



Immigration and  
Refugee Board of Canada

Commission de l'immigration  
et du statut de réfugié du Canada

# Sierra Leone: Paramount chiefdoms of Kono District, including names; whether there is a paramount chief for Kono; information on the chiefdom in Koidu, including names of its paramount chiefs since 1985, how they are appointed, and their duties (1985- June 2015)

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## 1. Paramount Chiefdoms of Kono District

According to sources, Kono District is found in eastern Sierra Leone (Conteh n.d., 6; NPR 23 Nov. 2012; Associate Professor 23 June 2015). It is one of the country's 12 national districts (ibid.; Conteh n.d., 6; Sierra Leone Web n.d.). The capital city of Kono District is Koidu (FESS Feb. 2007, 3; NPR 23 Nov. 2012; Associate Professor 23 June 2015). Sources report that Kono District is divided into 14 chiefdoms (Conteh n.d., 68-70; Reed and Robinson 20 Oct. 2012, 84-90; Sierra Leone Web n.d.). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, an assistant professor of anthropology at the University of Notre Dame, who has worked in Sierra Leone and focuses her research on social politics in the country, stated that

Kono District [has] MPs and a district council, both elected, however the chiefdoms [are] each ... governed with respect to traditional matters (rituals, domestic affairs, family squabbles, etc.) by the paramount chiefs. (Assistant Professor 23 June 2015)

According to sources, there is no paramount chief who rules over the entirety of Kono District (Professor 22 June 2015; Consultant 25 June 2015). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a professor of political science at the University of Chicago, who

has published articles on the chiefdoms of Sierra Leone, noted that "there are paramount chiefs for all of the chieftaincies within Kono district" (Professor 22 June 2015). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a consultant, who has conducted extensive research on the paramount chieftaincies of Sierra Leone, stated that there is no paramount chief overseeing Kono District in its entirety because "[d]istricts are formally groupings of chiefdoms administered by local councils, which were established by the government in 2004 and are elected democratically" and that "[t]he authority of a paramount chief will generally only extend within his or her chiefdom" (Consultant 25 June 2015). The 14 chiefdoms of Kono District, as well as their respective ruling families and current paramount chiefs as of June 2012, are listed below:

#### Chiefdom Ruling Families Current Chief

Fiama Mbriwa; Gbetuwa Sahr Y.K. Mbriwa (elected 18/12/2002)

Gbane Nyandemoquee; Ngongou; Mafinda; Boima; Ngamoh; Ngegba Bebuyei Aiah B.S. Ngoungon (elected 27/01/2010)

Gbane-Kandor Manga; Mbawah Paul Manga II (elected 2005)

Gbense Kamachende; Toli Yanfeneh; Bona Sahr Fengai Kaimachiande (elected 13/01/2003)

Gorama-Kono Konobondor; Forawah S.C.N. Kono Bundor II (elected 04/03/1985)

Kamara Fania; Ngekia; Petekoi Babonjo; Teh Aiah Melvin Ngekia (elected 30/12/2002)

Lei Mani; Kungbana Vacant

Mafindor Pombor; Kongoba; Musa Abu Mbawa Kongoba II (elected 28/04/1986)

Nimikoro Foamansa Aiah Denton F. Bona (elected 17/02/2006)

Nimiyama Torto; Madoo; Nyanka; Kamanda George B. Torto (elected 05/12/2009)

Sandor Fassuluku; Sonsiama Sheku Amadu Tejan Fasuluku Sonsiama III (elected 13/05/2005)

Soa Torceh Foryoh; Gbenda; Nyanka Emanuel Tamba Foryoh (elected 07/12/2009)

Tankoro Saquee; Gandor; Ghense Gombu; Kange Paul Ngaba Saquee V (elected 10/03/2006)

Toli Soluko; Ngongou Nyansenkori Soluko J. Bockarie (elected 27/12/2009)

(Conteh n.d., 62, 68-70).

#### 2. Koidu Town and the Chiefdom of Gbense

According to sources, Koidu is located within the chiefdom of Gbense (Reed and Robinson 20 Oct. 2012, 84; Associate Professor 23 June 2015; Sierra Leone Web n.d.). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, an associate professor of political science at Fordham University, who has conducted research on the paramount chieftaincies of Sierra Leone, stated that "Gbense chiefdom is located in Kono district, and the chiefdom includes Koidu (district capital) - which is located at the southern end of the chiefdom" (Associate Professor 23 June 2015). The same source also stated that the headquarters of the paramount chiefdom of Gbense has "been located at different times in Yardu or Koidu" (ibid.). According to an unpublished manuscript by a James Robinson, a professor of government (IGC n.d.a.), and Tristan Reed, a PhD candidate in economics (IGC n.d.b), both affiliated with Harvard University, the headquarters of Gbense's paramount chiefdom was located at Yardu village as of 2012 (Reed and

Robinson 20 Oct. 2012, 84).

