

## Sierra Leone

Estimated population 4.2 million

Rated 176th out of 177 countries in the UN Human Development Index, Sierra Leone has suffered severe political and economic instability but is now showing distinct signs of redovery. Founded as a refuge for slaves who had fought on the losing British side in the American War of Independence the country became independent in 1961. Thirty years later however the collapse of governance in neighbouring Liberia, ironically founded as a refuge for American slaves, marked the beginning of a brutal civil war. An incursion by the Liberian backed Revolutionary United Front (RUF) ignited an already tense situation. This was followed by a coup d'état launched by officers dissatisfied with the government's attempts to deal with the RUF rebels. United Nations intervention eventually brought an end to a particularly vicious conflict and democratic presidential and parliamentary elections were held in 2002 and were followed by local elections two years later. Sierra Leone is an important producer of diamonds, iron, platinum and chromium. GDP per capita in 2005 was \$223. Life expectancy in 2004 was 42 for females and 38 for males.

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