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“Sierra Leone’s Refugee All Stars” Transform Tragedy Into Inspiring Music, Tuesday, June 26 on PBS’s P.O.V. Series

Documentary Executive Produced by Ice Cube

“It’s as easy to fall in love with these guys as it was with the Buena Vista Social Club.”
– Vanessa Juarez, *Newsweek*

MEDIA ALERT – FACT SHEET

Summary: The **P.O.V.** series (a cinema term for “point of view”) celebrates its 20th year on PBS in 2007. P.O.V. is American television’s longest-running independent documentary series. The film **Sierra Leone’s Refugee All Stars (June 26)** is scheduled to air in recognition of the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) World Refugee Day (June 20). P.O.V. is broadcast **Tuesdays at 10 p.m.** (check local listings), June through September on PBS, with primetime specials in the fall and winter.

Description: P.O.V.’s **Sierra Leone’s Refugee All Stars** by Zach Niles and Banker White (www.pbs.org/pov/sierraleone), **Tuesday, June 26 on PBS**

If the refugee is today’s tragic icon of a war-ravaged world, then **Sierra Leone’s Refugee All Stars**, a reggae-inflected band born in the camps of West Africa, represents a real-life story of survival and hope. The six-member Refugee All Stars came together in Guinea after civil war forced them from their native Sierra Leone. Traumatized by physical injuries and the brutal loss of family and community, they fight back with the only means they have—music. The result is a tableau of tragedy transformed by the band’s inspiring determination to sing and be heard. The film is a *Diverse Voices Project* co-production.

Sierra Leone’s Refugee All Stars chronicles the band over three years, from Guinean refugee camps back to war-ravaged Sierra Leone, where they realize the dream of recording their first studio album. And so begins a musical phenomenon that is making the world hear the voices of West Africa’s refugees, while drawing support from Keith Richards, Paul McCartney, Ice Cube (an executive producer of the film) and Joe Perry.

Diverse in age and character, from Reuben M. Koroma, the sage, 42-year old songwriter and guiding light of the group, to Black Nature, an orphaned teenage rapper, Sierra Leone’s Refugee All Stars have a common bond in the loss and displacement caused by their homeland’s civil war, and a shared belief in the transformative power of music.

Related news: The band is on tour in the U.S. See www.sierraleonesrefugeeallstars.com for details. Sierra Leone’s Refugee All Stars also appear alongside R.E.M., U2, Green Day and others on the double-disc benefit compilation of John Lennon songs, *Instant Karma: The Amnesty International Campaign to Save Darfur*, released June 12. The band collaborated with Aerosmith on “Give Peace a Chance.”

Filmmakers: This is Zach Niles and Banker White’s first feature film. They both live in San Francisco. Zach, from Vermont, was part of the production and promotion of some of the largest rock-and-roll tours (The Rolling Stones, Paul McCartney, Madonna, Simon and

Garfunkel) from 1998 -2004. In 2001 he was the associate producer for the eight-part television series "Live at the Fillmore." He has lived and worked in South Africa and Cameroon. He says, "Even amidst their unimaginable hardships, we knew the All Stars' story would be not only a celebration of what is beautiful about Africa, but what is beautiful about the human spirit."

Banker, originally from Boston, is a multi-disciplinary artist in the San Francisco Bay Area. He has been a writer-director for many short films, and from 1994-96 he helped start a learning center in Ghana, the Kokrobitey institute. "Reuben said that the band had been writing and practicing all along, and were just waiting for us to arrive," says Banker. "He really was writing songs for the whole world to hear."

Credits: Co-directors/Co-producers: Zach Niles, Banker White
Executive Producers: Matt Alvarez, Steve Bing, Ice Cube, Shelley Lazar
Editors: Jim Bruce, Banker White
Cinematography: Banker White, Chris Jenkins, Andrew Mitchell
Musical Director: Chris Velan

Running time: 86:46

Awards & Festivals:

- International Documentary Association Nominee, Best Documentary Feature, 2006
- Full Frame Documentary Film Festival 2006, *Filmmaker Award* and *Audience Award*
- Miami International Film Festival 2006, *Audience Award*
- Nashville Film Festival 2006, *Impact of Music Award*
- South by Southwest (SXSW) Film Festival 2006, *Audience Award Runner Up*
- Human Rights Watch Film Festival 2005, *Best of the Fest Award*
- AFI Festival 2005, *Grand Jury Prize, Best Documentary*

P.O.V. Web: The **Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars** companion website (www.pbs.org/pov/sierraleone) offers a streaming video trailer of the film, an interview with filmmakers Zach Niles and Banker White (video, podcast and text); a list of related websites, organizations and books; a downloadable discussion guide and classroom activity; and special features:

Additional Scenes and Film Update: Watch an exclusive 18-minute video that picks up where the film left off. Follow the band back home to Sierra Leone and on tour with the filmmakers. Find out what happens to Reuben, Grace, Frank, Mohammed, Black Nature and the rest of the band when their record is released and they perform in the United States! Plus, get dates for the band's current tour going on this summer in the U.S.

Make Your Own Music Video: Reuben, Grace and the rest of Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars want you to create a music video for them. Use audio and video clips contributed by the filmmakers and the band on the Eyespot website during June and July to mix your masterpiece. The band will choose their favorite videos, which will be featured on the P.O.V. website in August. Winners will receive a copy of the band's first album, "Living Like a Refugee," on CD and a Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars t-shirt.

In Search of the Durable Solution: Read about the complex issues surrounding the rescue, protection, and resettlement of refugees in Africa and the United States in five interviews with people working in the field.

Outreach: P.O.V. is working with public television stations and national and community-based groups across the country to foster community dialogue around the issues presented in **Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars**. For a list of upcoming screening and discussion events, go to http://www.amdoc.org/outreach_news.php.

P.O.V. has also worked with nationally recognized media educator Dr. Faith Rogow to develop a facilitation guide with discussion questions and background information to help event organizers carry out substantive and sensitive discussions around the film's content. Cari Ladd created the lesson plan. In addition, the American Library Association and P.O.V. have created a multi-media resource list of related fiction and nonfiction books and videos that further explore the issues. The materials are available free of charge at www.pbs.org/pov/outreach.

Pressroom: Visit P.O.V.'s pressroom, www.pbs.org/pov/pressroom, for press releases, downloadable art, filmmaker biographies, transcripts and special features.

P.O.V.: Produced by American Documentary, Inc., and celebrating its 20th season on PBS in 2007, the award-winning P.O.V. series is the longest-running showcase on television to feature the work of America's best contemporary-issue independent filmmakers. Airing on PBS on Tuesdays at 10 p.m., June through September, with primetime specials during the year, P.O.V. has brought more than 250 documentaries to millions nationwide, and has a Webby Award-winning online series, *P.O.V.'s Borders*. Since 1988, P.O.V. has pioneered the art of presentation and outreach using independent nonfiction media to build new communities in conversation about today's most pressing social issues. More information about P.O.V is available at www.pbs.org/pov.

Major funding for P.O.V. is provided by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, the Ford Foundation, the Educational Foundation of America, PBS and public television viewers. Funding for P.O.V.'s *Diverse Voices Project* is provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, with additional support from JPMorgan Chase Foundation, the official sponsor of P.O.V.'s 20th Anniversary Campaign. P.O.V. is presented by a consortium of PBS stations including KCET Los Angeles, WGBH Boston, and Thirteen/WNET New York.

TAPE REQUESTS: Please note that broadcast versions of the films are available upon request, as the films may be edited to comply with new FCC regulations.

