

PROGRAMME OF PEACE BUILDING DIALOGUES COMPLETED BY **HOPE-SIERRA LEONE**

Hope-Sierra Leone, in collaboration with UNDP, has successfully completed the last of eight parliamentary dialogues on the theme “Healings wounds, building trust, moving forward together.” It was held at the Pastoral Centre in the northern city of Makeni from 5-7 December.



Dialogue in session

The dialogue attracted over fifteen MPs from the three major political parties, traditional leaders, youth coordinators in the different political parties and representatives of civil society groups.

In his keynote address, Paramount Chief Bai Shebora Kasangha spoke about his experiences at the Initiatives of Change international conference centre in Caux, Switzerland. He described Caux as “heaven, a place where there is absolute equality, be you rich or poor; a place where you meet with people from different races; above all, a place

where you enjoy complete love, honesty, purity, and total unselfishness.” He underscored these four core moral values as a foundation for change. “My trip to Caux in 2005 has greatly transformed my life in terms of dealings with my subjects. I look at myself now as a servant of my people.”

The Chief appealed to Hope-SL and Initiatives of Change to increase the number of Sierra Leoneans going to Caux next year. “I want others to experience a change in life and come back home with renewed vigour to give a ‘face lift’ to our beloved nation,” said Chief Kasangha. He reaffirmed that Caux is a place of peace and divinity, and blessed with a love for humanity. The chief lauded the effort of Hope-SL in bringing peace, and its relentless support in enhancing free, fair, credible and transparent elections in 2007.

Chief Massa Yeli Tham expressed similar sentiments about Caux which he had visited in 2006. With reference to the current series of dialogues, he said he was particularly impressed with the high level of political tolerance displayed in Kono and Bo. He said, “I was astonished to hear that APC supporters wore green (SLPP colour) whilst SLPP supporters wore red (APC colour). This gives hope for the country. Throughout my seventy years’ experience this has never happened in the political history of the country.” He reiterated that the response to the President’s call for attitudinal change had started.

The Founder of Hope-SL, John Bangura, commended the 156 leaders who had participated in the eight dialogues nationwide and thanked UNDP for its financial support. He urged all participants to be agents of change to move the country forward. He assured the MPs of Hope-SL’s continuing partnership with them at all times. The Founder maintained that the dialogue in Makeni marked the end of the first phase. A second, wider phase would involve all councillors and other key

stakeholders. The second phase would focus on building national cohesion and the entire project would last until 2013.

The dialogue generated a spirit of honest forgiveness and reconciliation between people who had been at each other's throats for quite a long time. The deepest wounds were often healed through the 'Reflection and Decision' (R&D) early morning session. R&D was particularly important for participants as they organised themselves into groups of five to share their trauma and past bitter experiences together. Hon. Adama Bah, Kamakwe constituency, said, "Before coming I thought I had experienced the worst trauma in the world, but through the experience sharing and testimonies I have come to realise that there are people here whose bitterness far outweigh mine." She said that she would forgive all those who had wronged her and become born again.

Many other participants were able to diagnose their trauma and seek healing of the wounds inflicted on them during the war and post war periods, especially during the 2007 presidential and parliamentary election campaign which resulted in a change of government. Hon. Salamatu Turay, Constituency 112, Lumley Freetown said, "I suffered persecution from family members for challenging my younger sister in the same constituency. My sister declared me an enemy and waged war on me during the campaign, but I have found room to forgive her because of the healing I have received."

This revelation moved Hon. Adama Bah to continue, "During the campaign I was marginalised by the chief who happens to be my uncle, up to the point that my uncle hired the kamajors, a civil militia group, to eliminate me from the political race, but I was saved by Jesus. Because of this ugly development I considered my uncle to be the worst enemy I ever had. My heart was like a stone and I never dreamt of forgiving him, but I will now forgive him because of the healing I have received."

Hon. Eric Jumu, who was witnessing the programme for the second time, urged that the dialogues would be replicated at chiefdom levels, involving councillors, chiefs, section chiefs, women's groups and youth leaders. He believed that this series of dialogues was a conscious response to the national cry for attitudinal and behavioural change. Hon Jumu appealed to Hope-SL to send more parliamentarians to Caux next year so that they could become a blessing to others.

Hon. Jumu expressed his admiration for the young men and women from the armed forces and the police who had displayed a high level of maturity and intelligence throughout the facilitation of the dialogue. He said the days had gone when the military and the police were considered as a dumping ground for the drop outs and idlers in society. He commended the initiators of the Moral Foundations for Democracy (MFD) programme which, since its inception in the country in 2005, had helped to give a new moral authority to the police and army. He implored the councillors to emulate the MPs in demonstrating political tolerance at their ward and constituency level.

Hon. Abu Koroma, APC, commended UNDP and Hope-Sierra Leone for preaching cohesion and peace. He intimated that the President had himself always been preaching peace, reconciliation and democracy.

Hon. Cherinor, one of the youngest MPs and also a barrister, pointed out that man by nature is selfish but should not use that as a weapon to exploit others. He shared how moved he was by the courage and endurance of the founder who had lost nine members of his family during the ten-year

barbaric war, but nonetheless was still inspired by God to come and redeem his people. He confessed that the experience sharing moments had taught him new lessons in life.

Hon. Jusufu Mansaray, SLPP, said that he felt secure and at home, even though Makeni is the stronghold of the APC. He sent a message of tolerance and show of patriotism to the people of Makeni. He condemned outright regionalised politics which had the power to betray the hard-earned peace and to divide the country. "We are all one, no matter our ethnic background," he said. "With such a programme we are gradually marching towards national cohesion and solidarity between the different political parties, as we move towards the 2012 election."

Hon. Frances Rogers, PMDC, encouraged all present to forget about politics "as it is a game that comes and goes, but relationships stay." She disclosed that the dialogue was a step in the right direction. She appealed for continuity of the programme at grass roots level nationwide.

The representative of the Mayor of Makeni, Alex Kapoto Kamara, said that since 2001 Hope-SL had been engaged in peace and reconciliation drives and economic programmes which dealt with youth empowerment for self reliance. He said the dialogues provided an immediate surgical operation that would help heal the bitterness of the past.



Overall, the dialogue centred on key areas such as corruption, change, conflict transformation, teamwork and trust building. There was an urgent need to stand against corruption which had impoverished people and ruined the country's development. The dialogue also resolved major conflicts that had almost teared people apart. Throughout the dialogues the message of peace, tolerance and reconciliation had spread across the country like a bush fire in the Harmattan wind.

The certification of participants formed the high point of the closing ceremony.

Hon. Salamatu Turay, APC, receiving her certificate from MFD Manager, Abu Bakarr Kamara

Following the programme, a social and reconciliatory night was organised for all participants at the Hope-SL office in Makeni.

NOTE: Reports of the dialogues that began in Freetown on 3 October 2008, followed by those in Bo, Port Loko, Kono, Pujehun and Kenema, can be accessed in the Latest News page of the Hope-Sierra Leone website www.hopesierraleone.org

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