

INFORMATION SHEET RELATING TO DEATHS IN SIERRA LEONE

The death of a relative or a friend can be a traumatic experience. When the death occurs overseas, family and friends in the UK can feel additional distress as they are unfamiliar with foreign procedures and perhaps are unable to communicate in the language of the country where the death occurred. You may be uncertain about what to do next or who to contact for advice. Consular Directorate of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and our High Commission in Sierra Leone are ready to help as far as they can. These notes are designed to help you through the practical arrangements you will need to make. You should be aware that procedures and standards in Sierra Leone may differ to those in the United Kingdom and that, while we understand your need for arrangements to be made quickly, this is not always possible.

The information contained in this document is not meant to be a definitive statement of the law, nor is it to be taken as a substitute for independent legal advice.

Autopsies/Post Mortems

Autopsies are carried out where the police believe a death is suspicious, or when the Doctor, or family, wish to ascertain the cause of death. Autopsies can also be carried out at the specific request of a bereaved family, in which case a written request must be made to the Mortuary (this may take time to be granted). In all cases, families can receive a copy of the autopsy results, although these may take several months to be issued. Sierra Leone does not retain organs of the deceased. Sierra Leone's medical facilities are not equipped to perform organ transplants.

Mortuary Facilities

Sierra Leone's main mortuary is located at Connaught government hospital in central Freetown. There is currently only one pathologist in Sierra Leone - Dr Koroma - who is based at Connaught hospital mortuary (Contact details under 'Hospitals' below).

Medical and mortuary facilities in Sierra Leone are very poor. Overcrowding as well as erratic electricity supplies tend to hinder preservation. Embalming is possible in the capital but standards are lower than that in the UK. Hospital facilities outside of Freetown do not have regular electricity supplies and facilities are extremely limited. If a death has occurred outside of Freetown it is important to move the remains to the mortuary in Freetown as soon as possible. However, even the hospitals in Freetown suffer from power shortages, particularly Connaught Hospital, which is the Government Hospital and the location of the main mortuary and only pathologist in the country.

There is no standard price for an autopsy/post mortem. The price for foreign nationals is far higher than for Sierra Leonean nationals. We recommend you ask the funeral home/undertaker to help you liaise with the mortuary and agree the costs. Funeral homes report that the average cost of an autopsy/post mortem for a foreign national is between US\$800 and US\$1500 although some international organisations have been known to pay up to US\$2000.

Burial

Sierra Leone is mainly a Muslim country but Christian funerals can be arranged in accordance with local laws.

If the deceased has been embalmed, they are usually buried within one month of the month of the death of the individual concerned. If the remains have not been embalmed, local tradition demands that the remains be buried within 48 hours after the death of the individual concerned, although this is not always enforced by law. However, there are exceptions (i.e. for religious/cultural reasons, and/or because of delays in transporting the remains for embalming).

Costs vary depending on the exchange rate, but the estimated costs of a basic local burial (within 1 week) are £800. This charge includes collection/transportation of remains, a wooden casket, funeral home charges (including embalming), administrative fees, cost of a burial plot in a public cemetery, as well as a brief service.

Cremation

Cremation is also an option in Sierra Leone, but official government authority must be granted. Local cremation facilities and urns are available. Cremations take place in an open area in a cemetery, rather than in enclosed facilities as one might find in the UK.

To arrange a cremation, family members, or, the funeral home on their behalf, must submit an application to the Ministry of Health marked for the attention of the Director-General, Medical Services, and provide a copy to the office of the City Council.

There is only one crematorium in Freetown, which is connected to a Hindu temple. There is no official fee for the service, but the temple request that you make some form of donation.

Caskets and Containers

New, and used, caskets are available at short notice, and basic caskets are available from £100 upwards. Wooden caskets with zinc lining, as well as metal caskets, are available for repatriating the deceased back to the UK in accordance with the Department of Health guidelines. These are significantly more expensive.

Repatriation

According to Sierra Leone law, all repatriations must be carried out by a funeral home. The funeral home will deal with all the administration and arrangements in attending to the return of the remains. There are several funeral homes in Freetown that are capable of organising repatriation in partnership with an UK-based or international funeral director and/or travel insurance companies. You should be aware that currently only one commercial airline operating from Sierra Leone, SN Brussels, repatriates human remains. Their limited flight schedule means that repatriation of loved ones can take several weeks. Please see below for contact details of funeral homes.

The cost of repatriation varies, and is subject to the exchange rate and the type of casket used, but the estimated costs of any repatriation is £3,500 upwards. Family, or

friends, will need to factor in airfreight charges when repatriating the deceased to the UK.

Registration of Death and Death Certificates

Once death has been confirmed a doctor in Sierra Leone issues a 'Medical Certificate of Cause of Death'. This is not the same as a death certificate, which can be obtained from the Registrar of Deaths (see contact details below). All official documents in Sierra Leone are issued in English.

Obtaining a death certificate is likely to take less time if a local undertaker/funeral home assists you. It could take some time if organising yourself.

The authorities in Sierra Leone frequently make errors on death certificates, particularly in the spelling of names. Therefore, please ensure that you carefully check any Sierra Leone death certificate before repatriation to ensure that the name in particular is spelt correctly. This ensures all records are accurate and also avoids further distress for friends and relatives at an already difficult time.

Return of Personal Effects

Personal effects are usually handed over to the next of kin, or, other family members, on producing some sort of ID. Our High Commission cannot store personal effects in our offices. If next of kin, or, other family members, are not present in Sierra Leone, our High Commission can assist in helping you to return personal effects by commercial means. This can often be done through a funeral home when arrangements for repatriation are being made.

