

HOPE-SIERRA LEONE FACILITATES UNDP-SPONSORED DIALOGUE IN BO, PROVINCIAL HEADQUARTERS, SOUTHERN REGION, SIERRA LEONE

In Bo, over the weekend of 17-19 October, the third in a series of eight intensive and interactive dialogues was held for elected Honourable Members of Parliament, Mayors, Chairpersons and Traditional Leaders. These dialogues, the first of which was formally launched in Parliament on 3 October by The Honourable Vice President, Chief Sam Sumana, aim to build confidence, trust and cohesion within public life, and promote political tolerance and reconciliation among MPs for sustainable peace and development in the country. This series of dialogues, funded by UNDP, is one of several programmes that UNDP will be bringing to parliamentarians through its credible partners in the next few years. Hope-Sierra Leone is a non-governmental organisation affiliated to Initiatives of Change (IofC) International.

The Bo dialogue was formally launched by H.E The Second Lady, Mrs. Kadia Sam Sumana, at Bo City Hall. The launching was preceded by a peace march (photo right) involving supporters of all three major political parties – APC, SLPP and PMDC – through the main streets of Bo. Traditional dancers and singers also participated in the peace march (photo below). The event was unique, being the first time that all the political parties had come together in a friendly and peaceful atmosphere, shouting songs of tolerance and reconciliation for peace and development.



In her keynote address, the Second Lady maintained that tolerance and reconciliation is a prerequisite for peace and development, adding that democracy requires absolute tolerance to each other, irrespective of political affiliations, religion or ethnicity.

She craved the indulgence of MPs to exhibit maximum love and respect

for each other, noting that they should all join forces to help mitigate poverty and youth marginalization in the country.



The Second Lady commended the Founder of Hope-Sierra Leone, John Bangura, for turning his quest for vengeance after the war into a constructive idea that gave birth to Hope-Sierra Leone. She added that the organisation seeks to promote peace, development and democracy. Mrs. Sam Sumana expressed her conviction that Hope-Sierra Leone is the instrument that the government should use to attain the vision of the President for attitudinal and behavioural change.

Bo City Mayor, Dr Wusu Sannoh (left) with Paramount Chief Alhaji Issa B. Kamara

The UNDP Deputy Country Director, Samuel Harbor, described Hope-Sierra Leone as a credible partner that, over the years, has served as an auxiliary to UNDP in preventing conflict and creating sustainable peace and development in Sierra Leone. Mr. Harbor described the dialogue as a clear demonstration of UNDP's continued solidarity with the people of Sierra Leone. He said the peace march symbolised that by acting together we shall achieve our goals. He called on all to remain peaceful and to show love towards one another.

The Police Commander for Southern Region, A.I.G David Sesay, assured the audience of police neutrality and impartiality in the dispensation of their duty. He said the police have the legal mandate to protect lives and properties. A.I.G. Sesay called on all the political parties to consider the police as friends and a force for good.

The Bo City Mayor, Dr. Wusu Sannoh, advised political parties to show tolerance and put the interests of the country above everything else.

The Founder of Hope-Sierra Leone, John Bangura, encouraged the gathering to practise absolute love, honesty, trust and purity in all walks of life. He gave a brief background on the formation of the organisation which started in a small office space in the Eastern part of Freetown but is now counted among the reputable organisations in Sierra Leone.

Representatives of paramount chiefs, political parties and civil society also made meaningful contributions towards the programme.

Following the Opening Ceremony, the dialogue continued successfully at the Fair View Lodge in Bo. The 25 participants included eight MPs, four paramount chiefs and a cross

section of people from the Bo political and civic leadership. Over the three days MPs were able to dialogue on the challenges facing the country such as poverty, underdevelopment, corruption and the need to heal the bitterness of the past. The MPs were encouraged to show tolerance and develop trust in one another.

MPs described the programme as timely and a step in the right direction. They asked that the programme be replicated at grass roots level. Some of the MPs disclosed that the programme had changed their lives and that they had become inspired to accept each another in good faith.



Hon. David George Soriba (right), Member of Parliament for Eastern Kenema, receives his certificate from Alhaji Issa B. Kamara, Secretary-General, National Council of Paramount Chiefs

Report and Photos by Patrick Jakema