

SIERRA LEONE PEOPLE'S PARTY

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
15 WALLACE JOHNSON STREET



His Excellency

Dr. Ernest Bai Koroma

President of the Republic of Sierra Leone

State House

Freetown

12th November, 2009

Your Excellency,

MAJOR GOVERNANCE AND DEVELOPMENT CONCERNS

On behalf of the membership of the Opposition Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP), I would like to draw your Excellency's attention to some important issues that we need to address together as a country in our collective work in building a well-managed state. Let me start by assuring Your Excellency of our Party's fullest support to any endeavour that will take our country out of its current economic difficulties to thriving economy. As a Party, we believe that we all owe it to our people to advance their lives regardless of whatever party is in power. We believe deeply that we cannot meet the challenges Sierra Leone faces unless we solve them together despite the fact that we may come from different parties and different parts of the country, but we share common hopes and aspirations that we should all work towards a better future for our children and our country.

Against this backdrop I, on behalf of the membership of the SLPP, congratulate your Government upon the completion of the first phase of the Bumbuna Hydro Electric project which has begun to provide appreciable hours of electricity to Freetown. We are also aware of the dismissal of your Minister of Health and Sanitation who is currently in court answering to corruption charges levied against him. Mr. President, we are pleased with this advancement of the good works of your predecessor.

Your Excellency, you may wish to know that within two years of your administration, Sierra Leone has witnessed a dramatic turn in the international community's posture towards the

country. For example, direct budgetary support for Sierra Leone was withheld by donors in 2006 under the erroneous belief that our SLPP led administration would have used donor funds to finance the 2007 election in favour of the SLPP. This support was resumed immediately after your election. Again, in 2006, the SLPP Government's request to the UN and the World Bank to restore power to Freetown did not receive an enthusiastic response. In 2007 the same request was granted to enable your administration deliver on its campaign promise of bringing electricity to Freetown in 100 days. Let me advise that we need to exploit this goodwill together as a nation - and not as a divided people.

Your Excellency, for the records, I am presenting below a number of issues and concerns that could potentially destroy all efforts in developing our country and quickly diminish the international goodwill Sierra Leone currently enjoys. We crave Your Excellency's indulgence to treat the following issues with the seriousness they deserve:

- 1) There is documentary evidence that our Vice President, Honourable Alhaji Samuel Sam Sumana, has been indicted by a United States court for various criminal offences ranging from involvement in racketeering, to soliciting and accepting bribes and fraudulent conversion while serving as Vice President. We are concerned that such indictment is not good for the country's image; and could undermine the national efforts in the fight against corruption and present a negative example to the country's youth. Equally worrying is Government's silence on the allegations in spite of several calls for an explanation in the spirit of probity and accountability. Your continued silence on this important issue could be interpreted as duplicity in your fight against corruption and could undermine public confidence in the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC). A statement from Your Excellency will lay to rest the anxiety created by widespread reports in local tabloids and the World Wide Web.

- 2) Your Excellency Sir, we also wish to remind you about the improper award of the National Power Authority contract for the supply of electricity to Freetown by the Minister of Energy and Power, Afsatu Kabba. The ACC investigated the matter and found that the contract award process was not only flawed, but the contract terms including the cost were not in the interest of Sierra Leone. The government was forced to renegotiate the contract bringing it to US\$26 million from initial contract price of US\$ 52 million. We are also reliably informed that funds were raised from an external source to the tune of US\$14 million for your Government to pay off part of this debt. As required by our constitution, all loans and grants are approved by Parliament. In this case, our Parliamentarians do not know about this because it was never presented for Parliamentary approval and the terms of this arrangement with the external partner still remain a mystery to both Parliamentarians and tax payers.

