

**MILITARY REGIMES AND HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN SIERRA LEONE: FOCUS ON CAPTAIN
VALENTINE STRASSER 1992 – 1996**

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ABSTRACT

On 10th December, 1948, Universal Declaration of the fundamental human rights was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly. Subsequently, the African Charter on human and people's rights was adopted in Nairobi Kenya, in 1986. In spite of these declarations, human rights violation in Africa remains overwhelming. Military regimes in most African countries have been violating the fundamental human rights of Africans. This contradicts the provision of article 21 of the United Nations Declaration of fundamental human rights. Sierra Leone, a West African country, was excessively marked by high frequency of militarism and civil wars, and their human rights abuse, over-whelming. Thus, the study examines military regimes and human rights violation in Sierra Leone with special focus on the regime of Captain Valentine Strasser. The study contends that the regime of Captain Valentine Strasser was seriously involved with tremendous rates of human rights abuses. Until there is a culture shift by the Sierra Leonean political class, and their citizens towards saying "No" with one voice, against the military, fundamental human rights will continue to be violated. Perpetrators and collaborators of human rights violations must be held accountable for their actions and must be given fair trials and punished according to national and international law. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) should assure that human rights concerns are integrated into its own initiatives to promote peace and stability not only in Sierra Leone but in other West African countries.

Keywords: Captain Valentine Strasser, Human rights, Human rights violation, Military regime, Military regimes in .Sierra Leone.

INTRODUCTION

On 10th December, 1948, Universal Declaration of the fundamental human rights was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly (Obiozor,1985). Subsequently, the African Charter on human and people's rights was adopted in Nairobi Kenya, in 1986. The African charter was adjudged the most comprehensive human rights document, containing all the generation of rights in a single document. However, the African Charter contains most of the provisions of the U.N Charter (Edeh, 2000).

In spite of these declarations, human rights violation in Africa remains overwhelming. That was why Achike (1986), stated that successive regimes in most African countries (especially the military) have been violating the fundamental human rights of Africans. Ukpabi (1966) affirmed that the structure of every regime (especially the military) in Africa is a sheer violation of the fundamental rights of man. For instance, the military regimes that ravaged the African continent obstructed the expression of the people's aspirations in the selection of their leaders and, consequently, reduced the citizens to mere observers and passive supporters of political processes, thus, contradicting the provision of article 21 of the United Nations Declaration of fundamental human rights, which states that: Every one has the right to take part in the government of his country directly or through freely chosen representatives (Obiozor, 1985).

Chidume (2013) highlighted some African countries characterized with long period of militarism to include Burkina Faso, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria and Sierra Leone. Sierra Leone, a West African country, has been excessively marked by high frequency of militarism and civil wars. The military was in power for a very long time in Sierra Leone and their human rights abuse, over-whelming. Militarism has led to a decline of institutions, the erosion of civil relations and the steady rise of violence in the society. Indeed, military regimes in Sierra Leone have succeeded in permeating civil society with their values – both the formal military values of centralization and authority, and the coarse attitudes associated with “barrack culture”, hedonism and brutality that were derived from the colonial army. Wisenberg (1998) stated that in Sierra Leone, the military regime was characterized by violation of the citizen's fundamental human rights. As the reality of most of its policies and programs has shown, a very large number of Sierra Leonian's, mostly the dominated or the less privileged groups, were subjected to untold hardship and deprivations.

Assimeng (2007), highlighted some of the features of the military regimes in Sierra Leone, that were absolutely repugnant to natural justice and governance: The denial of return of basic liberties. The right to free expression, the right to take part in deciding issues affecting their country, and the human suffering, hardship, social deprivation, neglect and abject poverty to which the citizens of were subjected to.

