country from neighboring Liberia and ignited a conflict that was to last a decade and wreak untold havoc on its population.[1] The RUF asserted that theirs was a just revolution that sought to end the corrupt rule of the All Peoples Congress (APC) that had ruled Sierra Leone since 1968 (and as a single-party state since 1978) and to establish a more equitable society.[2] In fact, however, the RUF simply capitalized on the "people's suffering to pose as liberators,"[3] and their fight quickly devolved into the indiscriminate killing of the very civilians they claimed to be liberating.[4]

In April 1992, a year after the initial incursion, twenty-six-year-old captain Valentine Strasser seized power from the APC. His justification for the coup was that his National Provisional Ruling Council

(NPRC) would foster democracy, end corruption, set the economy on a sound basis, and defeat the RUF—something the APC had been unable or unwilling to do.[5] After their initial enthusiasm, the people of Sierra Leone became disillusioned as they saw the NPRC seemed to be just as uninterested in ending the war and the profit-taking opportunities the war afforded them as the APC had been. The NPRC presided over an escalation of army abuses against civilians, and increased government involvement in illegal diamond mining, while failing to suppress the RUF—even though the army swelled to ten thousand troops within three years.[6] In fact, elements within the military appeared to be covertly collaborating with the RUF, leading to the phenomenon called *sobels* (soldiers by day, rebels by night), whereby soldiers took off their military uniforms at night to loot and to provide weapons, ammunition, and intelligence to RUF forces.[7]

The NPRC regime attempted to enlist the help of traditional hunters, the *Kamajors*, some of whom had formed the Civil Defense Forces (CDF) at the start of the war to assist in fighting the rebels. The military's collusion with the rebels made that cooperation short lived, and the *Kamajors* soon chose to fight alone. Seeking protection from abuses by both the government and the rebels, people increasingly turned to the *Kamajors* for protection.[8] The *Kamajors*, who formed the CDF, constrained somewhat the ability of soldiers and rebels to harass citizens and illegally mine diamonds, but they themselves targeted civilians suspected of assisting those factions. When the regular army lost all credibility as a disciplined, professional fighting force, the NPRC government hired a South African–based private security firm, Executive Outcomes, to repel the rebels. With just two hundred highly trained and well-equipped mercenaries fighting alongside the CDF, Executive Outcomes was able to rout the RUF from Freetown, secure the Kono diamond mines, and retake the bauxite and rutile mines in the Southern Province.[9]

Under both international and local pressure for "elections before peace"—fueled by the assumption that "peace before elections" would simply play into the hands of those elements who wanted to prolong the war[10]—the NPRC agreed to hold elections, insisting the *P* had stood for "provisional" all along, and it had pledged to return the

country over to civilian rule within four years of taking power.[11] In the run-up to the election, both the rebels and government soldiers committed many atrocities, including amputations of the hands and arms of at least fifty-two people.[12] The RUF intended these acts as warnings to people not to vote, after the statement of Sierra Leone Peoples Party (SLPP) candidate Ahmad Tejan Kabbah that "The future is in your hands."[13] In spite of these terrorizing acts, the election was held in February 1996 and was followed by a runoff in March that brought Kabbah to the presidency with 60% of the vote and ushered in civilian control after four years of military rule.[14]

Nevertheless, sporadic fighting continued in the hinterland, compelling the president to negotiate a peace accord with the RUF at Abidjan, Ivory Coast, in November 1996. Kabbah agreed to pardon the RUF, demobilize the rebels, register the RUF as a political party, and expel Executive Outcomes from the country. With the mercenaries out of the way, and the army pruned by Kabbah to just seven thousand soldiers, however, the RUF was emboldened to ignore the ceasefire and refuse to demobilize. This forced Kabbah, who was suspicious of the loyalty and capability of the national army, to rely increasingly on the CDF.

Kabbah had been in office just fourteen months on May 25, 1997, when he was faced with a coup, this time by a group of Sierra Leone Army noncommissioned officers calling themselves the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC). They forced Kabbah's government to flee to neighboring Guinea. The AFRC then freed and armed six hundred prisoners from Pademba Road Prison, among whom was former corporal Johnny Paul Koroma, who was being held on treason charges, and whom they immediately set up as chairman. Inviting the RUF to rule jointly with the AFRC, Koroma appointed RUF leader Foday Sankoh as his deputy chair. Sankoh was unable to accept as he was by then in detention in Nigeria, but he gave his blessing to the new regime and urged his men to come out of the bush and join the new government.

The coup ushered in a period of wanton looting dubbed "Operation Pay Yourself," in which thousands of people were raped, killed, or mutilated by AFRC/RUF forces. Public buildings, churches, and

mosques were razed. CDF fighters retaliated against AFRC/RUF forces and their supporters and, in the words of one witness at the TRC, "became worse oppressors than the RUF rebels."[15] The Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), a peacekeeping force led by Nigeria, intervened and was able to take control of Freetown, allowing Kabbah to return from exile in Guinea in March 1998.

