

2009 NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COUNCIL MEETING
OPENING STATEMENT BY THE NATIONAL CHAIRMAN

Founding members of this our great party.

Past Leaders, Ex-President Alhaji Ahmed Tejan Kabba and Ex-VP Solomon E. Berewa

Past Chairmen, Dr. Sama Banya, Alhaji U.N.S. Jah

Past National Secretary-General, Dr. Prince A. Harding

Past Members of Parliament and Councilors

Past Ministers and Ambassadors

Past Executive Members

Deputy National Chairman and other Executive Members

District and Constituency Executive Members

Hon. Members of Parliament

Chairmen, Mayors and Councilors of Local Councils

Grand Chief Patrons, Chief Patrons, Patrons and ordinary members

Good Morning,

Before I make any statement I entreat you all to rise and pray silently for a peaceful repose of the souls of our dear departed party faithful since we left Kenema after our last convention.

In March 2009, this great party, the SLPP, democratically elected a new executive including me as Chairman to man the affairs of the Party. Let me first and foremost thank all of you for the trust you placed in us and formally welcome you to the first National Executive Council Meeting as Chairman of the Party.

Immediately after the March 2009 National Party Conference in Kenema, the executive started the first task of reconciliation with those that were not voted into the various offices. I and other executive members visited our colleagues and appealed to them for peace and reconciliation and for us to work together for the success of the Party. Recognizing the invaluable role these people have played in the Party, we offered some of them the opportunity to serve the Party as Chairmen and members of committees.

Notwithstanding all these efforts, we still await the full support to the administration of this Party from some of our colleagues. In this my first National Executive Council meeting, I now appeal to my fellow contestants and their supporters to join me in rebuilding our party so that 2012, sharp 12 we are back to service for the people of our beloved country.

As NEC provides the forum to meet a large number of stakeholders of the Party, it is crucial that we live up to the constitutional provision of at least one such meeting every year. Under my chairmanship, I will ensure that the party meets that requirement. NEC provides a unique opportunity to inform the members of what is happening, have vital input from them and create synergy between officials of the party and stakeholders for the effective running of the party. This is even more crucial when, as it is now, the party is in opposition. This executive shall ensure that NEC does not only meet to plan for a Party Conference and elect national officers but also ensure that this forum provides a unique opportunity to engage in frank policy discussions, create cohesion and reconcile our differences, all in the spirit of developing a vibrant party.

Fellow Party Members, the theme of this meeting
“STRENGTHENING COHESION AND COMMITMENT WITHIN SLPP”
is appropriate and timely.

You will agree with me that our success come 2012 lies in our unity of purpose and commitment. This is why I am asking all of us to work together so that together we will achieve that objective.

Let me reiterate that my interest is to develop an effective and cohesive party that will take SLPP back to full service come 2012. This commitment is unequivocal and unambiguous.

We have made some progress since we took office 7 months ago. Although the Regional Chairmen and the National Secretary-General shall be giving some details of our achievements, I wish to highlight a few of them. We have:

- Signed the Joint Peace Communiqué following the attack on our party Headquarters.
- Thanks to the United Nations, we have secured funds for the rehabilitation of our party Headquarters. It is hoped, that this building shall be in a different form when you are here for the next meeting.
- revived the Unity Newspaper – which is the party’s only mouthpiece following the Government closure of our Radio. We are pursuing the matter in court and shall update you as the proceedings unfold.
- Increased dialogue and cooperation throughout the country and even beyond between the national executive and other organs of the Party including MPs, Councilors District Chairmen, Mayors and Chapters abroad.
- Increased revenue through party membership drive, enabling us to respond to the diverse needs of the party.
- Developed a database to secure records of our membership and putting in place effective systems for transparency and accountability.
- Reactivated our Diaspora branches in the USA and UK.
- Improved relationship between the Party and development partners.
- Over and above all, this executive has rekindled the confidence of the general membership of the party that come 2012, the party shall bounce back to full service.

