



Immigration and
Refugee Board of Canada

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

Sierra Leone: Birth certificates and national identity cards, including requirements and procedures, appearance and security features; document issued to replace a missing birth certificate; circumstances in which a Certified True Copy BC/99 is issued; prevalence of fraudulent copies of these documents; whether the government has ever suspended the issuance of birth certificates or other identity documents (2010-October 2015)

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1. Birth Certificates

Sources indicate that birth certificates in Sierra Leone are issued by the Chief Registrar [or Office of the Registrar of Births and Deaths (US n.d.)] (PI 10 Oct. 2015; UN 7 Oct. 2015). The Chief Registrar is part of the Ministry of Health [or Ministry of Health and Sanitation (ibid.)] (Sierra Leone 1983, Part II, Art. 3). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a representative of the UN Development Programme (UNDP) in Sierra Leone further indicated that the Ministry of Health and Sanitation receives assistance from UNICEF and Plan International (PI), a children's development organization with presence in over 60 countries (PI n.d.), in the issuance of birth certificates in the country (UN 9 Oct. 2015a). The Births and Death Registration Act of 1983 contains information on the procedures to register a birth (Part III), the persons responsible for notifying and registering a birth (Part III), delayed registration (Part III, art. 18), and offenses and penalties associated with birth registration (Part V) (Sierra Leone 1983). A copy of the Act is attached to this Response (Attachment 1).

1.1 Types of Birth Certificates and Fees

Sources indicate the existence of the following types of birth certificates:

"Original" [or "Current"] birth certificates: provided free of charge, for birth registrations that take place within one month from the date of birth;

"Late" birth certificates: provided for birth registrations that take place between one month and one year from the date of birth, and whereby a penalty fee must be paid;

"Delayed" birth certificates: provided for birth registrations that take place after one year from the date of birth, and whereby a penalty fee must also be paid;

"Certified True Copy" birth certificate: provided to replace a missing "Original" birth certificate, whereby a fee must be paid (UN 7 Oct. 2015; PI 10 Oct. 2015).

The UNDP representative in Sierra Leone provided to the Research Directorate correspondence from a representative from PI, who said the following fee structure applies for these birth certificates:

"Late" birth certificates: 1,200 Sierra Leonean Leones (SLL) [C\$0.36];

"Delayed" birth certificates: 3,000 SLL [C\$0.89]; and

"Certified True Copy" birth certificate: 5,000 SLL [C\$1.49] (PI 10 Oct. 2015).

The PI representative indicated that, in order to obtain a "Late," "Delayed," or "Certified True Copy" birth certificate, the applicant must provide an affidavit from a justice of the peace or a commissioner of oaths; a letter justifying the reasons to request one of these birth certificates; and go through an interview process to substantiate the application (ibid.). The PI representative also indicated that the information obtained during the interview will be matched against the records available in the Registrar's office, especially for missing birth certificates (ibid.). The UNDP representative indicated that a "Certified True Copy" birth certificate is a replacement, not an "Original" birth certificate (UN 7 Oct. 2015). The PI representative noted that no other document replaces an "Original" birth certificate but a "Certified True Copy" birth certificate (PI 10 Oct. 2015).

1.2 Appearance and Security Features of Birth Certificates

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a representative of UNICEF in Sierra Leone provided samples of an "Original," a "Late/Delayed," and a "Certified True Copy" birth certificate, which are attached to this Response (Attachments 2, 3 and 4,

respectively). The PI representative provided samples of an "Original" birth certificate and a generic birth certificate, which are attached to this Response (Attachments 5 and 6, respectively).

In further correspondence with the Research Directorate, the UNICEF representative in Sierra Leone indicated that the size of birth certificates is approximately 21 centimeters by 19 centimeters and that the information it contains is handwritten (UN 12 Oct. 2015). The UNICEF representative also indicated that birth certificates are stamped and signed by the Chief Registrar or his or her "designate," which could be the District Registrar or the person in charge of "peripheral" health units (*ibid.*). Further information about security features of birth certificates could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

1.3 Certified True Copy BC/99

According to the UNICEF representative, the last two digits in the title of a Certified True Copy birth certificate indicate the year during which the certificate was printed; therefore, a "Certified True Copy BC/99" birth certificate is a replacement birth certificate that was printed in 1999 (UN 7 Oct. 2015).

2. National Identity Cards

2.1 Issuance

The National Registration Act of 2008 regulates the issuance of national identity cards in Sierra Leone (Sierra Leone 2008). A copy of the Act is attached to this Response (Attachment 7). An undated draft document produced by the National Registration Secretariat (NRS) of Sierra Leone, the government agency responsible for the "harmonisation and standardisation of the registration policies and programmes of all those institutions in Sierra Leone that have responsibility for [v]ital statistics," indicates that the national identity card is issued to all registered Sierra Leoneans (Sierra Leone n.d., 1). According to the same document, in order to obtain a national identity card, applicants must be six years or older and provide one of the following: a birth certificate, a Sierra Leonean passport, a voter identification card, or a naturalization certificate (*ibid.*, 1-2). The NRS document also indicates that applicants must pay 2,500 SLL [C\$0.74] for the registration form, and 10,000 SLL [C\$2.97] every five years for the identification card, but that these fees are subject to periodic review (*ibid.*). However, the Keesing Reference Systems' website indicates that the national identity card is valid for three years (n.d.). The NRS document further indicates that it takes three working days to issue the national identity card (Sierra Leone n.d., 1). Additional and corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