Sources report variations in the name of the current paramount chief of Gbense as follows: "Sahr Fengai Korgbede Kaimachiandeh" (Associate Professor 23 June 2015), "Sahr Fengai" (Reed and Robinson 20 Oct. 2012, 84), and "Sahr Fengai Kaimachiande" (Conteh n.d., 62). Some sources state that Sahr Fengai was elected paramount chief of Gbense in 2002 (Associate Professor 23 June 2015; Consultant 25 June 2015; Reed and Robinson 20 Oct. 2012, 84), while a report on paramount chieftaincy, written by M. N. Conteh, an election administrator "attached to the National Electoral Commission of Sierra Leone," indicates that he was elected on 13 January 2003 (Conteh n.d., 62). According to the Associate Professor of political science, the predecessor to Sahr Fengai was Paramount Chief S. M. Tholley, "who died in April 2001" (Associate Professor 23 June 2015). The same source added that "it is unclear how long he [Tholley] ruled. During some earlier portion of the civil war (1991-2002), it is entirely possible that Gbense did not have a serving paramount chief, as many fled or were targets of violence" (ibid.). The consultant indicated that Gbense "was ruled by Sahr Yanfande Thorlie II from 1971 until 1998. The chieftaincy was then vacant through the end of the war, until in 2002 [when] Sahr Fengai of the Korgbede family was elected chief" (Consultant 25 June 2015). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

### 3. The Election of Paramount Chiefs

Sources indicate that only members of "ruling" families or houses within a chiefdom are able to run in an election for the role of paramount chief (Reed and Robinson 20 Oct. 2012, 7; Sierra Leone 2009, Sec. 8; Associate Professor 23 June 2015). These "ruling families" were established in each chiefdom prior to Sierra Leone's independence in 1961 (ibid.; Reed and Robinson 20 October 2012, 7). Section 8 of the Chieftaincy Act (2009) of Sierra Leone provides that

8. (1) A person is qualified to stand as a candidate in a paramount chieftaincy election if-

he was born in wedlock to a rightful claimant in a recognized ruling house in the chiefdom; or

where tradition so specifies, he or she has direct paternal or maternal lineage to a rightful claimant in a recognized ruling house, whether born outside wedlock or not. (Sierra Leone 2009)

A copy of the Chieftaincy Act (2009) of Sierra Leone has been attached to this Response.

According to sources, the election date for paramount chieftaincy is set no later than 12 months following the occurrence of a vacancy in the office of paramount chief for any chiefdom in Sierra Leone (Conteh n.d., 29; Sierra Leone 2009, Sec. 2). According to the Chieftaincy Act (2009),

2. Not later than twelve months after a vacancy occurs in the office of Paramount Chief, whether by the death, removal or otherwise of the previous holder of the office, the Chiefdom Councillors of the chiefdom shall elect a new Paramount Chief for the chiefdom in accordance with this Act and the customary law of the chiefdom. (ibid.)

The Chieftaincy Act (2009) also notes that

7. (1) In any paramount chieftaincy election, the responsibility of the Government is limited to only the facilitation of the process so as to ensure that the election is conducted in a fair and transparent manner. (ibid., sec. 7)

Conteh's report similarly indicates that the Electoral Commission (EC) conducts the elections of paramount chiefs (Conteh n.d., 29).

According to the same source, elections for a paramount chief are conducted exclusively by "chiefdom councillors" (Conteh n.d., 30). Sections 4 and 5 of the Chieftaincy Act likewise state that only a pre-approved list of chiefdom councillors are entitled to vote in paramount chief elections (Sierra Leone 2009, Sec. 4, 5). Reportedly, one chiefdom councillor must be appointed for every 20 tax payers in a chiefdom (ibid., Sec. 4; Conteh n.d., 30). Conteh's report states that a Two Round System (TRS) is used for paramount chief elections (ibid., 38). The same source indicates that