International human rights laws and treaties are clear, when they stated that: “children under 15 are not to be used as soldiers” (Moorehead, 1995: 118). But in Sierra Leone, young boys not up to 15 years were recruited as soldiers, to prosecute wars. Sierra Leone was in a state of internal conflict for over ten years. At that time, thousands of people died, and a high number of the population fled to surrounding nations. Many different factions participated in the war, with all sides recruiting young boys as young as 10, to act variously as porters, mine sweepers, man checkpoints and carry out executions. Moorehead, (1995:119), affirmed this, when she stated thus: That the first killing of a captive is seen as an essential rite of passage. Many have watched their own parents sliced or beheaded with machetes, and have been driven into the war by hunger, desperation, and because they have no other way to survive.

The regimes of Major General Joseph Momoh, Captain Valentine Strasser and Major Johnny Paul Koroma, were associated with high rates of human rights violations with the regime of Captain

Valentine Strasser feared to be the worst as regards human rights violations (Kendeh, 2002). Ibidapo – Obe (2001), reported that the regime of Captain Valentine Strasser, which was a torn in the flesh of the citizens of Sierra Leone, engaged in a war of terror against civilians in Sierra Leone. The regime, which was made up of young soldiers committed unimaginable and widespread atrocities against unarmed civilians, as their rights were seriously and variously abused. Thus, this study, therefore, seeks to examine military regimes and human rights violations in Sierra Leone, with special focus on the regime of Captain Valentine Strasser, 1992 -1996.

MILITARY REGIMES AND HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN SIERRA LEONE

Sierra Leone got her independence in 1961 and ever since then the military has dominated the political climate in Sierra Leone, with high rate of human rights violation. Siaka Stevens of the opposition All People's Congress (APC) won the polls in the March 1967 General Elections and he was called upon by the Governor-General to form the government. However, a coup was staged by Brigadier David Lansana, to prevent Siaka Steven from taking over the government. Siaka Steven fled the country and went into exile in Guinea. A counter coup was however staged immediately by junior officers who declared Siaka Stevens winner of the elections, but power was not handed over to him. Another coup was staged by warrant officers and other ranks of the army on 18th April 1968, and Siaka Stevens was invited to come and assume office. Brigadier J. Bangura staged a bloody coup in 1971, in which many people were killed, including the coup leader. Ever since then, political violence has been a central occurrence in the political life of the people of Sierra Leone, with high rate of human rights violation (Assimeng, 2007).

In 1978, a state of emergency was declared in Sierra Leone by Siaka Stevens who also turned the country into a one party state. This move made formal and open opposition to the regime impossible. The regime became unpopular and the level of corruption of the regime became very high. Siaka Stevens had promised to resign after the 1981 elections, a promise which he did not adhere to and rather resigned in 1986. When he finally stepped down in 1986, he refused to hand over to the incumbent Vice President, Ibrahim Koroma as the constitution stipulated, instead, he unconstitutionally handed over to Major General Saidu Momoh. As the new head of state, Momoh was even more inept than his predecessor, and opposition to the regime grew. Plagued by attacks from different angles, a crumbling economy, and a divided party, the Momoh regime conceded to multi – party politics and elections in 1991. As the elections approached, it became crystal clear that the government intended to rig the elections (Rasheed, 2007).

Based on the above, in May 1991, Corporal Foday Sankoh led Revolutionary United Front (RUF), attacked Sierra Leone from Liberia with the support of Liberian leader Charles Taylor. The origins of RUF have been traced to Freetown from where recruits for a 'popular army' were drawn and sent to Libya for training (Abdullah, 2007). General Momoh dispatched a dispirited and poorly trained and equipped army to combat Sankoh's RUF. It was not an easy task as the RUF was not holding on to territory, but instead adopted guerrilla tactics. A new constitution was adopted, allowing for a transition towards multiparty elections. Political parties started to register in preparation for elections.

Wiseman (2001), however stated that the 1991 multiparty constitution was not implemented. Fighting with a rebel movement, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), which had started in March 1991, escalated, and there were incursions from neighbouring Liberia, the RUF in the south of the country being loosely in alliance with Liberian rebels.