The war continued nonetheless. Freetown was sacked on January 6, 1999, in the most intensive and concentrated period of human rights abuses committed during the war. In just two weeks, some ten thousand people were killed (including cabinet members, journalists, and lawyers, who were specifically targeted),[16] two thousand women were raped, countless businesses were looted, and some five thousand homes were destroyed.[17] Abductions reached their highest level during this period because AFRC/RUF fighters sought "numerical bulk," so that they might use bodies as human shields.[18] Fighting alongside the CDF, ECOMOG was able to push back the AFRC/RUF forces,[19] but in so doing they indiscriminately killed anyone suspected of being an AFRC/RUF sympathizer.[20] Nigeria, which was under its own domestic pressure to pull out its troops, and other international partners, including the United States, pressured Kabbah to open a dialogue with the RUF.

On July 7, 1999, another peace accord was signed, this one in Lome, Togo. The Lome Peace Accord guaranteed complete immunity from prosecution to Sankoh and the RUF fighters, and offered Sankoh a place in government as head of the new Mineral Resources Commission with the rank of vice president (later on, Johnny Paul Koroma of the AFRC was offered the position of minister of the Commission for the Consolidation of Peace by President Kabbah). Sankoh apologized "for any inconvenience my revolution may have caused."[21]

The new peace was short lived. In early May 2000, RUF rebels captured and held hostage 550 UN peacekeepers who had been part of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) to oversee the disarmament and demobilization of combatants authorized under the Lome Accord. Thousands of demonstrators marched to

Sankoh's Freetown home to oppose the RUF abductions and to insist that Sankoh adhere to the Accord's stipulation to disarm. When they broke through the UNAMSIL barricade, Sankoh's bodyguards shot into the crowd and killed at least ten civilians. In response, armed CDF and West Side Boys (a splinter group of the AFRC), who were among the demonstrators fired into the compound. Sankoh was able to escape, but several young children within the compound were gunned down in cold blood by *Kamajors*, West Side Boys, and government forces responding to Johnny Paul Koroma's call earlier in the week for a "Peace Task Force" to remove all RUF leaders.[22] Sankoh was arrested and removed from his government position. With the Lome Accord now discredited and in tatters, Britain sent its own troops under its own command to restore order to Freetown. The final Accord was signed in Abuja, Nigeria, later that year, and President Kabbah declared the war officially over on January 18, 2002. The final toll: some seventy-five thousand civilians killed, two million people displaced, and twenty thousand civilians mutilated.[23]

FAITH-BASED MEDIATION

The civil war provided the impetus for a new activism on the part of religious leaders, who were instrumental in brokering the Peace Accord between the government and rebel forces. During Siaka Stevens's rule (1968–85)—considered one of the most corrupt regimes in Africa and characterized popularly as a "seventeen year plague of locusts"[24]—religious leaders were mainly silent. According to Moses Khanu, the former general secretary of the Baptist Convention, one-time director of the IRC, and later a commissioner on the Human Rights Commission, "The religious leaders were either afraid to talk and condemn the evil that was plaguing the nation or they were part and parcel of the system. . . . It was like every leader forgot their God given religious responsibilities."[25] Khanu explained that those who did speak out were threatened with imprisonment, house arrest, and political marginalization. For reasons of survival and recognition, many religious leaders chose to keep silent.

The TRC report concurred with Khanu's assessment: "It is indeed regrettable that faith institutions seem to have found common cause with the governments of the day and therefore took no stand on the issues that were tearing the country apart between 1961 and 1991. Faith institutions were content to be feted and revered by the respective Governments." They did not use their access "to engage in dialogue with the rulers and try to have them change their oppressive politics."[26] Only once, the TRC report noted, did the religious community publicly criticize the government—when Anglican bishop Keillie of Bo District was assaulted in 1993 by an officer of the NPRC regime: "Up to 1991 therefore, faith institutions in Sierra Leone buried their heads in the sand and intoned that everything was fine in the country, admonishing the faithful through their sermons to be loyal to the constituted authority."[27]

The war was a turning point in the life of the faith community in Sierra Leone. Religious groups had played an increasingly important role in education, sanitation, socioeconomic, and cultural affairs during the corrupt rule of Stevens and his successor, Joseph Momoh, stepping into the breach to provide services that had been neglected by what had increasingly become a "shadow state."[28] With the advent of the war, ordinary Muslims and Christians began to urge their leaders to move beyond their roles as social services providers and to act affirmatively to end the violence.[29] Religious leaders realized, according to the IRC's first secretary general, Alimamy Koroma, that they needed "to tackle the war itself, not just the casualties of war."[30] The inspiration for the IRC was not only an awakening religious commitment to social justice and calls from its members to be more proactive in the peace process but also the example of the IRC of Liberia (formerly the Interfaith Mediation Committee), which was outspoken about human rights abuses committed during the Liberian civil war.[31]

PRECEDENTS FOR RELIGIOUS PEACEBUILDING

There were other precedents, in addition to neighboring Liberia, for faith-based peacemaking on the continent. One early example was

the mediation of the Quakers during the Nigerian civil war, which began in 1967. Quakers were invited by the Organization of African Unity to convene a meeting of low-level officials from both sides to search for possible areas of agreement. By acting as go-betweens, passing messages between head of state Yakubu Gowon and the Biafran leader Emeka Ojukwu, the Quakers, over time, helped both sides "re-perceive" each other, to recognize their enemies as "God in every one."[32] Through their efforts, Biafran insurgents and government officials were persuaded to convene a national peace conference that ended the thirty-month civil war. Commenting on the Quakers' success, Cynthia Sampson explains, "The Quaker team was the sole third party that won the complete trust of both parties to the conflict, and they sustained that trust for the duration of the war."[33] As pacifists, they were viewed as having no personal agenda or hidden interests, other than the promotion of peace.

