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**Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union
on the situation in Sierra Leone**

The EU is concerned about the continued instability in Sierra Leone and, in particular, the civilian casualties in Freetown.

Following the recent fighting, the need now is for targeted humanitarian operations to start as soon as possible to relieve the suffering of the people. We urge ECOMOG to cooperate with the UN, ECHO and other aid agencies to facilitate this process, to ensure that international humanitarian law is upheld and to assure the security of those engaged in providing such relief.

The EU further urges all those involved in the conflict in Sierra Leone to respect the lives of EU citizens and demands the immediate release of all hostages from EU Member States.

The EU believes that the peaceful future of Sierra Leone can only be assured by a process of reconciliation, as was envisaged under the Abidjan Peace Accord and the Conakry Agreement. We urge all parties to work to this end. The swift return of the democratic Government of President Kabbah is an important first step.