SPECIAL BRIEFING ON THE STATE OF AMPUTATED AND SEVERELY WOUNDED WAR VICTIMS IN SIERRA LEONE

I. The History

In the same sense that Rwanda is war widely known for war genocide, Sierra Leone’s post-war traumatic history is most remembered in the surviving image of amputated war victims. The war which started in 1991 and ended in 2002 claimed nearly 1000 amputated fatalities and about 2000 severely wounded victims. They included children, women and able-bodied bread-winning elderly and young men. Along with their non-wounded families, they all accounted for 10,000 affected persons by January 6 1999. 90% of the atrocities against the country’s estimated 3000 amputees and war wounded victims and their 7000 families were instigated by rebels during their battle for Freetown in January 1996. The main reason for the rebels’ action was to punish civilians for their support for West African troops who unseated their military regime from power a year earlier in 1998. The other few cases, which accounted 10% of atrocities against amputees and war-wounded, were instigated by rebels in 1996, mainly in the southern region, against civilians for expressing their franchise during the 1996 presidential elections which brought President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah to power, thus preventing the continuation of a military regime.

II. Amputee Programs

Past and present amputee programs have ranged from surgical/medical assistance to welfare, livelihood and recreational support. Through government’s coordination and leadership efforts, the support programs were mainly carried out by NGOs, particularly the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), Handicapped International (HI) and MSF France. Through the Community Reintegration and Rehabilitation Project (CRRP) which was implemented between 1998 and 2001, the Bank helped to complement other efforts by the Sierra Leone government and other development partners to facilitate the resettlement and reintegration of war victims (including amputees) and ex-combatants. In so doing, the Bank contributed to the restoration of social services and infrastructure which helped a lot in the resettlement of all war victims, including amputees.

III. Current Situation

There are currently 36 amputee settlements across the country, consisting of an average of 10 households per settlement, implying that there are a little over 360 amputee and war-wounded households for whom housing assistance have been provided through funds leveraged by the Norwegian Refugee Council. Most of the amputees who were not provided housing have been fully reintegrated into their communities of origin. Since the war ended in 2002, leading to the massive scaling down of relief assistance in the country, systematic support to the amputees and the war-wounded has ceased. This has led to an advocacy drive by the amputees and wounded association for war reparations. They have been making reference to the Lome Peace Accord (LMA) and the recommendations of the truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) as the basis for their advocacy. Specifically, they have advocating for a government pension scheme, and sometimes, for legal assistance to instigate lawsuits against the governments of Liberia, Cote D’ivoire, Burkina Faso and Libya as
well as multi national corporations who were allegedly purchasing blood diamonds and perpetrating the atrocities in Sierra Leone.