Religious leaders were also in the forefront of promoting peace between the government of Sudan and the Southern Sudan Liberation Movement. Facilitated by a three-man team representing the All Africa Conference of Churches' (AACC) and the World Council of Church's departments of International Affairs and Refugees, a peace settlement was signed in 1972. That settlement was abrogated in 1983, when the government imposed sharia law throughout the country, including in the non-Muslim south, but a final end to the civil war was mediated in 2005 by President George W. Bush's special envoy for Peace in Sudan, Senator John Danforth. The authors of *God's Century: Resurgent Religion and Global Politics* attribute Danforth's success to his having been an Episcopal priest before he became a politician, which garnered him respect from both Muslim leaders in the north and Christian leaders in the south as a "man of God." The authors also credit Danforth for successfully engaging the Sudanese Inter-Religious Council, a forum of Christian and Muslim leaders, to work out disputes in their communities.[34]

Perhaps the most celebrated case of faith-based mediation was conducted in Mozambique by a Catholic lay community. After its independence from Portugal in 1975, Mozambique's Frelimo (Mozambique Liberation Front) government became embroiled in a

long civil war with the opposition movement, Renamo (Mozambique National Resistance). The Catholic lay community Sant'Egidio, headquartered in Rome, initiated contacts in the country throughout the 1980s. During that decade, Sant'Egidio representatives became personally familiar with leaders of both sides by developing a "network of friendships."[35] Drawing on Sant'Egidio's reputation for impartiality, they were able to negotiate the release of missionaries taken captive by Renamo, thereby laying a foundation of trust with the insurgents that proved crucial in later peace talks. Sant'Egidio also partnered with the Mozambican Christian Council, made up of seventeen Protestant denominations, to hold talks with Renamo in Nairobi in 1989. Ten rounds of talks were held between 1990 and 1992, culminating in the signing of the General Peace Accord on October 4, 1992, which ended the seventeen-year civil war. At the signing ceremony, alongside Frelimo president, Joaquim Chissano; Renamo leader, Afonso Dhlakama; and other heads of state and foreign dignitaries were two Sant'Egidio representatives—founder Andrea Riccardi and parish priest Mateo Zuppi—as well as Mozambican Archbishop Jaime Goncalves and Italian MP Mario Raffaeli.[36]

South Africa provides yet another example of successful mediation by religious leaders, but in this case the mediation was not to end a civil war but rather to facilitate the transfer of power from the white minority regime to the majority. Beginning in 1978, the South African Council of Churches, headed by Anglican Desmond Tutu and subsequently led by the former Dutch Reformed churchman Beyers Naude and Pentecostal leader Frank Chikane, became the center of political activity, advocating for the end of apartheid and white minority rule. In 1984, when the National Party regime established a Tricameral Parliament giving voting rights to coloreds and Indians, hitherto excluded groups, in separate chambers, but not to Africans, religious leaders like Desmond Tutu and Allan Boesak, leader of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church, became patrons of the United Democratic Front, an umbrella group of several hundred organizations that rose up to oppose it. It advocated for the franchise for all South Africans in a single chamber. When the United Democratic Front was banned four

years later, the South African Council of Churches became the only legal institution left standing, and, by virtue of that fact, became the major body pushing for change.

After the publication in 1985 of the Kairos Document, a critique of apartheid penned mainly by black theologians impatient with the pace of change and perceived moderation of the churches, the World Council of Churches sponsored conferences in Harare in 1986 and in Lusaka in 1987, which brought together leading South African churchmen and members of the exiled liberation movements. In 1990, 230 church leaders (both black and white), representing 95% of South African churches, congregated in the town of Rustenburg to look ahead ecumenically to the postapartheid era and, for white pastors, to confess the sin of apartheid. After Rustenburg, church leaders continued to play a mediating role, joining with business leaders to facilitate the establishment of the National Peace Accord. The Accord was a code of conduct between the political parties and their followers that also authorized local peace committees throughout the country to monitor the ensuing violence threatening the transition to democracy and to intervene when necessary, thus containing the violence sufficiently to make elections possible in 1994.[37]

While not all cases of faith-based mediation are successful, the cases above demonstrate there can be advantages to this approach. The sheer numbers of people who adhere to a faith offer religious leaders a special platform. Out of a world population of seven billion people, more than five billion identify themselves as members of religious communities. Of the three billion poorest people in the world, many of whom live in zones of conflict, 90% are members of religious communities.