Ladies and gentlemen, notwithstanding these successes the road has not been always smooth. We have been faced with several challenges. Some of which are:

- a) Developing the capacity of the Party to stand up to the myriad challenges of thuggery, injustices and misrule of the ruling APC.
- b) Continuing to enhance the image of the Party at home and abroad.
- c) Rebuilding trust and good working relationship with external partners.
- d) Repositioning ourselves as a credible and reliable government in waiting.
- e) Building Party Infrastructure.
- f) Mobilizing adequate resources for implementation of Party programmes and activities.
- g) Strengthening intra-party communication.
- h) Enhancing the capacities of executives at all levels.
- i) Instilling discipline in the Party.

Ladies and Gentlemen, as if the challenges I have mentioned are not enough, even our right to exist as party has come under attacks. Our party members and offices have been repeatedly attacked by APC hoodlums; our women and sisters were raped, our headquarters was vandalized and the Unity Radio destroyed and shut down.

Fellow Partisans, the unity and stability of this Country are threatened by the unrepentant nepotism of the APC. The bad old days are back. Since the APC assumed power, every week those perceived to be SLPP are summarily dismissed. Our brothers and sisters, sons and daughters are discriminated against in the award of scholarships and grants in tertiary institutions. Jobs and contracts are only for APC cronies.

Worst still, as I speak to you, I feel despondent when I look back at where we left our country and the current dismal state in which we now live after barely two years of APC misrule.

We have come to witness increased crime rate with a recreation of scenes of perpetual fear and insecurity reminiscent only of the war years. Citizens are increasingly losing confidence in the commitment and professionalism of the police force, an institution we and our development partners fought so hard to rebuild.

Furthermore, the economy is in free fall with the price of every commodity rising day after day. This is frightening! In spite of the depreciation of the US dollar against other international currencies like the Euro, the value of the Leone with respect to the US\$ is now estimated at over Le4, 000 to US\$1 representing almost 33% depreciation.

Ladies and gentlemen, please allow me to illustrate. Two years ago, a teacher with a family of six (6) who earned Le300,000 (about US\$100) monthly bought a bag of rice at Le60,000 and left home Le8,000 for other condiments daily. Given that rate the teacher was able to provide at least a meal a day for a family without recourse to “*Gbashi Gbashi*” – courtesy of Emerson.

Today, this same teacher with a family of six (6) earning Le300,000 (the 20% salary increase promised by APC Government last year is yet to materialise), buys a bag of rice at Le140,000. S/he provides Le10,000 daily for sauce. This means, he requires additional Le140,000 to afford a meal for the family – to prevent teacher from living in shame in the face of his children.

Ladies and gentlemen! The logic is clear. We now see the reason for the poor performance of our children in public exams. This situation is the same for our doctors and nurses who have the huge task of reversing the ugly trend of maternal mortality in the country. And sadly though, other citizens who receive fat per diems for trips abroad and un-tendered contracts – say their own today is better than yesterday.

Fellow Party Members, now let us look at our friends in APC. When you ask ministers about their achievements, the first response you get is that “we have got light”. Now let us come to Bumbuna. Bumbuna has taken more than forty years to develop and what is not normally mentioned is that APC was in power for more than 25 of those forty years. In fact, APC abandoned the project completely. It was first the NPRC in 1993 and later, the SLPP when we resumed governance in 1996 with Dr. Chernor Jalloh as

Minister of Energy and Power in 2001 who reactivated the Bumbuna project and by 2007, 95% of the project was completed. The gloating of APC over Bumbuna is only completing the remaining 5% of the project.

I will not end my address without mentioning the apparent state of confusion about the constitution that emerged from the Kenema convention.

As you are aware, for several weeks now, rumors have circulated and persisted accusing the National Executive Council (NEC) and especially me, National Chairman, of intentions to cause an amendment of the constitution that was approved overwhelmingly in Kenema during our last convention for personal reasons. While all efforts to address this issue in house were being pursued, my silence on this allegation may have given some substance of truth to this issue. I therefore wish to use this opportunity to state that there is absolutely no truth in this constitutional amendment accusation levied against me.