Junior army officers, led by Captain Valentine Strasser took control in April 1992 after a coup and the 1991 multiparty constitution was suspended. There was an escalation of hostilities, despite air and ground support from Nigeria, and troops provided by Guinea, by 1995 at one point the government was in secure control only of the capital. In January 1996, Strasser was overthrown by his deputy

Brigadier Julius Maada Bio, who then organized Presidential and parliamentary elections in February 1996.

In the Presidential election, Ahmed Tejan Kabbah of Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) defeated Dr. John Karefa-Smart, of the United National People's Party (UNPP) and Kabbah was sworn in as president at the end of March 1996. In talks between the government and RUF leader Corporal Foday Sankoh, agreement was reached in November 1996 to end the war that had caused the displacement of two million people and over 10,000 deaths. The agreement allowed the RUF to register as a political party and permitted it access to the media (Wiseman, 2001). Major Johnny Paul Koroma staged a coup in May 1997, and Kabbah's government was overthrown. Koroma appointed four RUF members, including Sankoh, to his ruling Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC).

In a deal brokered by ECOWAS in Conakry the capital city of Guinea in October 1997, some far reaching agreements were arrived at: (i) Koroma's government agreed to a six-month transition to the restoration of the legitimate civilian Kabbah government; (ii) the leading rebels including Koroma were to have immunity from prosecution and (iii) RUF leader, Sankoh, will participate in the formation of a new government. Within a few days, thousands of people had returned to their homes in Freetown.

However, early February 1998 witnessed renewed fighting between Nigerian peacekeeping troops and Koroma's forces in Freetown, and within few days, Freetown was captured by Nigerian peacekeeping troops, and many members of the military regime excluding Koroma himself were detained. President Kabbah returned to Freetown in March 1998 after nine months in exile in Conakry, Immediately after his return, he declared a state of emergency, allowed detention without trial of suspected members and associates of the Koroma regime and banned possession of weapons and hoarding of food and fuel. The National Assembly reconvened and about 50% of its members attended. In order to maintain peace in Sierra Leone, the UN in July 1998, agreed to establish an observer mission to monitor the military and security situation in the country and to advise the government on the rebuilding of the police and security forces. Sankoh who was in detention in Lagos was flown to Freetown to face charges of treason and was sentenced to death in October 1998.

The news of Sankoh's death sentence, provoked varied hostilities, RUF and AFRC rebels launched brutal attacks of severe and varied degrees in the towns and villages they took over. They advanced rapidly towards Freetown, but were however halted by Nigerian troops in January 1999. Sankoh was allowed to attend peace talks in Togo in May 1999, which produced a ceasefire agreement to be monitored, by the UN and a promise by the rebels to release their prisoners. A wider peace agreement was signed in July 1999. It included a power-sharing arrangement between Kabbah and the RUF (with four RUF leaders appointed to ministerial portfolios in November 1999), annulment of Sankoh's death sentence and the release of those sentenced for their role in the 1997 coup. UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan recommended the deployment of 6,000 troops to Sierra Leone to guarantee the peace agreement and this was increased to 11,000 on the departure of the Nigerians in 2000.

Be that as it may, the U.N peacekeepers moved into the diamond-producing region and began demobilizing the rebels in May 2000. Subsequently, the rebels took 500 UN troops hostage, thus, leading to the collapse of peace agreement and fighting resumed between the Sierra Leone Army and the rebels. Power sharing ceased and Sankoh was arrested, though the hostages were released unharmed in due course. In July 2000, the UN resolved to ban trade in diamonds from Sierra Leone until the government had established an authentication system, but the illicit trade continued into 2001, when there were signs that the ban was beginning to be effective.

THE CONCEPT, EMERGENCE AND DEVELOPMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Edeh (2000), while discussing the concept of human rights, stated that the ideals, principles, concepts and the general contraption of human rights has been an inherent facet of human creation, which were not up until few centuries ago rediscovered through political revolutions; principally ignited by some creative writers and great philosophers – whose works and ideas to life and human rights, played major role in bringing about radical, but monumental changes within very short time in the ways and means of citizens of various countries of the world, especially those countries of the world that experienced political revelations.