- 3) There is also documentary proof that about US1 million duty waiver was granted to Harmony Trading Company (now defunct) operated by your younger brother-Sylvannus Koroma. Immediately it benefitted from the waiver, Harmony Trading metamorphosed into a brand new company called Sierra Commodities Ltd. These mercurial company(s) benefitted from two ship loads of rice negotiated for Sierra Leone by Mr. Alimamy P Koroma, former trade Minister and Zainab Hawa Bangura, Foreign Minister. Though the consignments were meant for sale to the Public at concessionary rates, we are inclined to believe publications in Indian newspapers that a substantial part of the consignments was diverted to Dubai where they were sold at market price. To pull wool over our eyes, the remaining quota which was eventually brought to Sierra Leone was never tendered but given to Harmony whose only qualification is its closeness to the Presidency. We are

concerned that Harmony Trading was fleecing our poor people at a time when the global economic conditions had made it very difficult for the average Sierra Leonean to make ends meet. Our MPs were furious that the duty waiver they negotiated only ended up lining the bottomless pockets of a private businessman contrary to its intent of cushioning the effects of the global food crisis.

Your Excellency, we are also reliably informed that the Board of the Government owned Sierra Leone Commercial Bank, under the Chairmanship of Sheki Bangura (husband of foreign Minister – Zainab Bangura), has further endorsed the extension of a Multi-Million Dollar Credit Line to your brother's rice company under very questionable circumstances following a bitter litigation between your brother, Sylvannus Koroma and his overseas partners from Switzerland, Mr. Njack Kane of Novel Commodities. Your Excellency's declared commitment to the rule of law would suggest that the Ministry of Finance and the National Revenue Authority explain whether Harmony Trading Company is an exempted organization under the customs code.

- 4) Furthermore, Your Excellency, we are concerned that your elder sister; Admire Sesay (the wife of Alpha Sesay, Managing Director of Sierra Leone Telecommunications (SIERRATEL)) who runs a restaurant called Palladio keeps bagging huge government contracts using her influence without competing on public tender. We are equally concerned that almost all catering services for government functions, including the Conference of Finance Ministers recently held in Freetown were provided by Palladio.
- 5) Your Excellency, we also wish to bring to your attention a very strong allegation that Angelique International, a company owned by Indian businessmen won a huge contract of US\$15 million for the supply of tractors. It is also alleged that Admire Sesay, your sister is the local agent. The information around is that the company had prior information of the prices; the contract price was inflated and the goods were under supplied. We will be glad to get clarification that the same Angelique International is now lined up for a huge telecommunications contract of US\$29 million from SIERRATEL, where Admire's husband is Managing Director and her daughter's husband is one of the managers.
- 6) Another issue for which we seek clarification is that the contract for the construction of the Kenema-Pendembu Road (56 Km) funded by OPEC and BADEA was awarded to a company with Thomas Koroma (your brother, an architect by profession) serving as the local agent. We learnt that the bid price was US\$55 million and the negotiated price was US\$56 million. We further learnt that the site was supposed to have been handed over to

the contractor by October, 2009 on the condition that the company provides a bid security of US\$14million. We are concerned about the delay in the handing over and commencement of work which we understand emanates from the low status and credibility of the firm which no bank is prepared to provide such bid security for. As the Party in control of the three local councils which the road connects, we are deeply interested in the success of the project and would appreciate clarification on the current status of this project.

- 7) Your Excellency Sir, we also wish to draw your attention to the fact that immediately the APC assumed the reigns of power, a contract was awarded for the supply of 25 vehicles for use by Ministers. The market price for each of those vehicles then was US\$35,000 and the contract price was revised substantially upwards to US\$47,000 (duty and tax free). By the time of signing the contract, the number of vehicles was increased to 35 and later to 50. Since there were no budgetary provisions for that procurement, EU and DFID disbursements were used to pay for the vehicles at the expense of poverty-related expenses.
- 8) Another disturbing issue Your Excellency is the use of Euro 2.3 million of public funds lodged at National Social Security and Insurance Trust (NASSIT) for the purchase of a 30-year old Ferry that could hardly serve the public. A nineteen-man team comprising Minister of Labour and Social Security and the then Director-General (now Financial Secretary) travelled overseas to purchase the Ferry. This procurement was done without respect for procurement rules. Sadly enough, we are also informed that over 2 billion Leones has so far been spent over nine months to repair the said Ferry which is still not operational.
- 9) Your Excellency, concerns are now reaching a crescendo over how a World Bank grant of about \$12.5m allocated to the protection of the Bumbuna dam, its catchment areas and the resettlement of affected persons have been handled. Under this agreement, eligible households were to be compensated to allow them to find alternative housing and to help restore their livelihoods. There are now revelations that most of the beneficiaries have not been compensated and government is demolishing houses along the T line with flagrant disregard for international best practices. There is therefore a compelling need for full disclosure of the use of these resources by the Government in the interest of probity and accountability.
- 10) Your Excellency, we are worried that your seeming ambivalence in the fight against corruption now threatens to institutionalise this menace to an extent that a day hardly