Moreover, a vast infrastructure accompanies those numbers. In Africa alone, there are some nine hundred thousand congregations, reaching from the smallest village to capital cities.[38] Religious communities also have international linkages and are able to partner for resources through a vast worldwide network. The cases mentioned above owed their success, including essential material donations, in part to the support of outside bodies such as the World Council of

Churches, the All Africa Conference, and Sant'Egidio. However, as those cases also demonstrated, international mediation is doomed without credible partners on the ground, which local religious institutions can sometimes provide, who have access to elite government leaders (and opposition forces).[39]

The quality of religious leadership is important. Religious leaders are effective peacemakers to the degree they are seen as unbiased, honest brokers who are independent from the government. (This explains perhaps why the Catholic Church in Rwanda, historically co-opted by the government, had little input in the Arusha Peace Accord of 1993, or later in leading postgenocide reconciliation activities.)

A final tool in faith-based peacebuilding are religious ideas and values elucidated in the holy texts. Reconciliation is a dominant theme in all the great religions and is a powerful motivator in bringing warring sides who share these faith commitments to the peace table. Empathy and compassion, in particular, are key elements in religious life that religious peacemakers bring to the table and are important for helping warring parties to recognize the dignity in their opponents as they seek to rehumanize the other.[40]

The ubiquity of religious groups, led by respected leaders who have both access to elites in government and bonds to transnational bodies, armed with sacred texts that promote peace and reconciliation, make faith-based peacemaking a potentially powerful force in conflict areas. That was the message from William Vendley, secretary general of the World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP), which partnered with Sierra Leonean religious leaders in 1997. Established in 1970, the WCRP is a United Nations–affiliated NGO with over seventy national chapters, four regional bodies, and women and youth networks. The WCRP, also known as Religions for Peace, asserts that religious communities are uniquely placed to educate their communities about the root causes of conflict; to serve as advocates for the prevention of conflict locally, regionally, and globally; to play a central role in mediation and negotiation among armed groups; and to lead their communities in the reconciliation and healing required to transform armed conflict into lasting peace.[41]

FOUNDING OF THE IRC OF SIERRA LEONE

In late 1996, Mariatu Mahdi, president of the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Sierra Leone, met with WCRP officials in New York City to learn more about their work. The WCRP's vision resonated with Mahdi, who on her return to Sierra Leone raised with her coreligionists the idea of setting up a coalition of Islamic and Christian leaders who could speak with a common voice to the issues of the day. A one-day conference on "The Role of the Religious Community in Reconciliation, Reconstruction, and Development" held on April 1, 1997, was attended by over two hundred delegates. Two conference statements were generated, "Shared Moral Concerns" and "Shared Values and Common Purpose," which were signed by three representatives from the Muslim and Christian faith communities: Sheik Ahmad Tejan Sillah on behalf of the Muslims, the Reverend Moses Khanu on behalf of the Protestants, and Archbishop Joseph Ganda on behalf of the Catholics. The statements established the IRC of Sierra Leone as a national chapter of the WCRP.[42]

The Council's first secretary general, Alimamy Koroma, served simultaneously as the general secretary of the Council of Churches in Sierra Leone, an umbrella group of eighteen Protestant denominations. Joining the IRC, along with the member churches of the Council of Churches, were the Roman Catholic Church,[43] the Pentecostal Churches Council, and the Evangelical Fellowship for Sierra Leone. Founding Muslim member organizations included the Supreme Islamic Council, the Sierra Leone Muslim Congress, Federation of Muslim Women's Associations of Sierra Leone, United Council of Imams, Muslim Brotherhood Islamic Mission, and Sierra Leone Islamic Missionary Union. The IRC made its headquarters in Freetown in the western area but also established regional councils, in Makeni in the north, Bo in the south, and Kenema in the east, all of which had one Muslim and one Christian serving on their executive committees.

The goals of the IRC were for religious communities to share their respective traditions, principles, and values in order to build a more peaceful and just society; to discern areas of convergence in

their religious traditions; and to implement collaborative action programs based on their shared values. They believed that by acting collectively they could be more effective than a single body acting alone. Their subsequent success according to former US ambassador Joseph Melrose is attributable to the fact that churches and mosques are located in virtually every village, town, and city of Sierra Leone, which provided the IRC with "the best network of any group in the country."[44] Moreover, in a country where other kinds of division—ethnic, regional, and urban/rural—have been politically manipulated, the history of religious toleration and cooperation among Christians and Muslims in Sierra Leone has been a model. Interfaith marriages remain common, for example; Sierra Leoneans are quick to point to the example of the marriage between former president Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, a Muslim, and his late wife, Patricia, a Roman Catholic. Christians and Muslims celebrate important occasions together, beginning social functions, religious festivals, and state functions with both Christian and Muslim prayers.[45] Not surprisingly, Cynthia Sampson finds, in countries where religion is not a divisive issue, as it is in Nigeria or Sudan between a Muslim north and a Christian south, religiously motivated peacebuilding has had its greatest impact.[46]

To these factors must be added the fact that religious leaders were and remain among the least-tainted, uncorrupted leaders in the country and were, therefore, widely respected, even by the rebels. According to Alimamy Koroma, "People may not appear too religious but they respect religion and religious leaders."[47] The message of faith communities on peace and reconciliation has been a vital resource in a land weary of conflict and desperate for hope and meaning after years of seemingly senseless killing. Religious communities share transcendent values and have profound insights into tragedy and suffering. Spiritualities can provide believers enormous courage and strength in the midst of tragedy and wickedness, provide a ground for hope when all seems hopeless, and open up the possibility to forgive the unforgivable.[48] Lastly, it is possible that the rebels, many of whom were fellow believers, were more willing to listen to religious leaders than to government officials whom they did not trust.