Human rights like other human embodiments like hands, legs, head, tongue etc could be defined simply as uncompromisable rights of man inherent to man from birth to death. It cannot be removed from man. It is the basic foundation for man's existence and human dignity, which nobody, group of persons, or even constituted authority, has right to deny humans of such rights. It is widely believed and suggested, that human rights are subject to a number of factors, that include cultural, and civilization influences – which has a lot to do with time.

Theoretically and historically speaking, what we generally regard today as human rights; emanated from the philosophical works and writings of great ideologists like Hammurabi of the ancient Mesopotamia; Moses of the ancient Hebrew to mention but a few. And more recently, Thomas Hobbes, Kants, Karl Marx. Revolutions such as French Revolution, American war of independence and to a less extent Russian Revolution, which respectively, helped tremendously to define human rights in the context we know it today.

In the same vein, Asogwa and Omemma (2001: 193), maintained that “the concept of human rights is of recent origin. Even in its French – inspired form “rights of man”, it goes back only to the last decade of the 18th century. The idea however, of the law or the law giver, defining and protecting the legal rights of man – mainly the mutual rights of the members of the community – is very old indeed. It would, perhaps, be somewhat far – fetched to look for elements of the code of the Babylonian King Hammurabi (about 2130 to 2088 B.C), The most ancient code of law at present known. The sanctions which it provides in trying to protect worthy human rights objectives (such as the administration of justice, marriage, and the family) are so disproportionately cruel that it is preferable to disregard this legislator in our context.

Eze (2002: 5), defined human rights as “the demand or claim which are protected by law and have become part of us, while others remain aspirations to be attained in the future”. An idealistic and limited view of human rights is something of which no one may be deprived without great affront of justice. There are certain deeds which should never be done, certain freedom which never invaded something of which are supremely sacred” (Cranston, 2000). There are other writers who shared the same view with Cranston in terms of sacredness of human rights. In addition, these writers (not Cranston) believed that human rights are derived from nature and should not be infringed upon by any human or governmental organizations.

Eyntchare (1994:81), was one of the writers, and he defined human rights as: Inherent, inalienable rights of man, these rights are fundamental, because they are ensured to every citizen in his capacity as human beings, rights attached to him from birth. These rights are fundamental because they are capable of being abrogated or taken away from citizens by governmental or human laws.

Another writer, Okumade (1987:78), defined human rights “as a relation of the individual to his society and as the society changes and develops, so will his (individual) rights change. Besides the universal concept of human rights, individuals possesses rights, which are as much as normal human endowment as heart, lungs and brains.” Key issues in these two definitions deserve comment. The first definition stated that human rights are inherently inalienable and that they are attached to him

(individual) from birth, while the second definition stated that human rights cannot be removed from individuals just like man cannot do without human endowment like lungs, brains etc.

But, Mattew (2000), in his work, *The African charter on human rights and peoples rights*; was of the view that human rights, are not natural rights, rather they came from experience and history. It can be noted that rights are not essentially the rights or mutual entitlement of human beings in a given society's relations of production. Also, that some rights are absolute, while some are normal qualities and may be denied or curtailed in the interest of the society or public peace.

Furthermore, in a precise definition of Human Rights, the United Nations defines human rights as "those rights which are inherent in our nature and without which we cannot live as human beings". Human rights have also been described as the "common language of humanity" – and fittingly so just as the ability to learn to speak a language is a inborn quality that makes us human. There are other inborn needs and qualities that set us apart from other creatures on earth. For instance, humans have a need for knowledge, artistic expression and spirituality. A human who is deprived of filling these basic needs is forced to live a sub – human existence.. To protect humans against such deprivation, explains a human rights lawyer, "we use the term human rights instead of human needs, because legally speaking, the word need is not as strong as the word right. By calling it a right we elevate the satisfying of human needs to something every human being is morally as well as legally entitled to"(Pobee 2007).