A May 2014 report produced by PI based on a field study on birth registration and children's rights in Sierra Leone indicates that survey participants have obtained a national identity card without providing a birth certificate (PI May 2014, 8, 34). According to a participant interviewed in 2013 in Porto Loco, authorities asked him for a birth certificate in order to issue that national identity card, but after indicating that he did not have one in possession, he was issued the card "anyway" (*ibid.*, 34). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2.2 Appearance and Security Features of National Identity Cards

Information on the appearance of the Sierra Leonean national identity card was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

A sample of the national identity card found on the Keesing Reference Systems website is attached to this Response (Attachment 8).

Information about security features could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

3. Fraudulent Documents

Information on fraudulent Sierra Leonean birth certificates and national identity cards was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

On 22 September 2012, Sierra Express Media, a newspaper based in Freetown, reported that the Sierra Leone embassy in Senegal had seized over 15 Sierra Leonean fake documents, including passports, birth certificates, identity cards, and resident permits. According to the Sierra Leone embassy staff, the documents seized were either "forged, tampered with, expired, fraudulently obtained or in the hands of the wrong persons" (Sierra Express Media 22 Sept. 2012). The newspaper article further indicates that, according to the embassy staff, fraudulent Sierra Leone passports are "in the hands of most Nigerians and Guineans living and doing business in neighboring Cape Verde" (ibid.).

4. Suspension of Issuance of Birth Certificates or Other Identity Documents

According to the UNICEF representative,

[t]he government has never officially suspended the issuance of birth certificates or other identity documents at any point in time. During the 90's however, the government was constrained in the printing of birth registration documents. As a result, there was a scarcity of birth registration forms and birth certificates could not be issued. The details on reported births were recorded at the registration centres, and people were asked to return at a later date in the hope that certificates would be available then. Some did not.

During the civil unrest in Sierra Leone, issuance of certificates was not suspended but the Birth Registration office would be closed or staff would stay away from work if there was news of a pending attack. (UN 9 Oct. 2015b)

Additional and corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

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

Keesing Reference Systems. N.d. "Sierra Leone - Domestic Identity Card."

Plan International (PI). 10 October 2015. Correspondence from a representative to the Research Directorate through the UNDP in Sierra Leone.

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United Nations (UN). 12 October 2015. UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), Sierra Leone. Correspondence from a representative to the Research Directorate.

_____. 9 October 2015a. UN Development Programme (UNDP), Sierra Leone. Correspondence from a representative to the Research Directorate.

_____. 9 October 2015b. UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), Sierra Leone. Correspondence from a representative to the Research Directorate.

_____. 7 October 2015. UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), Sierra Leone. Correspondence from a representative to the Research Directorate.

United States (US). N.d. Department of State. "Sierra Leone Reciprocity Schedule." [Accessed 18 Sept. 2015]

Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Cordaid; Sierra Leone - Embassy in Washington, DC, Ministry of Health and Sanitation, National Electoral Commission; three lawyers in civil practice based in Sierra Leone.

Internet sites, including: ACP Times; AllAfrica; Awareness Times; Awoko; Eldis; Heal Sierra Leone; IDG Connect; Sierra Leone - Embassy in Ottawa, Ministry of Health and Sanitation, National Electoral Commission, Police; The Sierra Leone Telegraph; United Nations - Refworld, ReliefWeb, World Health Organization; United States - Agency for International Development, Central Intelligence Agency.

Attachments

1. Sierra Leone. 1983. The Births and Deaths Registration Act, 1983. Copy provided to the Research Directorate by a representative of the UN Development Programme in Sierra Leone.

2. Sierra Leone. N.d. Ministry of Health and Sanitation, Office of Chief Registrar. Original BC/2015. Sample sent to the Research Directorate by a representative of the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), Sierra Leone, on 7 October 2015.

3. Sierra Leone. N.d. Ministry of Health and Sanitation, Office of Chief Registrar. Late/Delayed BC/2012. Sample sent to the Research Directorate by a representative of the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), Sierra Leone, on 7 October 2015.

4. Sierra Leone. N.d. Ministry of Health and Sanitation, Office of Chief Registrar. Certified True Copy BC/2014. Sample sent to the Research Directorate by a representative of the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), Sierra Leone, on 7 October 2015.

5. Sierra Leone. N.d. Ministry of Health and Sanitation, Office of Chief Registrar. Original BC/2014. Sample sent to the Research Directorate by a representative of Plan International (PI) on 10 October 2015.

6. Sierra Leone. N.d. Generic birth certificate. Sample sent to the Research Directorate by a representative of Plan International (PI) on 10 October 2015.

7. Sierra Leone. 2008. The National Registration Act, 2008. [Accessed 19 Sept. 2015]

8. Keesing Reference Systems. N.d. "Sierra Leone- Domestic Identity Card."

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