THE IRC AND THE AFRC COUP

The IRC had been in existence for less than four months when the AFRC overthrew the democratically elected government of Ahmad Tejan Kabbah on Trinity Sunday, July 25, 1997. It wasted no time, however, in condemning the coup in interviews with the BBC and Voice of America.[49] Over the months, the IRC pursued dialogue with the junta leaders and listened to their complaints while also condemning in no uncertain terms both their illegal takeover of government and the human rights abuses they had committed. It warned the coup leaders of the resolve of civil society to continue its campaign of civil disobedience and supported the efforts of the various civil society groups such as students, trade unionists, market women, and teachers. It informed the junta of the international community's intention to isolate them and issued statements urging them to step down.[50] Its unyielding stance resulted in the arrest of IRC secretary general, Alimamy Koroma,[51] on August 17, the day of a planned inter-religious worship service at the National Stadium in Freetown, and the banning of the event.[52]

After the signing of the Conakry Peace Accord in October 1997, the IRC met with AFRC leader Johnny Paul Koroma the following month to congratulate him for his positive contribution to peace in signing the peace plan, to urge him to follow through on those commitments, to register the IRC's own pledge to implement the peace plan, and to offer him the IRC's assistance.[53] Shortly afterward, the IRC sent a seven-person delegation to Conakry to brief the exiled president about the IRC's activities in Sierra Leone. In Conakry, the delegates also met with Peter Penfold, the British high commissioner; the European Union delegate to Sierra Leone, M. Perez Poros; the UN special envoy, Francis G. Okelo; and the Vatican delegate, Archbishop Antonio Linhobello.[54] The IRC returned and once again urged Johnny Paul Koroma to comply with the Conakry Peace Plan for the good of the country, but to no avail. Despite its failure in getting the AFRC to step down, which ultimately required military action, Turay believes that the IRC's "high visibility and engagement with the junta

prevented greater abuses against civilians."[55] In any event, it received high marks among the population for speaking out and staying in the country, when most other institutions had collapsed and their leaders had fled.[56]

On February 12, 1998, ECOMOG forces ejected the military/rebel junta regime, and President Kabbah was officially restored to power on March 15, 1998. The service was held at the National Stadium, with the spiritual part of the program conducted by the IRC. Anglican bishop Julius Lynch of the Diocese of Freetown was selected to welcome the president home,[57] and the president in his remarks paid special tribute to the IRC for its stance against the junta and its contribution toward peace.[58] In celebration and gratitude to God for the return of democracy, the IRC conducted nationwide Thanksgiving services.[59]

THE SACKING OF FREETOWN: IRC RESPONSE

Hearing news that the forces of the disbanded Sierra Leone Army and RUF planned to launch an attack on Freetown, the IRC held a number of meetings with ECOMOG, the UN Observer Mission in Sierra Leone team, and the special envoy, Francis Okelo. On January 3, 1999, the IRC met with President Kabbah to warn him of the imminent invasion of Freetown. As had been predicted, on January 6 the combined forces invaded the capital, which not only fell on Epiphany but was also during Ramadan. (The rebels often chose days of religious significance to attack.) As they had done during the coup of 1997, they emptied Pademba Road Prison. For nearly three weeks Freetown was under fire, during which time seven thousand people were killed, tens of thousands were injured, women and girls were raped, children were abducted, and homes were destroyed. More than seventy places of worship were razed,[60] and Holy Trinity Church, an Anglican church dating back to 1877, was totally destroyed. Killings took place in churches and mosques that were serving as refuges for civilians. The rebels attacked the Church of the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star in Wellington, where they gunned down twelve

people. The worst massacre was at the Rogbalen Mosque in Kissy, where sixty-six people who had taken shelter there were murdered.[61]

Members of religious groups were targeted for abduction and murder.[62] The Catholic archbishop of Freetown, Joseph Henry Ganda, was abducted, along with six nuns from the Sisters of Charity and four Xaverian fathers.[63] One of the nuns, who could not keep up—they were made to move constantly around the city on foot—was shot on the spot. Ganda was tortured by the rebels until he was eventually saved by ECOMOG forces.[64] (Pham attributes Ganda's targeting to the fact that he was an ethnic Mende with close personal ties to his fellow tribesman President Kabbah.[65]) The rebels were finally halted by ECOMOG and the CDF at St. Anthony's Catholic Church.[66] This led to the church's acquiring an almost mystical status, according to Penfold.[67]

TARGETING RELIGIOUS PERSONNEL

While the rebels' attacks during the war often seemed indiscriminate—grandmothers, nursing mothers, young children—victims also were selected in a way to turn upside down traditional views of power and powerlessness. Authority figures such as clerics, government figures, and chiefs were prime targets of RUF atrocities.[68] Sheik Abu Bakarr Conteh, one of the founding members of the IRC, explained that (like Archbishop Ganda) he was targeted during the sacking of Freetown because he was a person of note in society. He was well known for his position within the IRC and as a regular preacher in his mosque.

