

REFUGEE ALL STARS
RESOURCE PAGE¹

From 1991 to 2002, the small West African nation of Sierra Leone was ravaged by a brutal civil war between rebel factions. During the eleven-year conflict, which left 50,000 dead and 2 million people (about one-third of the country's total population) displaced in refugee camps in neighboring countries, it was commonplace for both sides to use practices such as murder, rape, enslavement, torture, extermination, sexual slavery, conscription of children into armed forces and attacks on United Nations peacekeepers and humanitarian aid workers. The war was funded in part by the sale of "conflict" or "blood diamonds." Despite several peace treaties throughout the 1990s, the war was only resolved with the aid of 17,000 foreign troops who helped to disarm approximately 72,000 rebel and militia fighters. The Special Court for Sierra Leone was established in 2002 by the government of Sierra Leone and the United Nations to try those accused of bearing the greatest responsibility for the atrocities. Several, including Liberian former President Charles Taylor, are still in the process of being tried. The court applies a mixture of international and Sierra Leonean law and sits in the capital of Sierra Leone, Freetown.

A very different post-conflict attempt at reconciliation has been Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars, a group of musicians who formed a band in the midst of the squalid refugee camps in neighboring Guinea. The band formed when Reuben Koroma and his wife Grace met a "musical brother," another member of the music scene that pre-dated the civil war. The group doubled in size as they moved to another refugee camp, where they met others who had fled from their homes in or near Freetown and who also believed in the redemptive power of music. With the help of a Canadian NGO, the newly christened Refugee All Stars acquired used instruments and a dilapidated sound system. This documentary follows the group as they begin to perform in camps throughout Guinea before eventually returning to Freetown to record their album in a remarkable story of hope and healing.

More information:

Refugee All-Stars: The Band's Web Site – for CDs or tour dates or general information:

<http://www.sierraleonesrefugeeallstars.com/>

Background on the Conflict in Sierra Leone:

BCC: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/special_report/1999/01/99/sierra_leone/251251.stm

Human Rights Watch: <http://hrw.org/doc?t=africa&c=sierra>

Amnesty International on Blood Diamonds, Child Soldiers and Amputations:

<http://www.amnestyusa.org/amnestynow/diamonds.html>

Current Elections and Reform:

<http://www.iht.com/articles/2007/09/12/opinion/ednorris03.php>

<http://ap.google.com/article/ALeqM5i4UTMvN-MM7lnTSjcaDNM5LhH80Q>

Children Soldiers:

<http://www.iht.com/articles/2007/02/23/features/IDLEDE24.php>

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/14/magazine/14soldier.t.html?ex=1326430800&en=18db63da3854259e&ei=5088&partner=rssnyt&emc=rss>

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