Police/Judicial Inquiries

A police report can be made available to the family of the victim if they request it. Either the police or the Director of Public Prosecution's office prosecutes cases depending on the severity of the charge.

Offences in Sierra Leone are classified into two main categories. They are felonies (e.g. murder, aggravated robbery etc) and misdemeanours (e.g. perjury, petty theft etc). Bail is available to anyone who has been arrested and detained, except in cases of treason, murder, aggravated robbery. However, in exceptional cases (such as capital offences), the Judge has the discretion to decide whether to grant a defendant bail. However, such applications are often refused.

The law provides for a fair trial. In practice the lack of judicial officers and facilities often produce long delays in the judicial process. Defendants have the right to be present and to consult with a Lawyer. The law provides for Lawyer at public expense, if defendants cannot afford their own. Defendants can confront or question witnesses against them, present witnesses and evidence on their own behalf, if they choose to defend themselves. Defendants enjoy a presumption of innocence as well as a right to appeal.

Legal Aid

Although the right to legal aid was recognised in Sierra Leone under their 1991 constitution, it has not formally enacted by parliament so is not currently available in Sierra Leone. For further details, please visit (www.lawcla.org).

Compensation

Compensation is payable in civil matters only. Damages and/or compensation may be ordered in favour of the successful party. If the order of the Court is not complied with, the property of the individual against whom the order is made will be confiscated and sold at auction and the proceeds will be used in satisfaction of the order.

Contacts:

1. Funeral Homes

Columbia Davies Memorial Funeral Parlour

Columbia Davies Drive

Off Circular Road

Freetown

Mobile No: +232 76 602 454/ /076 622408/076829727

Freetown Funeral Service

Accession Cemetery

Accession Town

Freetown

Tel no: +232 22 240 464/232 22 230 219

Mobile no: +232 76 611 162

Virtues Funeral Home

8B Bolling Street

Kingtom cemetery

Kingtom, Freetown

Sierra Leone

Office Mobile: /076699272/ 033 858037

Email: gmilanjohnson@yahoo.com

2. Cremation

Indian Temple

Wilkinson Road

Freetown

Tel no:

3. Government

Registrar of Births & Deaths

Birth and Death Division

Wilberforce Street

Freetown Sierra Leone

Mobile NO: 076 613370 / 033 613370

Freetown City Council
15 Wallace Johnson Street
Freetown
Tel no: +232 22 223 636

4. Hospitals

Dr Koroma
Connaught Hospital (Main Government Hospital has mortuary facilities)
Wallace Johnson Street
Freetown, Sierra Leone
Mobile: +232 76 668762

Brookfields Community Hospital
Hospital Secretary
Ibrahim Foday Musa
11 Kingharman Road
Brookfields
Freetown
Tel no: +232 33 524018 / 088 217009

Choithram's Memorial Hospital
Hill Station
Freetown
Tel no: +232 22 233 835/+232 76 980000

Emergency Hospital)
Peninsular Road
Goderich near Freetown
Mobile +232 76 611386
Website: <http://www.emergency.it>

5. Airlines/travel agencies:

IPC TRAVEL
22 Siaka Stevens Street
Mobile no: +232 76 898 888/+232 76 660 651
Aberdeen Branch: +232 77 444453

SN Brussels Airlines
30 Siaka Steven Street
3rd Floor Access Bank Building
Mobile no: +232 76 801 492 /076333777/088 333777
glemmen@brusselsairlines.com
www.flysn.com

Kenya Airways
13 Lamina Sankoh Street
Freetown
Mobile: +232 76 536899/076 961556/033 353489
Airport Mobile: +232 76 817399
www.kenya-airways.com

6. UK International Funeral Directors:

Co-Operative Internationals
221 Upper Richmond Rd
Putney
London
SW15 6SQ
Tel. +44 20 8788 5303
Fax +44 20 8788 2525
Email: henley.wright@letsco-operate.com
Website: www.letsco-operate.com

Phoenix International
13 The Broadway
Gunnersbury Lane
LONDON W3 8HR
Tel: +44 20 8993 8767
Rowland Brothers International
301-305 Whitehorse Rd
CROYDON CR0 2HR
Tel. +44 20 8684 2324
Fax +44 20 8684 8000
Website: www.rowlandbrothersinternational.co.uk
Email: info@rowlandbrothersinternational.co.uk

National Association of Funeral Directors
618 Warwick Road
SOLIHULL B91 1AA
Tel. +44 121 711 1343
Fax +44 121 711 1351
Website: www.nafd.org.uk
Email: info@nafed.org.uk

Healix International Ltd
15 castle Mews
High Street
Hampton
TW12 2NP
UK
Tel: +44 (0) 208 481 7777
Fax: +44 (0) 208 481 7778
Website: www.healix.com/international/private
Email: operations@healix.com

Kenyon Air Transportation

81 Westbourne Grove
London
W2 4UL
Tel: 020 7258 1130
Fax: 020 7243 3125
Email: katuk@dial.pipex.com

The above contact details are supplied by the British High Commission, for information only, on the understanding that no responsibility can be accepted by the High Commission, or any members of its staff, on the competency of any of the person whose details are shown below. Neither does the list denote any recommendation by the High Commission.

Please note that Sierra Leone does not have a reliable land line telephone system and as a result most people rely on mobile phones for business purposes. This means that business contact telephone numbers can often change as staff change. Every effort has been made to provide accurate contact details but due to the nature of communications in Sierra Leone, this is not always possible. If you find any errors please let us know so we can update our records

Consular Section
British High Commission
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