During the attack, more than two hundred people took shelter in Conteh's home, which, as the only cement building in the neighborhood, seemed the safest haven from rebel and ECOMOG mortar attacks. He remembers, "The rebels kept coming around, asking 'Where is the sheik?' My good neighbors said, 'No, we have no sheik here.'" Fearing the rebels would return, his neighbors dressed him in a woman's long robe and veil and disguised him to look like one of the suckling mothers with his three-month old daughter tied on his

back. "Having been robed, I was in that condition for forty-five hours before tensions subsided, and I returned to my normal garb."[69]

For the Methodist bishop Joseph Humper, those days in January 1999 were harrowing. He recalls his daughter running into his room on the early morning of January 6, shouting, "Daddy, the rebels have invaded Freetown!" Watching from the window, they could see hundreds of women and children hurrying to escape the fighting. After sending the children to a safe place, he hid in his home alone for two weeks. From his hiding place, he witnessed the rebels vandalizing his home and carrying away all his possessions. At some point, his hiding place was discovered, and he was told by the rebels they had already taken the archbishop and he was second on their hit list. The bishop managed to slip away, taking cover at different houses. Eventually, the rebels discovered him, forced him to undress, took his money and his Episcopal ring, and left. Moving about the city constantly for fear of being discovered, Humper made his way toward the mosque near the city center for refuge. Once there he was told the rebels were looking for him, so he left and was eventually rescued by ECOMOG soldiers, who disguised him and moved him to the west end of the city until conditions improved.[70] He later heard that soon after he had left the mosque, rebels entered and murdered several people who had taken refuge there.[71]

J. O. P. Lynch, the Anglican bishop of Freetown, also had a frightening experience with the rebels during the January invasion. Three young rebels came to his home at the Anglican manse, pointed a gun at him, and said, "Pappy, I need fuel." Lynch thought they meant petrol. "I had immobilized my vehicles, so I said 'I don't have fuel; the vehicles are not working.' The rebel replied, 'I'm not talking about fuel. I'm talking about money.'" The bishop pulled three 5,000 leone bills from his pocket and gave them to the rebel, who took two and then, to the bishop's amazement, gave one back to him! "They said, 'Pappy, go back. You are free.'" Lynch went down to the docks, where two rebels with guns stopped him. "I introduced myself as the bishop of Freetown. I showed my identity and photograph taken when I was confirmed in the provinces. I was introduced to the commander. I told him a little bit about myself. I said we are peacemakers.

We have been praying for lasting peace. We are not very happy with the way things are going—the stealing and nepotism [in government] but that's no reason to react this way to that kind of situation. As we were talking, there was loud music and noise making. The commander shouted, 'Keep quiet. I am talking to the bishop of Freetown!' They listened to him. I saw he was really a commander. He asked if I knew who I was talking to. I said no. He said he was Commander Blood. He said he liked me. He said I should go back."[72]

Clerics were targeted because they were symbols of authority, because they supported the SLPP government, or simply because they were relatively affluent (and thus had something to loot). The RUF's stance toward religion was ambivalent, to say the least. Sankoh claimed to have been inspired by visions from God, and he identified himself sometimes as a Christian and at other times as a Muslim.[73] "Footpaths to Democracy," which was written to explain the RUF's platform and ideology, states that the RUF is religiously oriented, and both Christian and Muslim prayers are offered regularly.[74] Richards, an early apologist for an ideological motivation for the RUF, confirmed the presence of both a church and a mosque in every RUF camp, and rebels were required to pray daily under threat of punishment.[75] (Ironically, praying was often a prelude to attacking villages.)[76] In addition to destroying villages, rebels also committed egregious abuses on religious leaders and institutions. They forced Muslims to enter mosques with their shoes on and to drink alcohol; they urinated on the walls of mosques; they defiled and burnt down churches; they stole communion vessels; and they raped girls and women who had taken refuge in places of worship.[77]

Though they were often targeted, religious leaders were at times actually protected by the rebels because they connected on a personal level with the rebels in a nonjudgmental, loving way. For these young men, who seemed to be striking out in a frenzy to overcome the sense of shame they felt as marginalized members of society, the clerics' willingness to see them as worthy of dignity in the eyes of God/Allah made a deep impression and remains an important asset in faith-based mediation.[78] One UN worker perceptively stated, "In a way, what young people want, including rebels, is to be loved."[79] This insight

was not lost on religious leaders, who rightly saw they had a unique role to play since they are in the business of extending God's love.

