

AUGUST 11, 2007 ELECTIONS: CHALLENGES OF A TRANSITION & BEYOND

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In recognition of the role and achievements of the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) in Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding in Africa, particularly in West Africa, the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations at its substantive session of 2006 granted WANEP Special Consultative Status to the UN. WANEP is therefore mandated to designate official representatives to the United Nations in New York, Geneva and Vienna to further its advocacy and outreach strategies for peace and human security.

1. INTRODUCTION

Tension, acrimony and violence that have characterized the ongoing electoral campaigns in Sierra Leone remain a major cause for concern. One such classical case is the Sunday July 15 clash between the opposition Peoples' Movement for Democratic Change (PMDC) and the ruling Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) in Kailahun in the eastern part of the country. Weapons were used and Charles Margai, the opposition leader reportedly escaped death narrowly. Sierra Leone is one of the two pilot countries where the newly created United Nations Peacebuilding Commission is kick-starting its mission to build peace and ensure that never again would the country glide into chaos and anarchy. Indeed, the peace that Sierra Leone enjoys began in earnest with President Alhaji Dr. Ahmad Tejan Kabbah's declaration on January 18th 2002 in Lungi that the rebel war, which began on March 21st 1991, was finally over with the words "*di war don done.*" This feat was realized following the intervention of the international community, which provided peacekeeping troops, and the determination of the people of Sierra Leone to bring an end to the suffering caused by the war.

WEST AFRICA EARLY WARNING & EARLY RESPONSE NETWORK (WARN)

The West Africa Early Warning and Early Response Network (WARN) is an integral part of the West Africa Preventive Peacebuilding Program co-ordinated by the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP). Through its WARN Program, WANEP is setting the stage for a civil society-based early warning and response network in Africa with emphasis on human security.

WARN covers the entire Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) sub-region including Cameroon and Chad. Our focus was initially the Mano River Basin countries of Sierra Leone, Guinea, Liberia, and Côte d'Ivoire. We have since expanded to cover the entire West Africa sub-region.

Since 2002, WANEP entered into an agreement with ECOWAS through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in the framework of capacity building in Conflict Prevention. One of the goals of this agreement is to interface WARN with the ECOWAS Early Warning Systems to optimize early warning conflict prevention in West Africa. In view of this development, WANEP has been operating a liaison office located at the ECOWAS Secretariat in Abuja, Nigeria since April 2003.

Since then efforts have been made to ensure that the peace is sustained to enable the country to develop and rebuild communities devastated by the war. Presidential and Parliamentary elections were conducted (April 14th) soon after that the president's

declaration of the official end of the rebel war, which lasted for over a decade, and President Kabbah was re-elected almost on a landslide (with over 70% of the popular vote). After that election Kabbah promised to do all in his power to alleviate the sufferings of the people, but regrettably many of the specific promises have remained virtually unfulfilled, in the minds and opinions of many Sierra Leoneans, especially the youth, who constitute over 60% of the country's population.

Key promises such as jobs especially for the youth, the construction of a bridge from Freetown to Tagrin, and the provision of electricity for the congested capital, have remained unfulfilled. Life for the ordinary Sierra Leonean has got more difficult to live than many can remember in the past.

Elections in Sierra Leone would be very critical for peace in the entire Mano River Basin conflict system. It will also be a moment to assess the impact and exit strategy of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) as well as appreciate the UN Peacebuilding Commission and other stakeholders' efforts at building a stable and viable country out of the ruins of conflict. In this policy brief, we take a critical analysis of the pre-election situation in Sierra Leone, the readiness of the nation to transit from one era to another and consolidate democracy. In doing this, we have focused on:

- ❑ Highlighting the socio-economic and political challenges still haunting the country;
- ❑ Level of preparedness for elections and the stakes involved;
- ❑ Possible scenarios during the elections and thereafter;
- ❑ Options or recommendations for response to ensure peace and stability.

2. PRE-ELECTION SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

Barely one month to the Presidential and Parliamentary elections billed for August 11, 2007, Sierra Leone as a country, is deeply enmeshed in electioneering politicking. The shocks that often go with election campaigns have the potential to disrupt the socio-political equilibrium and stability in the country. Hate and inciting speech, provocations and opening of past wounds are woes that go with political campaigns where politicians are bent on ascending to power or clinging to it at all cost. In this section, we attempt a look at some of the key issues that may constitute the bases for discord and tension; issues around which tension could be mobilized and even violence. On the other hand, some of these issues, if well addressed and implemented could usher in a new era for democracy and peace consolidation in Sierra Leone.

