

PROFILE: SIERRA LEONE



Sierra Leone is bordered by Guinea to the north and Liberia to the south, with the Atlantic Ocean to the west. The name Sierra Leone was adapted from the Portuguese name for the country, *Serra Leoa*, meaning 'Lion Mountain.' During the 1700s Sierra Leone was an important centre of the transatlantic trade in enslaved Africans. The capital Freetown was founded in 1788 as a home for enslaved Africans who had fought for the British in the American War of Independence.

Sierra Leone became a British colony in 1808 but gained independence in 1961. From 1991 to 2002, the country suffered greatly under a devastating civil war. To end the civil war, UN and British forces disarmed 17,000 militia and rebels, in the largest UN peacekeeping effort of the decade.

Sierra Leone is one of the world's largest producers of industrial diamonds and gemstones, and has the third-largest natural harbour in the world. Despite its numerous riches, Sierra Leone remains an extremely poor nation with tremendous inequality in income distribution. There is a high rate of unemployment, particularly among the youth and ex-combatants. Health is poor, and the water and sanitation infrastructure was destroyed during the war.

At independence in 1961, Sierra Leone was known as the 'Athens of West Africa' in recognition of its provision of high-quality education in the African continent. However, in 2003 the country was rated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) as having one of the highest illiteracy rates (31 per cent) in the world.

TEARFUND'S WORK IN SIERRA LEONE

Tearfund has been working with partners in Sierra Leone since the 1990s, particularly in funding their emergency assistance to various communities. As the region becomes relatively stable, Tearfund is working with partners in long-term development work while strengthening their ability to prepare for disasters.

Tearfund partners ran peace-building workshops following the war in Sierra Leone, providing counselling for people who had suffered terrible atrocities, their families murdered in front of them or their limbs amputated. In addition, Tearfund's partners helped to repair and construct wells, build shelters, run health, sanitation and agricultural programmes and raise awareness about HIV.

- **Pray for people living in poverty in Sierra Leone**
- **Please pray for our partners as they seek to help others**
- **And pray for the country of Sierra Leone, for justice, peace, good health and hope for everyone.**