



## AFRICA SOUTH OF THE SAHARA

# Citizenship Activity 6

## Writing a Letter to Your Government Officials

**Why It's Important** Every day there are dozens of articles in your local newspapers, on the television news, and in newsmagazines about Africa. News articles may be about how Sudanese children were kidnapped and forced to be soldiers. The articles may discuss an AIDS epidemic that destroyed half the teenagers in some African nations, or the articles might be about Sierra Leone. Children there have been massacred and badly hurt during years of fighting for control of the diamond mines.

Sometimes events that take place in other parts of the world seem far away. What do these things that happen so far away have to do with your life? As a compassionate human being, you need to take responsibility to help others whenever you can. A child's cry—whether next door or halfway around the world—needs to be heard and answered by anyone willing to listen and act. One individual can do much to change the world into a more humane and kinder place.

### Background

Few Americans had heard of the small West African country of Sierra Leone. Then American newspapers began printing articles about the children there whose arms and legs were cut off by rebel fighters. Matthew Mirones read such an article and decided to do something to help these children. Mirones's company makes artificial devices called prostheses (prahs•TEE•seez) that replace missing parts of the human body. With his congressional representative, they contacted helpful organizations, such as Friends of Sierra Leone, an organization devoted to helping the people of Sierra Leone.

As a result of one newspaper article and the action of one individual, children from Sierra Leone were flown to New York City. There they received orthopedic surgery and prosthetic (prahs•TET•ik) fittings.

### Questions to Consider

**Directions:** Answer the questions below on a separate sheet of paper.

1. Why do you think it is important to read newspapers or news magazines and to watch some television news programs? Do you think you can read or listen to too many newspapers or programs? Why or why not?
2. Do you think it is important as a citizen of the United States to help people in other countries? Why or why not?
3. Do you think, as one student, you can make a difference in the world? Why or why not? Do you know of any stories where other young people made a difference in the world? Do you think these young people are different from you or more special in some way? Explain.

