SIERRA LEONE REPARATIONS PROGRAMME 2009

REPORT OF SYMBOLIC REPARATIONS

(Memorials and Reburials)

Bomaru, Kailahun District, 21st – 23rd March 2009

Implementing Agency: NaCSA
Implementing Partner: Hope-Sierra Leone

COMPILED BY HOPE-SIERRA LEONE
## CONTENTS

1. Appreciation ........................................... 3
2. Introduction .......................................... 3
3. Background ........................................... 3
4. Activities ............................................ 4
   4.1 Day one - 21\textsuperscript{st} March 2009 ....... 4
   4.2 Day two - 22\textsuperscript{nd} March 2009 ...... 7
   4.3 Day three - 23\textsuperscript{rd} March 2009 ...... 9
5. Constraints ........................................... 12
6. Achievements .......................................... 12
7. Recommendations .................................... 20
8. Conclusion ........................................... 21
1 APPRECIATION

Hope-Sierra Leone would like to express its thanks and appreciation to the able leadership of NaCSA for inviting us to join them as implementing partners in this huge and very challenging programme. As winner of the All Works of Life (AWOL) ‘NGO of the Year 2008’ Award, we will endeavour to deliver the quality services demanded of us by NaCSA.

2 INTRODUCTION

Bomaru is a small settlement/town situated near the Sierra Leone - Liberian border in the Upper Bambara Chiefdom, Kailahun District. The Chiefdom Headquarters of Bomaru is Pendembu town. Bomaru is situated on a hill top surrounded by a rain forest. Its beautiful natural vegetation receives rain on an almost weekly basis. Bomaru has a population of about approximately 500 inhabitants from diverse tribes. It is also a transit point for small scale cross-border trading activities. Almost every day traders from Kailahun district converge on to this small border settlement to conduct their business.

Bomaru is recorded as the first point of entry for Foday Sankoh’s Revolutionary United Front Rebels (RUF) into Sierra Leone’s territory. It was also the place where the rebels fired their first gun shot and massacred 14 local inhabitants and a young RSLAF officer on 23rd March 1991. Bomaru was also used as an exit point of escape by the notorious RUF killer, alias Mosquito, into Liberia when he fled an ECOMOG onslaught and eviction from the City of Freetown.

This particular date – 23rd March 1991 – marked the inception of a sad chapter in the history of this country. These sad events led to the brutal civil war that lasted for almost 11 years and were characterized by a series of war crimes and human rights violations that rivalled those committed during the holocaust and the Second World War.

3 BACKGROUND

The 23rd March 1991 has been officially endorsed as the day when the Sierra Leone civil war started in the Eastern town of Bomaru, close to the Liberian border. It was on this day that the RUF leader Foday Sankoh officially claimed responsibility for the Bomaru attack, even though information collected from the local inhabitants proved that the first gun fire was heard on the 17th March 1991.
On 23rd March the Revolutionary United Front launched their first attack, killing fourteen inhabitants of Bomaru town. This date marked the inception of the eleven-year brutal civil war, during which huge numbers of people were maimed and killed, and hundreds of women violently raped with impunity. It was a sad period in the history of this country.

It was against this background that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), in its report, recommended that a National Reparations Programme be set in motion in order to address and restore the dignity of war victims through memorials and symbolic reburial exercises, and in many other diverse ways. It was in this light that the National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA) contracted Hope-Sierra Leone, as an implementing partner, to carry out a programme to remember this fateful day. The day would also to be used to signify the start of the symbolic reparations project to restore the dignity of war victims, and provide an opportunity for people to vow that this ugly chapter in the nation’s history would never be repeated.

4  ACTIVITIES

Activities for remembrance commenced on the 21st March 2009, and continued until the 23rd March. These activities involved speeches from various government representatives, staff members of NaCSA and Hope-Sierra Leone, the Host Paramount Chief and the Resident Minister Eastern Province.

4.1  Day One 21st March

The preparations for the unique Symbolic Reparations programme officially started on the 21st March with the arrival of guests and dignitaries for the occasion. Many cultural activities took place, including the dancing of soweis, and other cultural masquerades were in attendance to welcome the dignitaries to the programme.