Indeed I had decided not to make any public statement on the issue because I had hoped that our efforts to reach an in-house resolution of the controversy would yield the desired dividend. However, in view of the sustained and widely circulated publications of Dr. Bubuakei Jabbie, the press briefing by Mr. Eke Halloway, and the publication of Dr Abass Bundu's letter to our Secretary General I have come to realize that my desire to have this issue resolved in-house is no longer possible. Hence, my decision to break my silence now.

Therefore, let me at this juncture give you a succinct background to the controversy.

Prior to my departure for the United States last June, I received a memo from the National Secretary-General stating that the Constitutional Review Committee (CRC) of which he is a member has completed their task and he was satisfied with the final document and wanted my approval for onward submission to PPRC as required by our constitution. After reading the document I realized that certain things that were never in the draft document and were never even mentioned at our convention in Kenema had made their way into the constitution. For example, the functions of the National Chairman were co-mingled with those of the National Secretary-General even though this issue was not discussed at Kenema.

Additionally even though the Kenema conference had agreed to make the North America Branch of the party (SLPPNA) its fifth region and accord it appropriate number of delegates, the document handed to me for submission accorded SLPPNA one delegate per 100 members. Because of these and other discrepancies between what was agreed at Kenema and what was in the document that was presented to me, we agreed that members of the executive should also read the document and make relevant comments for the attention of the Constitutional Review Committee (CRC).

At the time of my departure I categorically instructed my deputy Dr. Kadi Sesay and the Secretary-General that when the document has been editorially sanitized, they can forward it to PPRC even in my absence.

On my return to Sierra Leone in July, the issue was still pending and so I met the Chair of the review Committee; Lawyer Eke Holloway, the Secretary-General and Deputy National Chairman where I was told that the document cannot be substantially changed without another consultative conference to approve the new changes. Against this background, we were strongly advised by Lawyer Eke Holloway, the Chairman of the Legal team to convene a National Party Conference to resolve these outstanding issues. In the light of the above, I am very concerned that the impression is now being created by some members that we no longer need a consultative conference if the present document can be “sanitized” to remove alleged computerized “cut and paste” errors from the current draft. As Chairman of the party, I welcome this new Legal opinion wholeheartedly if only it could be formalized in writing by the same Legal Team that advised in writing for us to hold a National Party Conference.

Accordingly, I am now urging the CRC to “sanitize” the current document and present it to me in a tidy manner for my signature and expeditious deposition to the Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC) thus cancelling the need for any other National Delegates Conference to discuss this matter. However, there are concerns already raise by members regarding some portions of this document. T herefore we look forward to the CRC to advise accordingly with regards same.

Now, let me take this opportunity to appeal to us all that we are living in trying and turbulent times. We have a lot of party faithfuls who are facing terrible moments and need to be able to look up to strong leadership from their elected National Executive. We therefore cannot afford to betray them

by allowing our individual interests and ambitions to overshadow the common good of the party and destroy our members' fervid solace of bouncing back in 2012.

Finally, because there has been quite a flurry of accusations and innuendoes about my motives and role in the current impasse I want to make the following points absolutely and indisputably very, very clear. That:

- As I have said publicly several times, my only goal as National Chairman is to be the best Chairman that this party has ever had in its illustrious history. In that spirit, I hereby reiterate my unflinching commitment to serve the party to the best of my ability as Chairman and Leader and provide a level playing field for all who might be interested in the 'flag bearership' for the Presidential Elections of 2012.

I do hope that I have now clarified my role in this current constitutional debacle. More importantly, I trust that the CRC will, as usual, rise to the challenge so that we can stop this rancor within our ranks and redirect our energies to promoting the interests of the Sierra Leone Peoples Party and make it electable at sharp 12, 2012.

I would like to appeal to all members present to be calm and be guided by the principle of party cohesion and the need for the SLPP to win 2012.

I wish us all a successful deliberation and a safe journey back home.

Long Live the Sierra Leone People's Party
Long Live Unity

SLPP!

The only way out!

The only way forward!

The only way through!

And power to the people!

I thank you and God bless you!