ECOMOG forces repelled the attack. In the aftermath, the IRC held a series of sensitization programs; released press releases domestically and abroad; held consultations with parliamentarians and traditional leaders;[80] and, with the encouragement of UN special envoy Okelo, met with both President Kabbah and the detained RUF leader Sankoh, acting as consultants and go-betweens for both sides. Okelo explained, "The IRC enjoys a unique position within the society, they have the respect and confidence of the people, so it was important to work closely with them right from the beginning of the peace process."[81]

In February meetings with the president, the IRC commended Kabbah for his radio address in which he made another offer of peace through dialogue. The IRC requested the president's permission for the IRC to meet with Sankoh, who was being held in detention by the government. In a communique published on February 25, the IRC highlighted the efforts it had made and urged the government "to talk less and listen much more." It urged the government to give the people an opportunity to hear the positions of the RUF and its allies.[82] But, according to Khanu, the other civil society organizations held the view that the rebels were a "bunch of bandits," and the government should not waste its time talking to them but just "flush them" (referring to the military option).[83]

With Kabbah's approval, a cross section of the IRC met with Sankoh at the military headquarters at Cockarel, where he was being detained, on March 1, 1999. They briefed him on their earlier meetings with the president, with the chiefs, and with civil society groups, and they acknowledged him as one of the key players in the peace process. According to Khanu, Sankoh said he "had been longing to meet with religious leaders and also stressed his trust and confidence in them."[84] He indicated he needed to consult with his colleagues before decisions could be made, recommended a joint cease-fire, and implied that he would be willing to release abducted children to the religious leaders as a show of good faith.[85] Sankoh expressed sympathy for the victims of atrocities, but he would not apologize since it

was a "revolution he was leading," and because his court appeal was pending, he did not want to admit responsibility.[86]

Later that month, accompanied by Vija Jetley, the commander general of the UN Observer Mission in Sierra Leone, the IRC had the opportunity to meet with the rebels in the bush. Alimamy Koroma, the IRC's secretary general, who led the delegation, reported, "When we got to the last point of ECOMOG jurisdiction zone near Newton, the ECOMOG officer said to us, this is the last point of our protection, any step beyond this point is at your own risk."[87] From there the delegation traveled by foot through dangerous territory, the heart of RUF activity. As the delegation advanced, they could see the rebels waving white flags as symbols of peace. Additionally, the rebels had tied white pieces of cloth on the arms and heads of thirty-two children, lined them up in single file, and released them to the IRC delegation "as a token to show commitment to continue working with the Inter-Religious Council."[88] One of the IRC delegates, Saimihafu Kassim, explained how she communicated on a personal level: "I talked to the rebels as a mother." She recalled that some of the rebels asked her to pray for them.[89]

After arriving at the rebel base, the delegation was taken farther into the bush for consultations that lasted more than two hours. During the discussions, Sankoh was asked to authorize the release of more abducted children and child soldiers as a sign of his commitment to peace. Before he agreed, Sankoh asked that the IRC provide medicines, food, and other humanitarian assistance to the rebels. The IRC arranged for the delivery of food, blanket, clothes, and sanitary kits, a move that was unpopular in some quarters but one that Alimamy Koroma believes "helped to consolidate real confidence."[90]

From that point forward, a constant line of communication was opened between the Council office and the disbanded soldiers in the bush through radio and letters. Subsequently, the IRC brokered a radio conversation between Sankoh and his field commanders, which resulted in the release of twenty-one additional abducted children.[91] Alimamy Koroma later commented, "We followed like sheep for the slaughter not knowing what will befall us, yet we went by faith and the mission was successful."[92]

In April, a national consultative conference brought together political leaders and civil society representatives, including religious and traditional leaders, who proposed terms for a peace accord broadly based on the provisions in the unimplemented Abidjan Accord of 1996, which would accept limited power sharing, offer amnesty, and establish a truth and reconciliation commission. The conference conclusions were said to reflect a consensus, but a number of participants from the human rights community complained privately about the amnesty provision, with respect to which they had been "bullied into acquiescing in an outcome insisted upon by the government and its international supporters."[93] This reflects the divisions that existed between the purists, who rejected impunity for gross human rights violations, and the pragmatists (which included the IRC), who were willing to compromise for peace.

In mid-April, delegates of the IRC traveled to Liberia to meet with RUF officials, including its spokesman, Omrey Golley, and senior military adviser, Ibrahim Bah.[94] Their decision to meet in Liberia and their appeal to Charles Taylor to help bring peace were controversial to many Sierra Leoneans since Taylor had backed the rebels. But the IRC favored dialogue and was able to convince the government to include Taylor in the peace talks.[95]

THE ROAD TO LOME: IRC CONTRIBUTION

At the invitation of the Economic Community of West African States chairman and Togo president, Gnassingbe Eyadema, and at the request of the RUF, the IRC attended RUF's preliminary meetings, which were held in Lome in May 1999, before the formal peace talks. With a wry grin, Khanu joked that the IRC was promised one airline ticket but brought seventeen leaders, including Alimamy Koroma, who served as the spokesperson for the group.[96] Represented by a fifteen-person team, including representatives from the WCRP and Norwegian Church Aid, the IRC presented a statement in which it appealed to the RUF to abide by any agreement that was ultimately

reached. According to Khanu, the RUF expressed great appreciation for the efforts of the IRC.[97]

