

REPORT ON SIERRA LEONE - 21/01/99

From Jane Knight.

I tried to get through to Freetown and Bo on Monday this week. It became very clear that the lines are down and the whole situation in Freetown seems to be worse than we have ever known it.

On January 17<sup>th</sup> Dr. Abdul phoned me. He is a cousin of Momodu Koroma and we have communicated now for 2 years when we were anxious about the situation in Sierra Leone and particularly re. the safety of Momodu and his family. He is married to a Dutch lady and has a large family and practices in England.

He went out to Freetown with his family a week or 2 before Christmas to have a family holiday and to set up a project for child welfare.

They arrived back on Sunday last after a nightmarish experiences. He had seen his parents etc. for 3 days when the trouble started. Then as he was in Kissy and east and west were separated, he never saw them again and does not know if they are alive.

He said the rebels had been infiltrating weapons (some from Ukraine) for several weeks. He reported that telephones were down, he saw public buildings burning, bodies on the street. He said the rebels tried to take Wilberforce and did it by collecting civilians from the villages and they used them as human shields putting a row of children first then a row of women and then captured men behind them. They pushed through in this way to Pademba prison to release their friends.

Abdul managed to leave Freetown with his wife and children on January 13<sup>th</sup> and was flown by helicopter to Lungi airport where they waited in anguish until a private plane valiantly took them to Conakry.

In the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of his stay, he saw Momodu who provided him with a car. Momodu said the young ministers were fighting alongside the Nigerians, and 2 were already killed. One of them was shot by a 9 year old.

The Archbishop (Ganda) was kidnapped.

Abdul's conclusion was that the Nigerians are the only substantial force for ECOMOG, the other West African countries are contributing much less. Many Nigerians are being killed and if they withdraw the Sierra Leone government does not have an adequate military force to defend it. Abdul felt more troops were needed to flush out the rebels.

Any way I have spoken to Choithram's today. They said it is hoped that the business community will be starting up again on Monday. There is apparently fighting still going on outside Freetown. Still no news of Fr. Patrick Koroma. I spoke Ambrose Ganda in London and he has no news about his brother or anyone else.

I will keep trying to get through and glean information from wherever I can.

I was heartened to see the picture in "The Times" of Peter Penfold walking through Freetown yesterday.