Unbridled truth of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

The findings and recommendations of Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which concluded among others that the causes of the rebel war and reparation for victims must be addressed to ensure it is not repeated, have generally not been done by the government. Many people are angry that while victims of the war are made to live with their shattered and broken lives the perpetrators are courted by the government and let to roam about freely. The government on its part argues that it has not been able to raise the necessary funds from its international partners to fulfil all of the TRC recommendations. Moreover, the issue of dealing with former combatants is a controversial one that is influenced by the international community and its experts who handle these issues more than national governments who are always at the receiving end of policies and assistance.

The TRC specifically noted that weak governance structures, corruption, injustice and extreme poverty were the main causes of the war, and that there would be no lasting peace in the country without addressing these issues. As the Presidential and Parliamentary elections approach, there have been lots of uneasiness in many quarters about the viability of peace in the country during and after the elections, with many opposition political parties claiming that the government is so unpopular because of its failure to deliver on its promises that it can only win the forthcoming elections through massive rigging and other electoral malpractices. It may be true that the government has failed to fulfill specific promises it made since the end of the war including the failure to fully implement the recommendations of the TRC, as a precondition to the establishment of lasting peace in the country. It may also be very true that the government has achieved quite a lot in the few years since the end of the war especially with regards to the rehabilitation, reintegration and reconstruction of areas and infrastructure devastated by the war. In this regard government officials are quick to refer to their successes as being directed towards the wider picture of recovery for the entire country and not merely on little things.

Media and public opinion on the polls

A casual review of the daily newspapers reveals to a large extent a picture of the varying degrees of opinions on forth coming elections. There is a lot of doubt in the ranks of the opposition concerning the independence of the National Electoral Commission (NEC) and its ability to conduct free and fair elections. Pessimistic stories about the conduct and outcome of the elections abound and in many ways appear to dominate the publications or news items in the country.

Among the negative stories that may threaten the smooth running of the elections are stories of disgruntled soldiers threatening to disrupt the democratic process, because of their perceived belief that the government has refused to address their concerns, especially regarding allowances and other benefits. The Chief of Defence Staff of the army, Major General Edmond Sam Mboma had to conduct a meeting with soldiers in response, during which he reminded them all to either desist from politics or resign from the army to carry on with their political aspirations, since the army was now very much apolitical and professional.

There is also the press release from the Office of the Vice President, Solomon Berewa, regarding the skirmishes on the 28th April, during which supporters of the ruling party (SLPP) were attacked by unidentified people apparently disaffected with the public support for the government. Some observers say it is a precursor to what lies ahead, if mechanisms are not put in place immediately to forestall such violence in the future.

Other alarming headlines in news tabloids include the PMDC leader's cry that the new election date is unrealistic, and that the electoral Commission is bias infavour of the ruling party; Amnesty International's (AI) condemnation of the government for corruption (Awoko, May 10); Disgruntled teachers threat to strike because of late payment of government subsidies (Concord Times, May 10); PDP petition's CPP over symbol (Standard Times, March 12); Prisoners on the run again (Awoko, March 12); US Human Rights report indicts prisons (Awoko, March 12); Defenders of democracy in abject poverty (Lawala), (Awoko, March 12); Many illegal crossings in Kailahun (Awoko, May 10); British born Master and Registrar says he is disappointed with the judiciary (Standard Times, May 17); Kabbah meets with top brass as army threatens (Standard Times, May 4); Parliament accused of disrupting the electoral process (Standard Times,

May 4); and 55 houses burnt down in Pujehun (Awoko, May 3).

These and many other stories that are published everyday in the nation's newspapers, sensational as they may be or not, have the potential of influencing the outcome of the elections. However, considering the fact that most of the publications are owned by publishers that are generally very critical of the government, it is but wise to read between the lines and take the stories with a pinch of salt. In addition, newspapers are very limited in circulation, and as a result are only popular in the city, Freetown, with the rural areas generally covered by the government's information system. The image of the government in rural areas is quite different from that which is portrayed by the mass media in Freetown.

Challenge of Job provision and Governance Reforms

The average Sierra Leonean talks of lack of jobs, but government officials say jobs cannot come if there is no peace and stability, the achievement of which they have prioritized. They have ensured that more children now attend school than ever before, with plans to build over 500 primary and secondary schools in the country by the end of 2007. Government officials seem to be quite aware of the commendations from the international community for the prudent financial management structures and practices in place for the management of funds from donors and other international sources like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) in its bid to minimize corruption. The judiciary has been in the process of reformation through the Justice Sector Development Programme (JSDP) in collaboration with the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID) to ensure that justice is available to all Sierra Leoneans at all times.

The delay in the completion of the Bumbuna Hydro-electric Project has had serious repercussions on the economic take off of the country. The government seems convinced that the project would finally be completed by the end of the year 2007 or early 2008 and the slogan of enough energy for all would be reality, thus providing opportunities for jobs to be created for most of the unemployed youths. Access to potable water supply is still a major problem. The government has disclosed plans for the construction of another dam in the vicinity of Freetown, to serve the growing population of the city and remove the extra strain on the Guma dam, which was not meant for the present population of the city.