The formal talks began on June 27, 1999, and again the government and rebels both asked the IRC to play a role as a neutral facilitator between the parties. The IRC delegates, reduced to just ten, found themselves acting as "go-betweens" at times of impasse to convince both sides to return to the bargaining table.[98] UN special representative Okelo recalls that the RUF had such drastic demands that "I needed to use the IRC members constantly in dealing with the RUF and the government."[99] According to then-US ambassador to Sierra Leone, Joseph Melrose, "When things looked bad in the negotiations, they kept the dialogue going."[100] At difficult points in the process—for instance, on the contentious issues of power sharing and the withdrawal of ECOMOG—"the Council members resorted to preaching and praying to sway resistant hard liners."[101]

The Accord was signed on July 7, 1999. At the closing ceremonies, the IRC was recognized as the "kick starter" of the peace process in Sierra Leone and was thanked by both sides. Because of its significant contribution in brokering the Peace Accord, the IRC was given a place in the Council of Elders and Religious Leaders that was to be established to mediate disputes of interpretation of the Peace Accord (but that was never set up because the Accord collapsed).

Not everyone was pleased with the outcome at Lome. Some civil society leaders who had attended the peace talks returned home, complaining that too much had been given to the rebels—not only in terms of appointments (Foday Sankoh was made chairman of the Commission for the Management of Strategic Resources, a position equivalent to vice president, while Johnny Paul Koroma was selected by the president to be chairman of the Commission for the Consolidation of Peace)—but also in terms of the blanket immunity granted to rebels for any and all atrocities committed during the war.[102] "I don't see the problem," reflected Okelo. "Really, human-rights people can be so sanctimonious sometimes. . . . If we did not agree to this amnesty, there would have been no peace. . . . We had no choice."[103] (Despite Okelo's personal view on amnesty, the United Nations instructed him

to pen a caveat that the United Nations did not recognize amnesty for genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, or other serious violations of international humanitarian law.)

The difficult job of selling the Accord to the general public then began in earnest. On returning to Freetown, the IRC distributed thousands of copies of the Peace Accord for civil society groups to study, and went around the country explaining the Lome Accord to their constituents.[104] From their pulpits, religious leaders advocated for peace and reconciliation. Penfold noted that in all churches and mosques, no family had escaped personal tragedy enacted on them by the rebels. Some of the faithful in the mosques could not hold out both hands for the fatwa, while some congregants in churches were attempting to make the sign of the cross without a hand.[105] Through the work of the IRC, the difficult message of the need for forgiveness was heard widely in churches and mosques across the country. Alimamy Koroma explained at the time, "We have begun sensitizing our various communities on the need to accept the peace and to work together again as one nation. This will mean some aspect of forgiveness and reconciliation, but it will not be easy because our communities have been deeply hurt."[106]

Koroma recognizes that the approach of the IRC has not been accepted by everyone: "Perhaps as religious leaders, we are too bold for our civil society activists, in terms of our method, we are too compassionate, we are too endearing, or we are too tolerant with ex-combatants. . . . We tried to let [other activists] understand that our leaders, our style of work cannot be the same as others."[107] In a nutshell, the IRC had prioritized peace and reconciliation over punishment and justice.

After the signing of the Accord, the IRC leaders sought to welcome Sankoh back to Freetown and to thank him for his commitment to the peace process, but they were rebuffed. After keeping them waiting for an hour, Sankoh burst out of his office and lambasted the religious leaders, calling them "hypocrites." One leader said, "I was not only shocked but nearly shed tears, and we all refused to accept any drink from his servers. We left his house thoroughly embarrassed and humiliated."[108] On the other hand, their visit to Johnny Paul Koroma

was positive. One leader said, "He warmly welcomed us and took time to express his apology for what has happened and took time to explain his ordeal with the RUF."[109]

LOME FALLS APART

The situation continued to deteriorate throughout the rest of 1999 and into 2000. On May 5, 2000, RUF forces abducted UN peacekeepers in Makeni, seven of whom were killed. Meanwhile, Johnny Paul Koroma, in his capacity as chairman for the Commission for the Consolidation of Peace, addressed followers at the National Stadium in an incendiary manner, urging them to bring peace by eliminating the RUF leadership.

In a demonstration at Sankoh's home on May 8, demonstrators were shot by Sankoh's bodyguards who feared the UN forces were unable to control the crowd, which included *Kamajors* and those sent by Johnny Paul Koroma as the "Peace Task Force" to kill RUF leaders. Sankoh escaped, after which the attorney general reassessed the situation, and President Kabbah requested the United Nations to set up a special court to prosecute Sankoh and Koroma. Sankoh was later charged by the Special Court for Sierra Leone for war crimes and crimes against humanity, but he died of a stroke in 2003 while he was in custody. (Koroma, who fled to Liberia, was officially pronounced dead.) With Sankoh out of the way, the disarmament and demobilization process began, under the auspices of UNAMSIL. On January 18, 2002, with the symbolic burning of three thousand weapons at the Lungi International Airport, President Kabbah was finally able to declare, "Di wor don!" (the war is over).