The Deputy Commissioner of NaCSA, Mr. Charles Rogers, expressed satisfaction with, and stressed the significance of, this programme. In his statement he said the government was making frantic efforts to restore the dignity of the war victims. He said the government was also serious in seeking the welfare of the victims, so he encouraged all present to be united
and help to develop Sierra Leone. He further highlighted his personal commitment and that of his institution towards the Symbolic segment of the Reparation Programme.

**Deputy Commissioner, Mr. Charles Rogers, speaking**

In his statement, the Senior Director of NaCSA, Dr. William Conteh, re-affirmed the degree of seriousness and commitment that the government was putting into the whole Reparations Programme. He also expressed satisfaction with the offering of the cow as the first activity for remembering the 23rd of March 1999.

**Dr. William Conteh, Senior Director, speaking**

Dr. William Conteh further expressed his satisfaction with visiting Bomaru for the first time. The main purpose of the remembering exercise was to undertake symbolic reparation towards the victims of the war and to encourage all Sierra Leoneans not to repeat this sad chapter in the history of the country.

**Mr. Obi Buya Kamara speaking**

The man at the centre stage of all these arrangements, the charismatic Director of Reparations, Mr. Obi Buya Kamara, in his very emotional and life-touching style, expressed his condolences and respect to war victims, and thanked the Host Paramount Chief and deputies, as well as the people of Upper Bambara Chiefdom and Kailahun District, for hosting this unique event. Mr. Buya Kamara went further to re-assure the people of Kailahun District that NaCSA stood shoulder to shoulder with them in
remembering and symbolically reburying lost loved ones, cleansing the town and all sacred bushes and planting a tree for sustainable peace, regional and national development. He concluded by reaffirming that NaCSA was here to stay and would provide high quality services to both the people of Kailahun and Sierra Leone.

Host Paramount Chief Foray Gondor (centre) speaking

Paramount Chief Foray Gondoh spoke about the atrocities committed in the town and the consequences this had on the quality of housing and other material resources. He used this forum to appeal to government to pay special attention to Bomaru, especially in the area of youth employment. The Paramount Chief said that the commemoration would serve as a deterrent for generations yet unborn. He also condemned the continuous confrontation between the ruling All People’s Congress (APC) and the opposition Sierra Leone People’s Party (SLPP). The serious cases of violence that had broken out threatened the peace of the country. He called on all stakeholders and political party leaders to resolve their differences and work towards peace and reconciliation.

After some very moving statements by the two leaders, the Paramount Chief and several other stake holders, combined Christian and Muslim prayers, according to local tradition, was said.

An animal offering, according to local tradition and culture, marked the start of the memorial and symbolic reparations programme.

The cow was shared amongst various groups who were charged with the responsibility of catering for the hundreds of guests who came to witness and attend the occasion.

Ceremonial offering and slaughtering of a cow
**Sharing of the meat**

4.2 Day two 22\textsuperscript{nd} March

The programme continued at the Court Barrie at 10.30am. The chairman of the occasion for the day was Bishop Joseph C. Humper who in his key note address traced the reparations programme from the recommendation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. He said that a reparations programme needed to be implemented by any Government in power.

*Bishop Joseph C. Humper*

He noted that it was part of the peace building process and he asked all inhabitants and Sierra Leonean beneficiaries to embrace the process and consider it as their programme.

Speaking on behalf of NaCSA, the Deputy Commissioner, Mr Charles Rogers, spoke about the commitment of NaCSA in implementing the programme.

Dr William Conteh, Senior Director, NaCSA, thanked all those present and re-affirmed the commitment of NaCSA to completing its mandate. Speaking on behalf of Government the Resident Minister East, Mr William J Smith, said the Government of Dr Ernest Bai Koroma was committed to the implementation of the programme. He admonished all present to desist from conflict of any nature and work towards peace and unity.
Speaking on behalf of the town and entire chiefdom, the Host Paramount Chief, Mr Foray Gondoh, welcomed the dignitaries and everybody present stating it was very timely to start commemorating this day because it marked the beginning of a very sad chapter in the history of Sierra Leone. He appealed to Government to consider them in that part of the country. The programme continued with a lunch interval, followed later by a cultural dance and football match.

**P.C. Gondor declaring support for the Government and the Reparations programme**

The activities of the 22\textsuperscript{nd} were climaxed by well attended Muslim and Christian vigils with statements of confessions and forgiveness. The vigils were observed in the local mosque by the Muslims, whilst the Christians held theirs in the Court Barrie. During the Muslim vigil the officiating Imam, Mr. Juana Swarray, spoke about the essence of remembering 23\textsuperscript{rd} March 1999. The Muslim vigil was well planned and effective. Hope-SL and NaCSA’s Director attended.

