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For immediate release

For months I told Bob Lloyd and *The Australian's* reporter, Shelley Gare, through my publisher, my agent, and my adoptive mother, that unfortunately they were wrong, that the man they claimed was my father was not my father, and that my mother and brothers were not alive, as Lloyd claimed. Last week, when *The Australian* sent reporters to my home in Sierra Leone, they were forced to acknowledge that this has been a hoax.

Now *The Australian's* reporters are trying to raise questions about the dates in my book, ***A Long Way Gone***, regarding when the war came to my village. They offer as "proof" a man named Mr. Barry who claims to have been the head of the school I attended when I was young. I have never heard of a Mr. Barry. The principal of my school was Mr. Sidiki Brahma.

The war in Sierra Leone began in 1991. My story, as I remember it and wrote it, began in 1993 when rebels "attacked the mining areas" (my words from the book) in my village while I was away with friends. I never saw my family again. *The Australian*, presumably, is basing their defamation of me on reports that the Sierra Rutile Mine was closed down by rebels in 1995. But there were rebels in my region, my village, and my life in 1993. They attacked throughout 1993 and 1994 before closing down the mine.

Others from Sierra Leone can bear witness to the truth of my story.

Leslie Mboka, National Chairman of the Campaign for Just Mining in Freetown, was a counselor at Benin Home, the rehabilitation center in Freetown, Sierra Leone, which I entered in January 1996. He told this to my publisher, Sarah Crichton, on the telephone today:

"A gentleman named Wilson was here investigating regarding Ishmael Beah's book, and I told him emphatically—emphatically—that Ishmael's accounts are accurate and correct. Wilson was going to Mogbwemo to find out if Ishmael Beah's family was alive. When he came back to Freetown, he said he couldn't find anyone alive, and the man who said he was Ishmael's father was actually just a relative. But then he asked, what about confusion with the dates?"

And I said, there is no problem with the dates. The rebels made sporadic attacks on the mining communities between '93 and '94, leading up to and in preparation for the major assault in '95. In fact, military personnel were deployed to the area because there were these sporadic raids. Ishmael was caught in one of the earlier attacks.

I told all this to Peter Wilson. I told him everything that Ishmael wrote is accurate and completely factual, and I explained to him what was confusing him.

I do not understand what his paper's agenda is. I do not understand why they are trying to blackmail this brilliant and honest young man."

Mboka was contacted by *The New York Times* when they fact-checked the excerpts of my book which they published. His testimony did not appear in *The Australian's* reporting.

My publisher also spoke today with Alusine Kamara, former director of Benin Home, who now lives in Boston.

"I have known Ishmael since he was a soldier and he came to our center. I have read his book, and I have no doubt that what he says is true. I do not know why anyone would want to question what Ishmael writes about. He did not write a history of the whole war, he wrote about his experiences. And if anyone has any doubts about what Ishmael went through, or what it was like for those soldiers, I refer them to the BBC World—they made many documentaries about our center."

I was right about my family. I am right about my story. This is not something one gets wrong. *The Australian's* reporters have been calling my college professors, asking if I "embellished" my story. They published my adoptive mother's address, so she now receives ugly threats. They have used innuendo against me when there is no fact. Though apparently, they believe anything they are told—unless it comes from me or supports my account. Sad to say, my story is all true.

Sincerely,

Ishmael Beah

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Peter Wilson of *The Australian* has asked us to point out that *The Australian* did not publish Ishmael Beah's adoptive mother's "address," but her Internet address. Also, although Mr. Barry is referred to in the 1/19 *Australian* article as the "principal" of the secondary school Beah and his older brother had attended, Wilson later states in that article that Mr. Barry was only promoted to principal in 2002, and in subsequent articles Mr. Barry is referred to as both "boarding master" and "teacher," but not as "head" of the school at the time Beah attended. Wilson also included a quote from an interview with Leslie Mboka in his 1/21 article in *The Australian*: "Leslie Mboka, the first social worker to meet Beah in a rehabilitation camp for former child soldiers in early 1996, said the book accurately recounted Mr. Mboka's experiences with Beah in Freetown but 'he was a young child who had been through terrible things so he could easily have got things mixed up.'"