



SIERRA LEONE GOVERNMENT'S INTOLERANCE TO LEGITIMATE OPPOSITION

The attention of the public is hereby drawn to a spate of ugly incidents orchestrated by the ruling All Peoples Congress (APC) against the legitimate opposition party, the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP). These incidents undermine the rule of law, threaten democracy and destabilize the country.

A. Violence in Ward 323, Sorogbema Chiefdom, Pujehun District

1. A local council bye-election for Ward 323, in Sorogbema Chiefdom, Pujehun district was scheduled for March 14, 2009. On Thursday, March 12, 2009, elements of the APC led by the Resident Minister Southern Region, Mr. Musa Tarawally backed by a contingent of about 80 police officers including armed OSD officers descended on the surrounding communities in the Ward.
2. The APC thugs backed by the Police Officers harassed and brutalized residents in the Ward. Some people, mainly women and children were forced to flee across the border into Liberia, while others hurriedly fled into the surrounding bushes. Vehicles and motorcycles belonging to SLPP campaigners were destroyed and burnt down. The wife of a SLPP Chiefdom Chairman was stabbed and is currently in Pujehun hospital for treatment. Several other persons were wounded and are in critical conditions.
3. The conduct of the APC thugs and the police caused the National Electoral Commission (NEC) to cancel the planned bye-election in Ward 323.

B. Friday March 13, 2009 attack on SLPP National Secretariat

1. On Friday March 13, 2009, the SLPP National Secretariat was attacked for the third time since the APC assumed power in September 17, 2007. On that day, Freetown City Council commissioned a clock on the *East-End Police* tower. The occasion attracted a rowdy crowd of APC supporters dressed in APC Party colours.
2. At about 2:30pm on Friday, a group of about 50 riotous youths, mainly women broke away from the commissioning ceremony and danced their way to the city centre passing through the SLPP office singing provocative songs and shouting invectives. Some even took their pants down and displayed their private parts in full view of everyone present. A larger group of APC youths later arrived outside the SLPP office uttering insults against the leadership and membership of the party.
3. Following this incident, the National Secretary General, Mr. Jacob J. Saffa called the newly elected Regional Chairman Western Area, Mr. Lansana Fadika to monitor the situation and to try to keep the two sides apart. He then called the Inspector General of

Police, Mr. Brima Acha Kamara and requested police presence. The IG assured him of this service.

4. Mr. Lansana Fadika persuaded the group to use the KPMG route to the City Council. A small group of unarmed police arrived an hour later and deployed outside the party office, adjacent to the Metropolitan Police building. Mr. Fadika and the National Publicity Secretary of the SLPP, Mr. Ibrahim El-Tayyib Bah pleaded with the police to barricade the road leading to the SLPP office, leaving the road leading to the city council from the KPMG end open. The police agreed, using their patrol vehicle to barricade the road.
5. Another group of marauders approached the police to allow them through the barricade. The police ordered them to use the other entrance leading directly to the city council office. They disobeyed police orders and attempted to force their way through.
6. The situation calmed for a while until Mayor of Freetown, Mr. Herbert George-Williams emerged dancing ahead of a large crowd from the Charlotte Street end. The Mayor was seen leading the local mask devil *Matorma* followed by Sylvannus Koroma, the brother of President Ernest Koroma and a crowd of thugs carrying machetes and other missiles at about 6:30pm.
7. The Police ordered the Mayor who was leading machete-brandishing crowd to use the other route to his office in order to avoid problem. The trouble shooting Mayor castigated the Police and defied their orders. He beckoned to the group behind him to advance. At that point, the police withdrew their vehicle and left the scene.
8. Thereafter, a scuffle ensued between a few SLPP supporters on the scene and the APC thugs who were with the Mayor. A large number of APC thugs appeared with stones, machetes and other dangerous weapons and took positions around the SLPP office. Municipal police officers was seen with gun confirming the view that the city council police are thugs hired to serve the APC when needed.
9. The thugs pelted stones and other missiles at the building and people in the compound wounding several party women and men causing extensive damage to the building and property. Two vehicles, one belonging to the National Secretary-General were completely burnt down. Fire-fighters who attempted to put out the fire were chased away by the thugs.
10. The value of the damage will be estimated later. Already, over 15 persons are cared for in private and public hospital.

Monday March 16, 2009 attack on National Secretariat

11. On Monday March 16, 2009, the APC thugs aided by the police launched another raid on the SLPP headquarters and this time succeeded in entering the office. These hoodlums comprehensively vandalized the party office, looting and carting away anything they could lay hands on. The notorious presidential body guard Idrissa Kamara alias '*Leatherboot*' was seen in the party office and actually led the thugs to break into the compound. **Six women were raped and several injured** . These victims are admitted in a hospital. Over 20 SLPP supporters were arrested and detained with the police.

12. The SLPP strongly condemns these acts of barbarism, vandalism and intimidation. The frequent occurrence of insecurity undermines the peace process and threatens state stability.
13. The SLPP is disappointed that the leadership of the governing party has not publicly denounced violence. The Party therefore urges the leadership of the APC government to publicly denounce violence and shame the perpetrators irrespective of their political colour.
14. The SLPP strongly condemns the Mayor for perpetuating acts of violence. The practice of moving with a large crowd after commissioning of a project around the City Council is a recipe for chaos. Also, arming Municipal Police is illegal. For the third time now, the Mayor has led thugs and caused destruction to the SLPP office and injuring several persons.
15. The SLPP is disappointed that the Police has not been effective in the discharge of its responsibilities when SLPP offices are attacked. The deployment of the police is always late and initially thin. Even when the police officers are deployed, they do not arrest the perpetrators. Rather, they arrest SLPP supporters and create a safe passage for the APC thugs thereby allowing them to cause havoc. The Police even used teargas against the SLPP supporters.
16. Without the truths, there shall be no reconciliation. The SLPP therefore urges Civil Society Organisations to carry out independent investigation of the attack on the National Secretariat and the insecurity in Sorogbema chiefdom, Pujehun district. The findings of the investigation should be made public and perpetrators named and shamed.
17. The SLPP also urges the international community to facilitate an independent investigation of the attack on the National Secretariat and the insecurity in Ward 323, Sorogbema chiefdom, Pujehun district. The findings of such investigation should be made public and perpetrators named and shamed.

Signed
Jacob Jusu Saffa
National Secretary-General