**Muslim vigil service**

*A time to reflect, remember war victims and pray. NaCSA’s Director Buya Kamara, emotionally touched and reflecting deeply, though a devoted Christian, attended the Muslim vigil service, exercising the high level of religious tolerance practised in Sierra Leone.*

The Host Paramount Chief said it was an occasion of mixed feelings. He noted that there was sadness because thousands of people had lost their lives during the civil war, but there was also joy because the war had ended, and that NaCSA, in collaboration with Hope-Sierra Leone, was prepared to implement the reparations programme.

During this event the Executive Director of Hope-Sierra Leone pleaded with the Muslim community to pray for peace between NaCSA and Hope-Sierra Leone on the one hand and fambul tok on the other. Paramount Chief Gondoh thanked the Muslim community for their commitment to peace. Prayers were also offered for the government and its leadership.
The Christian vigil, observed in the Barrie, was flooded with people of diverse ages who sang hymns and songs of praise. There were also pastors who read passages from the holy bible. The scriptural readings were followed by a period of reflection and confessions. The vigil was well planned and coordinated, and attended by a huge crowd. It was followed by eating, drinking and dancing till dawn.

Pastor (above right) preaching the word of forgiveness and compassion, whilst a crowd of local people, guests and war affected victims listen attentively

4.3 Day three 23rd March

Monday 23rd March 2009 was the official date for remembering the war that caused wanton destruction of property and thousands of lives in Sierra Leone. The programme started at 10:30am with the arrival of the Resident Minister East and his entourage, the NaCSA entourage led by the Deputy Commissioner and the Senior Director, Paramount Chiefs from four Chiefdoms and a host of other dignitaries including the press. The occasion started with Christian prayers offered by the Priest of the Local Church and Muslim prayers by the Imam of the local Muslim Community. It was indeed an event that was climaxed with personal and spiritual reflection as hundreds of delegates gathered to remember and pray for loved ones who had perished at the hands of evil exactly eighteen years previously.

Bomaru town was also cleansed on this day after the women and traditional chiefs had cleansed their various sacred bushes the day and night before. The events leading to the cleansing of the sacred bushes were unique and dramatic, but no cameras were allowed. Those who were members of certain secret societies witnessed a rich cultural activity.

There was no doubt that war victims felt their dignity and that of their lost loved ones restored, and were now prepared to move on with their lives. Many testimonies of forgiveness and reconciliation were made. Victims felt more relieved.
Mr. John Bangura of Hope-Sierra Leone introduced the Chairman of the occasion, Paramount Chief Daniel Gaima IV of Baiwala. In his opening remarks the Chief thanked Mr Bangura and Hope-SL for inviting him and three of his colleagues, all Paramount Chiefs, to this unique occasion. He further expressed warm gratitude to Mr. Bangura for introducing him in style. He further thanked the Resident Minister East and the NaCSA entourage for inviting him to this memorial ceremony. He spoke about the essence of the memorial, which would serve as a lesson for future generations never to be involved in armed conflict or any other form of violence in the future. He further highlighted the events that occurred at Baiwala, near Bomaru, on 17th March 1991 which led to the events and massacre at Bomaru on the 23rd March 1991. He however subscribed to and supported 23rd March 1991 as the day now popularly acclaimed to be the official date when the war started in Sierra Leone.

He further stressed that this memorial would serve as inspiration for every Sierra Leonean to work towards peace building and development. He used the opportunity to make a special plea to the central government for more assistance for the war victims especially in the area of skills training and housing.
The Senior Director of NaCSA, Dr William Conteh, spoke about the essence of the programme. He noted that NaCSA was the government institution that had been delegated with the responsibility to implement the Symbolic Reparations programme through its partners. He noted that the programme was geared towards restoring the dignity of the victims of war. Mr Charles Rogers, in his brief statement, encouraged all citizens to embrace the programme and promised the people that NaCSA was committed to see that the project was successful. Paramount Chief Cyril Gondoh recapped the agony of the war and advised all Sierra Leonean not to take part in any violence. He asked NaCSA to continue to promote the welfare of the victims noting that he was not happy with recent development in Freetown between the supporters of the ruling APC and the opposition SLPP.

