

A Mother's Saga

A Mother's Saga:
An Account of the Rebel War in Sierra Leone

Karamoh Kabba

Universal Publishers
USA • 2002

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Universal Publishers/uPUBLISH.com
USA • 2002

ISBN: 1-58112- 608-5

www.uPUBLISH.com/books/kabba.htm

A MOTHER’S SAGA

An Account of the Rebel War in Sierra Leone

“January 6, 1999, and all the other tragic incidents of the rebel war have taught us a lesson. They will forever strengthen our resolve to rebuild our nation, and moreover to uphold the pledge that forthwith, we shall refrain from the use or threat of use of armed force to bring about any change in our beloved country.”

Mr Ibrahim M Kamara

Sierra Leone Head of Missions to the United Nations

BY KARAMOH KABBA

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CONGRATULATIONS

YOU HAVE JUST CONTRIBUTED
TO THE *SIERRA LEONE YOUTH
LENDING HAND, INC. (SLYLH)*
“*SUPPORT A CHILD CAMPAIGN*”
(SACC) PROGRAM FUNDS.

The dates and events in this narrative are based on the narrator's memory and may not be accurate. Names of people, places and locations of eyewitness account of atrocities, except places, heads of government and rebel movements, family and extended families are fictitious except otherwise indicated.

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We have been afraid for too long,
We have been crying,
And running,
And begging,
And searching,
Praying and pleading to evade torture in forever hands.

And if you bare to stay with me in this place
Ladies and gentlemen,
You will hear us when we confess that,
As you all continue to argue amongst yourselves,
Our children were part of a revolution.
A revolution that turned into war and chaos.

Sunju Ahmadu

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Thanks to my mother and the ‘*Sierra Leonean Amputees*’, whose stories inspired my involvement with *Sierra Leone Youth Lending Hand, Inc. (SLYLH) organization* and this project. Thanks to my wife, *Maria Gutierrez*, and children, *Oscar, Kemoh* and *Fatima* whose sacrifice made it possible. Thanks to my sister, *Mary Kabba*, whose unconditional love transformed into a significant help against my struggle with despair. Thanks to the Executive Committee and the Board of Directors of *SLYLH* for their supports and invaluable advice throughout my endeavor. Thanks to *Tonganty Borbor* and *Lisa Rackstraw* who have stood with me and supported my endeavor as a soldier for humanity. Thanks to *Ishmael Mansaray (Salone Ishmael—The African Child)* for the dramatization on the poem page. Thanks to *Sunju Ahmadu* for the use of the verses in her famous poem, ‘*Hope*’. Special thanks to *Mr. John L. Musa* for his advice and assistance throughout this project.

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To the Reader

In March 1991, the *Revolutionary United Front (RUF)* rebels, under the leadership of *Foday Sankoh* waged a ruthless war on Sierra Leone, which was to last for a decade. Since then, Sierra Leone has been torn by this senseless war characterized by the worst forms of crimes against humanity. In a war where people turned on themselves to fulfill their quest for cruelty. *“The atrocities in the rebel conflict seemed as if people motivated by evil intentions of cruelty were waiting for the slightest chance to reveal their true nature of evil. As if the state of anarchy was the moment to reverse, they acted like beasts in this once peace loving nation, by resorting to committing the damnable atrocities against themselves.”*

As a humanitarian, the war crimes against humanity in Sierra Leone have captured my attention. The notion that people would turn on themselves in such a manner is very atrocious. They used children as tools of war by means of indoctrination, by threat of violence against them, by

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intimidation, by killing and hacking limbs of many to subdue others and by exposing them to all kinds of drugs, rape and torture for ten horrible years and finally refused them any chance to revive their torn lives.

As an activist, I urge all men and women of goodwill to keep in mind the plight of the people, especially the children, traumatized by war and now requiring recovery. I urge politicians in the frenzy of elections to remember the victims of war in their manifestos and political platforms.

The attack on innocent civilians, especially the youth, in the ten years of rebel conflict in Sierra Leone was endemic for the following reasons:

- These young men and women became targets because; their vibrant minds were vulnerable for easy manipulation to suit their abductors' [the warlords] needs.
- These youth were the citizens with the energy to support the manpower needed for the war.

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Therefore, they were abducted and indoctrinated as fighting young men and women. Their body parts were hacked off or killed when they resisted their captures' choice less offer. The rest that survived the rebel onslaught are affected in several ways:

Psychological—a statistic has either witnessed a family member being killed or perpetrated the killing and maiming. A large number of them are orphans. In addition, most of these young men and women ended up with dismembered faces, hacked off limbs, and memories of rape and torture. “UNICEF says it is expecting 5,400 children who will need psychological help.”(Associated Press, July 10, 2001)

Social—these young men and women have been on the run for their lives for the past ten years; they moved from place to place with no opportunity for education or access to medical facilities. The ten years of war has obliterated

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all learning institutions, which has further escalated and maintained the illiteracy statistic of Sierra Leone at the highest in the world. Most of the girls who found themselves on foreign soils with language and other cultural barriers had no choice other than prostitution to meet basic ends. In the process, they acquired infectious diseases and passed them on to others ignorantly. Consequently, HIV/AIDS infection has become a threat to the society.

These basic facts inspired me to form *SLYLH* and write a recount that would shed light on the cruelty the people of Sierra Leone inflicted on each other during this odd decade of their history.

These atrocious actions have placed the youth population at risk, if not attended to, that may lead to a leadership vacuum in Sierra Leone. Chris Robertson, the head of '*Save the Children Fund*', stated; "How these children will act as adults depends much on the support they get from society..." (*Associated Press, July 10,*

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2001). A whole generation was victimized by the war in Sierra Leone. This is why I am pleading through my mother's recount with the world community to see the need to help the people of Sierra Leone rebuild their lives in this postwar period.

As a member of the world community, I urge you to find out how you can help the nation of Sierra Leone grapple with this difficult time of its history.

I thank you for your attention to this extreme humanitarian catastrophe I have brought to your attention.

Sincerely

Karamoh Kabba

Karamoh Kabba

President & CEO—Sierra Leone Youth Lending Hand, Inc.
(SLYLH)

SLYLH is an independent, nonprofit, tax-exempt humanitarian organization formed under Section 501 (c)

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(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of the United States, to provide medical and educational assistance to the youth of Sierra Leone in their postwar rehabilitation. It is registered as a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) under Section 249 of the Laws of Sierra Leone as a corresponding nonprofit and tax-exempt institution to cater to postwar medical and educational needs of the youth of Sierra Leone.

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*A dedication to my late sister, Fatimata Kabba (Kumba)
and all the victims of the rebel conflict of Sierra Leone
whose lives were cut short directly or indirectly as a result.*

*Whose souls and spirits linger within, waiting their actual
time of death.*

*May their souls and spirits have a final place to rest in
perfect and everlasting peace.*

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Souls and Spirits

*Souls and spirits roam our midst
Souls and spirits roam our mountain
In 27,000 sq. mile den, souls and spirits search for garments,
Garments of body, blood and bones.*

*Bash! Bang! Boom!
The machetes slashed,
The guns shot,
The shells shattered
Garments of body, blood and bones.*

*Slashed, shot and shattered,
Body, blood and bones,
Souls and spirits ejected out of
Garments of body, blood and bones.*

*Souls and spirits search the den
On the white-sand beaches and
In the white-stone fields.
On the red-metal mounds and
In the bean and pod forests and rice paddies.
West, East, North and South, for
Garments of body, blood and bones.*

*As the den gropes for peace and tranquility,
Souls and spirits roar high.
Roar for garments of souls and spirits,
Search for garments of body, blood and bones.*