Adele (2000), stated that the United Nations Declaration of human rights marked the Universal adoptions and acceptance of fundamental human rights. It applies to all nations or countries around the globe, irrespective of their variations in culture. This declaration was tailored and chartered by events, before and after the Second World War. When the world was in the mood for peace and justice and also appeared prepared and willing to enthrone a new order in which the dignity of man is respected and protected. Then in 1948, the international bill on human rights was placed before the General Assembly of the United Nations. This was subsequently adopted by resolution 217a (111) of December 10, 1948. And was widely known as Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 (Adele 2000).

Finidi (2000), in his own contribution stated that it was more than fifty years ago, a grandmotherly looking woman spoke up and the world listened. And this happened in Paris on December 10, 1948. The United Nations General Assembly was gathered in the recently built 'Palais Chaillot', when the chairwoman of the UN Commission on Human Rights rose to give a speech. In a firm voice, Eleanor Roosevelt, the tall widow of former United States president Franklin D. Roosevelt, told those assembled: "we stand today at the threshold of a great event both in the life of the United Nations and in the life of mankind; that is the approval by the General Assembly of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

After she read the ringing phrases of the Declaration's preamble and it's 30 articles, the General Assembly adopted the document. Then, to honor Mrs Roosevelt's exceptional leadership, the UN members gave 'the first lady of the world' as she was affectionately known and called, a standing ovation. Pobee (2007), pointed out that earlier in January 1947, soon after the UN Commission's work had begun, it became clear that writing a human rights document agreeable to all UN members would be a formidable task. From it's beginning, deep disagreement marred the 18 – members Commission in endless disputes. The Chinese delegate felt that the document should include the philosophy of Confucius, a Catholic Commission member promoted the teachings of Thomas Aquinas, the United States championed the American Bill of Rights, and the Soviets wanted to include the ideas of Karl Marx – and these were just a few of the strong opinions expressed.

In consequent to about two years of meetings, hundreds of amendments, thousands of statements and 1,400 rounds of voting on practically every word and every clause, the commission did produce a document listing the human rights to which it believed all men and women, everywhere in the world, are entitled. It was named the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Thus, was

accomplished a mission that, at a time, seemed impossible. Forty – eight countries voted in favor, none against. But today however, all 185 UN member nations, including those that abstained in 1948, have endorsed the Declaration.

In Africa, prior to the advent of colonization of Africa, African society enjoyed a great level of respect for human rights especially pre – slave trade era. Even though the rights of women then were violated with impunity, as a result of gender inequality, which was, enshrined in most cultures. The European conquest of Africa and centuries of economic exploitation and slave trading disrupted the pattern of life in Africa. The socio – political life of the people were dangerously disoriented and disarranged. And by the time the lootings were over, the entire face of Africa was in ruins psychologically, socially, politically and most of all, economically. (Okoye, 2000).

Finidi (2000), while analyzing human rights in Africa, stated that although the European powers give lip service to human rights, these rights were never implemented in their administration of the colonies. As a result they now saw nothing wrong in slave trading as they looted African resources. They administered the colonies with impunity and treat the people as people without rights. And by these acts, disoriented and disarranged African norms and values. The colonial masters groomed and nurtured the police, army, the civil service and new leaders. And these new leaders even after independence, continued with ‘status quo antes’. They continued with the repressive political culture which they inherited from their colonial masters. And this accounts for the abysmal human right records in post – independence Africa as demonstrated by Kamuzu Banda of Malawi, Idi – Amin of Uganda, Marcias Nguema of Equatorial Guinea, Jean – Claude Bokassa of Central African Republic to mention but a few.

Human rights records in post – independence Africa was at its lowest ebb partly as a result of the dislocation of the communal economy based on equality, and equity among members of the community, and its replacement by a western patterned socio – political and economic system. This gave rise to millions of impoverished people. Spread across the continent coexisting with few wealthy, educated and political elites, heavily dependent on their loot of state funds for sustenance. The state functionaries hardly survive economically outside the corridors of power because they are used to living – of the state funds they loot. And the sit tight syndrome and repression has become the order of the day, using colonial inherited instrument of coercion to perpetuate themselves in power.