The Resident Minister East came to represent H.E. the President as guest speaker. In the presence of a jammed-packed Barrie, the Resident Minister wasted no time to address the crowd on the government's commitment to implement the reparations programme.

*Resident Minister Eastern Province, Mr. William J. Smith, delivering his keynote address*

He also seized the opportunity to brief all present on the duties, responsibilities and commitments of government towards the Reparations Programme and government plans to bring development programmes to Kailahun District. However, he also encouraged and advised the inhabitants of the region not to emulate the ugly development in Freetown and asked everyone present to work towards sustaining the hard-won peace in the country.

The ceremony continued with a fitting symbolic re-burial of all those who had died during the war, and especially for those who had died on that solemn day of 23rd March 1991. They were all heroes and heroines and deserved a fitting symbolic re-burial, said Bishop Humper. A Funeral Service was conducted by the grave side by Muslims and Christians. The symbolic reburial took place at the site of a mass grave near the War Monument. Human remains were exhumed and later reburied with the shroud containing the symbol of the dead. The Host Paramount Chief poured libation to appease the ancestors of the land and prayed for all Sierra Leoneans to build everlasting peace in the region and country as a whole.
The Peace Tree was planted a few metres from the Symbolic Grave site and War Monument near the Court Barrie in Bomaru. The peace tree planting was led by the Deputy Commissioner of NaCSA, Mr. Charles Rogers. In giving his peace message, he urged all Sierra Leoneans to help build a hate-free nation and encouraged the people to ensure that such atrocities would never re-occur in the country again. Lunch was served to guests and delegates departed.

5 CONSTRAINTS

The memorial ceremony and remembrance of 23rd March 1991 at Bomaru, the day the eleven-year civil war started, were successfully implemented, but there were many challenges. The two main challenges Hope-SL faced were as follows:

a. We had very limited time for groundwork and late disbursement of funds by NaCSA was a major challenge. This was clear from the late arrival of the Hope-Sierra Leone advance team at the project location, sometimes less than fifteen hours prior to the start of events.

b. A major problem was that Mr. Caulker and the fambul tok group had already gone ahead and informed the local inhabitants that it was fambul tok that was going to implement the Symbolic Reparations programme. This came to light just after the banner was displayed. Mr Caulker was a member of the reparations steering committee. People started to say that they had been informed by John Bangura that it was fambul tok that was going to implement this programme. This was a case of blatant misinformation as well as a breach of confidentiality essential in a committee like the one to which Mr Caulker claimed to belong.

6 ACHIEVEMENTS

The Bomaru Memorial and Symbolic Reburial Programme was indeed a very successful event despite the challenges starting from the preliminary consultations at Pendembu and right through the implementation process. Nevertheless, Hope-SL, as an award-winning organization which strongly believes in its core moral values, quality service delivery and implementation, was able to achieve successfully the following 19 benchmarks:


2. Despite last minute arrangements, Hope-SL stretched its muscles to mobilize a good number of major traditional and cultural groups from various chiefdoms to grace the
events. It was also able to facilitate reconciliation between Paramount Chiefs where relationships had broken down.

3. Community women were mobilized and contracted to do the catering.

4. Local councillors were fully included during the purchase of food and other items listed by NaCSA.

5. Two well-planned reconciliation seminars were organized (22\textsuperscript{nd} and 23\textsuperscript{rd} March 2009) which attracted a huge attendance.

6. A children's jam session was arranged

7. The following media houses were financed and represented:
   a. UN Radio
   b. Radio Democracy 98.1
c. Radio Maria - Makeni
d. Radio Mangneh - Makeni
e. Radio Wanjeh - Pujehun
f. Kiss 104 FM - BO
g. Easter Radio - Kenema
h. CTN
i. SLBS
j. RADIO MOA - Kailahun
k. Citizen Radio - Freetown
l. Awareness Times News paper
m. Awoko News Paper
n. Standard Times
o. Premier News
p. Spark

All media houses adequately reported the events at Bomaru on 23rd March 2009. Many media houses mentioned above are still running the good news to their listeners and readers to date.