[u]nder the TRS, a winning candidate must poll at least fifty-five percent (55%) of total valid votes cast in the first round. If no candidate polls the required 55% votes cast in the first round, then a second round of election is held between the two candidates with the highest votes in the first round. In this round, the candidates with the least votes shall be eliminated leaving only the first two candidates with the highest votes in the first election. The second ballot, which usually takes place immediately after the first ballot, is conducted on the basis of a simple majority. (ibid., 38)

Sources report that once elected, paramount chiefs hold their office for life (Associate 25 June 2015; Professor 23 June 2015; Assistant Professor 23 June 2015). The Assistant Professor stated that paramount chiefs guard their positions for life "unless there are serious breaches of protocol discovered, or their rule is so unpopular as to cause calls for resignation" (ibid.). The same source added that chiefs have been removed from office for offences like "excessive taxation, embezzlement, or other signs that they [were] living far too lavishly at the expense of their people," but also noted that a paramount chief being deposed "is not actually all that common" (ibid.). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

#### 4. Roles and Duties of Paramount Chiefs

A report on paramount chiefs in Sierra Leone, researched jointly by six NGOs, describes the paramount chieftaincy of Sierra Leone as a "sacred institution, built on tradition and culture" (PICOT et al. n.d., 5). A blog post by the Sherbro Foundation, an NGO that promotes local development and education in rural Sierra Leone (Sherbro Foundation n.d.), similarly states that paramount chiefs "are a long standing country institution that ensures basic law and order, management of local land rights and maintaining traditional practices" (ibid. 26 Aug. 2014). According to sources, paramount chiefs in Sierra Leone are charged with the following roles and responsibilities:

Serving as "custodians of the land" (Professor 22 June 2015; PICOT et al. n.d., 9);

Maintaining customs, traditions and local justice (ibid.; Associate Professor 23 June 2015; Sierra Leone 2009, Sec. 29);

Act as arbiters of land-use rights (Associate Professor 23 June 2015);

Supervising local tax collections and assisting appropriate authorities in collecting lawful taxes (ibid.; Professor 22 June 2015; Sierra Leone 2009, Sec. 29);

Supervising sub-chief elections (ibid.; Associate Professor 23 June 2015);

Managing sub-chiefs to work in the interest of their people (PICOT et al. n.d., 9);

Elaborating bylaws (Associate Professor 23 June 2015; PICOT et al. n.d., 9) in consultation with the community (ibid.);

Settling disputes/conflicts among the people (ibid.; Professor 22 June 2015; Assistant Professor 23 June 2015);

Mobilizing resources for development programmes or activities (PICOT et al. n.d., 9) or serving as development "agents" (Associate Professor 23 June 2015; Sierra Leone 2009, Sec. 29);

Overseeing the "purposeful and judicious use" of chiefdom funds (PICOT et al. n.d., 9);

Ensuring passage of relevant bylaws for Chiefdom Councils (Associate Professor 23 June 2015).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

## References

Assistant Professor of anthropology, University of Notre Dame. 23 June 2015. Correspondence with the Research Directorate.

Associate Professor of political science, Fordham University. 23 June 2015. Correspondence with the Research Directorate.

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Sierra Leone. 2009. *Chieftaincy Act, 2009 (No. 10 of 2009)*. [Accessed 23 June 2015]

Sierra Leone Web. N.d. "The 149 Chiefdoms of Sierra Leone." [Accessed 19 June 2015]

## Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: The following were unable to provide information for this Response: Associate Professor of political studies, Queen's University; Professor of international

development, London School of Economics and Political Science.

Attempts to contact the following were unsuccessful within the time constraints of this Response: Canada - High Commission of Canada to Ghana, Togo, and Sierra Leone; Professor and Director of Program of African Studies, Northwestern University; Professor of international development, University of Birmingham; Professor of political science, University of Richmond; Sierra Leone - Embassy of Sierra Leone in Washington, DC; Sierra Leone Policy Watch.

Internet sites, including: Africa Confidential; African Research Bulletin; Agence France-Presse; Al Jazeera; AllAfrica.com; Amnesty International; BBC; Brookings Institution; Canada - High Commission of Canada to Ghana, Togo, and Sierra Leone, International Development Research Centre; ecoi.net; The Economist; Factiva; Freedom House; The Globe and Mail; Human Rights Watch; The New York Times; Reuters; Sierra Leone - Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development; Sierra Leone Policy Watch; The Washington Post; Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.

#### Attachment

Sierra Leone. 2009. Chieftaincy Act, 2009 (No. 10 of 2009). [Accessed 23 June 2015]

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