Kalu (2000), noted that Africa gave itself a continental system for the protection and promotion of human rights by putting into force in 1986, the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights (ACHPR), which was earlier 1981. This charter was modeled after the UN human rights convention advocates collaborating Universal human rights standards and continental African particularities. Though differs from the approach taken on the Universal level to differentiate civil and political rights from social, economic and cultural rights (with the adoption of the two covenants on civil and political rights and on social, economic and cultural rights in 1966), both categories of rights as well as ‘third generation rights’ such as the right to development, are contained in the African Charter.

Under this charter the same methods of supervision are applied for all aforementioned categories by its supervisory organ, the African Commission on Human and People’s Rights. An interstate and individual complaints system and a state reporting mechanism have been created for the purpose, neither of which can be described as functioning satisfactorily at present. This charter imposes duties on individuals, an approach that differ from that of other human rights conventions. But be it as it may, with continued reference throughout the ACHPR to traditional African practices and values, this has led to the question whether such an approach could endanger the Universality of human rights. The practice of the commission, which started its work in 1987, has been criticized repeatedly by observers, due mainly to its scarce resources and less than dynamic interpretation of the charter which has hardly any positive impact on human rights in Africa (Kalu 2000).

DIFFERENT SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT ON THE CONCEPTUAL APPROACH TO HUMAN RIGHTS:

Naturalist Schools: This school of thought would regard human rights as those rights conferred by God or nature and discernible by human reason. The religious and moral approaches to human rights are based on the natural rights school. The Christians for example has a great influence on the early development of human rights in Europe, and through colonialism, settlement, travel, trade, has permeated human rights thinking in other parts of the world. Evan (1999), referring to John Locke, who was one of the protagonists of this school, maintained that the law of nature entails natural rights which belongs to man and men. This school was nothing but propaganda used by the Europeans with the Bible in one hand and the sword in the other, to blindfold the third world countries, into believing that the reward is in heaven and not on earth.

The Positive School: Unlike the natural school, the positive school recorded human rights as those with system and device either from the will of the state or the command of the sovereign. This school failed to situate the issue of human rights to the socio-economic formation of the state. It therefore failed to acknowledge the class nature of human rights.

The Socialist School: The third school accepts as a starting point, human rights, as those which have become part of the positive legal system, as well as situated it, to socio-economic relations, where there is sub-structure, determining the political system, which is the super structure.

THE MILITARY REGIME OF CAPTAIN VALENTINE STRASSER AND HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATION IN SIERRA LEONE

The African Charter, which was adopted in Nairobi in 1981, came into force in 1986. It was adjudged as the most comprehensive human rights document, containing all the generation of rights in a single document. Below is the summary of the rights:

CIVIL RIGHTS:

Right to life;
Right to the dignity of the human person;
Right to personal liberty;
Freedom of movement;

POLITICAL AND MORAL RIGHTS:

Peaceful assembly and association;
Freedom to express oneself;
Right to participate in government;
Freedom of thought, conscience and religion

The document also contains economic, social and cultural rights, like the rights to education, work in conducive environment, health and equal pay for equal work. Also included in the African Charter is the right to development. And article 22 of the Charter reads:

All people shall have the right to their economic, social and cultural development in strict respect of their freedom and identity, and in equal enjoyment of the common heritage of mankind.