passes by without screaming newspaper headlines on the issues of government corruption. If it is not interference into Chieftaincy issues or the manipulation of the local justice system by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, it is the award of an untendered or manipulated contract to cronies or the outright sale of scholarships by foreign and education ministry officials. All these acts have now put the public faith in your avowed declaration to ruthlessly fight corruption in very big doubt. Remember, you promised the nation in your inaugural address "there will be no sacred cows in my regime. My ministers, my family and no one will be given preferential treatment. Everyone must face the law".

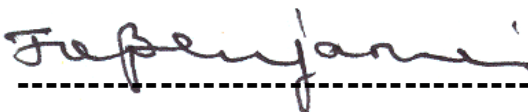
- 11) More worrying for our nascent democracy, Your Excellency is that the performance of state institutions including the Police, Military, NASSIT, Port Authority, Independent Media Commission, Judiciary, Chieftaincy and even the University are continuously being undermined as a result of illegal terminations/dismissals of qualified and competent persons, political interference in recruitment, postings and transfers. Moreover, state security institutions are being highly politicised. Recruitment, transfers and promotions in the police and the military is bias in favour of APC members. There is documentary evidence that almost all Local Unit Commanders (LUCs) nationwide are Northerners, mostly from the Limba ethnic group.
- 12) Mr. President, since you were elected in 2007, more than 200 qualified and competent professionals particularly those perceived to be sympathisers of SLPP, especially South Easterners have been fired from public service and replaced by your kinsmen, cronies and Party supporters with little regard for their competence, experience and qualification. This is confirmed recently by the September 2009 edition of the African Confidential magazine.
- 13) Your Excellency, we would like to bring to your attention reports of political interference in the ongoing chieftaincy elections, a situation similar to what prevailed in the 1970s and 1980s. There are reports of disqualification of eligible aspirants perceived to be non-APC supporters. One such case is in my home chiefdom, Njaluahun Chiefdom, Kailahun district where aspirants from only two sections have been declared eligible leaving out aspirants from ten other sections. Moreover, there are reports of arbitrary appointments of court chairmen across the country and the sacking of Regent Chiefs in the middle of the process. Your Excellency, you could recall from the TRC report that one of the root causes of the war was the subversion of the will of the people through political interference in chiefdom governance. Your Excellency, we implore you to do everything to ensure transparent, free and fair election of chiefs.

Your Excellency, you would recall that our Party had drawn your attention to the fact that members of our Party are being invited by your government to high level international conferences without reference to the Party Leadership. You did promise to appropriately address the issue. Your Excellency, to our surprise, we have again been informed that two of our members have been invited by your government to join you attend the Consultative Group meeting in London. While we wholeheartedly welcome any genuine moves at inclusiveness, we shall be grateful if all future invitations of this nature are channelled through the National Secretariat of the Party.

Your Excellency, in view of the concerns above and mindful of our desire to make services reach our people, we are open to discussions with you on the approaches to addressing the concerns highlighted.

Please accept the assurances of our continuing co-operation while looking forward to meeting with you to discuss the above and related matters at your earliest convenience.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Oponjo Benjamin', written over a horizontal dashed line.

John Oponjo Benjamin
Chairman SLPP

CC

- 1) Executive Representative of the Secretary General.
- 2) The Dean of the Diplomatic Corp.
- 3) Head of Delegation – European Union
- 4) Country Manager of the World Bank

- 5) Country Director DFID
- 6) Leader, People's Movement for Democratic Change (PMDC)
- 7) Commissioner, Anti – Corruption Commission