*Hope-SL set the scene in the style of its MFD programme at the start of each session*

8. Vigils were held by the Muslim and Christian communities until dawn (see photos on pages 8 and 9).

9. Sacred bushes were cleansed and re-purified. No cameras were allowed.

10. The town of Bomaru was also cleansed and re-purified after midnight.
11. The roundabout facing the war monument was identified for both the reburial and planting of the Peace Tree.

12. A symbolic corpse was prepared and made ready for the procession and reburial.

13. A Peace Tree Planting site was chosen, prepared and made ready on time.

14. Visible human remains of the 14 souls massacred on 23rd March 1991 were exhumed, prepared for reburial and reburied.

15. A meeting was held with the Host Paramount Chief and his subjects to identify a symbolic corpse for reburial and a unanimous decision was reached to choose a Banana stem. This corpse was ceremoniously prepared, dressed and made ready on time.
16. A ground breaking memorial procession was led by Right Rev. Bishop Humper and the Resident Minister Eastern Province, followed by NaCSA’s leadership, Religious leaders and all present.

![Symbolic Corpse joining the procession](image1.jpg)

17. An historic reburial ceremony of human remains and symbolic corpse was carried out, climaxed by a solemn grave-side memorial service. Family members of lost loved ones had the opportunity for the first time to physically handle the remains of
their loved ones and rebury them, an event which would be remembered for a long
time in the history of our nation. It was an emotional moment for all present.

*Right Rev. (Rtd) Bishop Humper, who chaired the TRC, led the reburial process*

Religious cohesion formed the backbone of this whole event, with the Chief Imam
praying alongside his Christian Brother, Right Rev. Humper.

*Prayers were also offered for H.E. the President, his administration and the entire nation.*
Women suffered the most during the 11-year war in Sierra Leone. Therefore a weeping widow was accorded the opportunity to lead the reburying event (below) by reburying the remains of her loved one.

18. The planting of the Peace and Development Tree was carried out by the Deputy Commissioner of NaCSA, Mr. Charles Rogers, witnessed by the Host Paramount Chief and Chief Imam.
19. Pouring of Libation and planting of the Peace Tree by Host Paramount Chief. No one wanted to be left behind.

At the conclusion of all these exercises, everyone observed silence, moved back into quiet reflection to remember, pray and regain spiritual energy. Mr. Kamara, Director of Reparations, was one of those deeply touched.
This first intervention was a success in terms of achieving project aims, which were to ensure that the memorial and remembering of lost loved ones, vigils, performing symbolic reburials and planting of a peace tree were achieved. To make it more national and colourful, many Paramount Chiefs and many key stakeholders within the District were invited. This inclusive move opened up doors and windows of forgiveness and reconciliation, allowing hate and the dark past to be buried. This was a significant achievement.

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

Hope-SL would like to make the following recommendations to NaCSA:

a. Funds for the implementation of all NaCSA-related projects by Hope-SL should reach Hope-SL’s account four weeks before implementation. This would then allow enough time to prepare an effective action plan and ensure adequate consultations, planning, diagnosis and resolution of problems, and effective networking in the project area.

b. Hope-Sierra Leone should be given a full mandate to conduct and implement all programmes in advance, so that it can exert maximum influence through its considerable MFD human resource base.

c. NaCSA should be in position to listen more to Hope-SL’s expert advice during the implementation period

d. Hope-Sierra Leone, in concert with NaCSA and all other implementing partners/stakeholders, should meet periodically and share information and lessons learnt in subsequent implementations.

e. Hope-Sierra Leone should be actively involved in, or take the lead in the formulation of programmes/agendas for subsequent Symbolic Reparations activities – as this will ensure a successful implementation.

f. NaCSA should, in concert with Hope-Sierra Leone, embark on massive sensitization campaigns in order to inform adequately the public about the project to be implemented in various Districts and Chiefdoms.
8 CONCLUSION

The Memorial and Symbolic Reburial Ceremony marking 23rd March 1991, the day the eleven-year civil war started, was indeed, despite all the odds, a ground-breaking success. 19 bench marks were successfully accomplished. The core elements of the whole programme, including animal offering, vigils, cleansing of the town and sacred bushes, forgiveness and confessions, recognition and acceptance of democratic values, a well attended memorial procession, exhumation of a mass grave and symbolic reburials, planting of a Peace and Development Tree, feasting – amongst others – were well coordinated and successfully accomplished, thanks to the able team of NaCSA’s Reparations Unit.

Submitted by

John Bangura

Founder, Hope-Sierra Leone