Analytically therefore, it is very clear that the regime of Captain Valentine Strasser violated almost all the rights mentioned above, this is confirmed in the discussion below:

Captain Valentine Strasser, overthrew General Momoh on 29th April 1992, He immediately established the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC), as the ruling organ. Most of the new leaders were very young, in their early twenties. Captain Valentine Strasser was twenty five (25) years old. Captain Valentine Strasser with his young soldiers formed a regime characterized by serious human rights violations and a complete breakdown of the rule of law. There was a significant increase in the

role of military and security forces in the political process of Sierra Leone. At the same time, the circulation of arms, private armed gangs and violence was very high (Pobee, 2007). Assimeng (2007), confirmed this, when he stated that members of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), engaged in a war of terror against civilians in Sierra Leone during the period under study. With no recognizable political platform, the AFRC / RUF rebel alliance was committing widespread and egregious atrocities against unarmed civilians in an attempt to regain power. As the violence in Sierra Leone continued, grave abuses continued to take place. In the same period according to Freedom in the World (2015) Strasser regime hired South African soldiers from the security company Executive Outcomes (EO) to help win back key diamond areas. Of course they have the RUF to contend with and when two elephants fight, grasses will suffer, grasses then were unarmed civilians whose fundamental rights were brutally violated.

In the same vein, Schema-root (2015) stated that under Strasser's regime the Republic of Sierra Leone Military Forces (RSLMF) was not able to stop the rampaging RUF rebellion, which fought government forces to a standstill and possessed vital diamond-producing areas. The hostilities resulted to the death of more than 10,000 people mostly women and children, about 300,000 people fled to neighboring countries as refugees and about 400,000 were rendered homeless or internally displaced (Schema-root, 2015).

Many thousands of Sierra Leonean civilians were raped, deliberately mutilated, often by amputation, or killed outright. Men, women and children, probably numbering in their thousands, were abducted by various rebel groups for use as combatants, forced laborers, or sexual slaves. Women faced severe discrimination and unlimited access to education and female genital mutilation was widespread. Women were actively targeted through sexual violence, including rape and sexual slavery. Children were targets of killings and violence and were forcibly recruited as soldiers. In addition to various forms of physical abuse, innumerable Sierra Leoneans suffer from psychological trauma due to intentionally cruel methods of inflicting harm against these individuals and their communities. The constitution prohibited forced labour but rebel factions were abducting civilians and forcing them to work as virtual slaves performing domestic duties or mining in diamond areas (Freedom in the World, 2015).

Analyzing the military regime and human rights violation in Sierra Leone, Assimeng (2007), stated that since independence in 1961, Sierra Leone has endured a series of military regimes and rebellions in struggles over economic and political power. He however stated that the latest round of violence was unique in the scale and grotesque nature of the attacks on civilians. Human rights watch compiled information regarding the experiences of more than 500 survivors of atrocities committed in Sierra Leone and it was discovered that most of these cruelties occurred between 1992 and 1996 and that was the reason why Kende, (2002) stated that the regime of Captain Valentine Strasser was noted to be the worst as regards human rights violations in Sierra Leone.

There were vast abuses during the period under study as were registered in Connaught, Magburaka, and Makeni hospitals in Sierra Leone. There were survivors from gunshot wounds, amputations and other mutilations, or rape.

Confirming the above, Newton (2007), noted that human rights watch documented some abuses committed during the period under study in Port Loko district, 40 – 65 kilometers from Freetown. The abuses include cases of rape especially under aged girls, cases of abduction of villagers, and three murders. Human Rights Watch interviewed some released or escaped captives. They confirmed that female abductees were constantly raped, and the male captives were used as slave labor.

CONCLUSION

The military was a major actor, in the political, economic and social theatre of the people of Sierra Leone. The major casualty of military regimes in Sierra Leone was the people's fundamental human rights, in spite of the United Nations provision for the preservation of the fundamental rights of individuals as contained in the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights of 1948. The regime of Captain Valentine Strasser engaged in a war of terror against civilians in Sierra Leone. The regime was a torn in the flesh of the citizens of Sierra Leone, as their rights were variously violated.

Until there is a culture shift by the Sierra Leonean political class, and their citizens towards saying "No" with one voice, against the military, fundamental human rights will continue to be violated. Perpetrators and collaborators of human rights violations must be held accountable for their actions and must be given fair trials and punished according to national and international law.

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) should assure that human rights concerns are integrated into its own initiatives to promote peace and stability not only in Sierra Leone but in other West African countries.

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