The economic impact of the presence of UNASIL like in most countries with a heavy presence of UN forces and staff remain a critical issue. Artificial indices and purchasing power of international staff sometimes give false impression of an economy and the true picture only come to light after the dollar spending spree is over. That notwithstanding, there are indications that economic exchanges, especially with the commercial banks, has witnessed significant profits¹ of lately. Agricultural production and marketing have also seen improvements than it has been for a long time, and the government's revenue collection is also far better than it was before the war. More economic and financial institutions are opening offices including Eco Bank and the Discount Houses, as well as the upcoming Stock Exchange.

Gender issues particularly those of marriage, administration of estates and violence against women have also become very topical as we approach the election date, as

¹ Rokel Commercial Bank recently gave a 55% bonus to shareholders .

advocates of women's rights lobby to present these as not merely a matter of right but also of peace and security. Indeed the parliament finally passed the three bills into law, in addition to a Child Rights Bill passed only the week before.

Hence the fact that the most of the opposition parties believe the ruling party can only win the elections through rigging, even when the Commission remains at pains to ensure its independence, is a cause for concern for all stakeholders in the country's stability that must be addressed with the utmost urgency. In this regard, it is necessary that both internal and external observers of the election process are seen to be free and fair in their observation, as they will be the neutrals who would decide whether the elections were actually rigged or won without rigging.

3. AUGUST 11 2007 ELECTIONS: LEVEL OF PREPAREDNESS

In order to gauge the level of preparedness for the upcoming Presidential and Parliamentary elections scheduled for August 11 this year, the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding in Sierra Leone conducted interviews with senior officials and executives of various institutions to gather information on their preparedness for the elections in August. Among these were the Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC), the National Electoral Commission (NEC) and a number of Civil Society Organizations. The PPRC officials disclosed that the Commission has been working steadily, since its establishment in December 2005, in collaboration with the United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other stakeholders in the country's electoral process, to enhance the culture of tolerance and political debates for transparent and credible post conflict elections. The official added that it is in this regard that the Commission embarked on instituting dynamic initiatives geared towards the fulfillment of its constitutional mandate to monitor conduct of political parties so as to ensure transparent and credible elections.

Code of Conduct & Platform for inter-political party dialogue

Most prominent among the Commission's achievement in preparation for the elections has been the facilitation of a dialogue among the registered political parties and the subsequent signing of an agreement on a Code of Conduct for political parties that would determine and shape political activities in the period leading to, during and after the elections. This Code was signed by all registered political parties at an impressive ceremony on November 23, 2006 in Parliament and it commits members to refrain from any form of political misconduct that would jeopardize the outcome of the elections.

To ensure compliance, the PPRC has also established a National Code Monitoring Committee (NMC) to serve as forum for discussion of issues of concern including breaches of the Code. Three PPRC commissioners including the Chairman, Justice Sydney Warne as well as the members of the NMC have inaugurated the Committee at the regional hubs in Bo, Kenema and Makeni.

To take the process closer to the grassroots level, the Committee has also established a District Code Monitoring Committee (MCMC) in all fourteen (14) districts charged with observing and reporting the conduct of political parties in their area of coverage. This includes representatives from each of the registered political parties, the police, civil society, National Commission for Democracy (NCD) and the Inter-religious Council.

The Commissioners have also been to Sweden where they completed a short course in

“Facilitations of Dialogue Processes and Mediation Efforts” to enhance capacity and learn skills in mediation and conducting constructive political dialogues². The Commission has also established and maintained a healthy working relationship with international partners for assistance in the development of the Commission’s operational infrastructure, human resource capacity and logistics. The United Nations Radio in Sierra Leone also supports the PPRC through its weekly discussion programme “Straight Talk”, which provides a level playing field for all parties to air their views. The radio, in collaboration with the independent broadcaster, Cotton Tree News (CTN), has arranged a special media workshop for the leading representatives of the registered political parties. According to the PPRC Chairman, dialogue with all stakeholders will continue throughout the election process.

National Electoral Commission

The National Electoral Commission (NEC) which is responsible for the actual conduct of the elections has been very much at work in preparation for the elections, which it has been forced by circumstances to differ to the 11th August, instead of the July 28 date suggested earlier. The Commission has long completed the delimitation of the country’s constituency boundaries, and has engaged new professional staff to carry out its mandate. The Commission has also met with various stakeholders in the elections including the Network of Women Ministers and Parliamentarians (NEWMAP) on the need to encourage greater women’s participation in the election process.

To increase access to polling centres in all parts of the country, the Commission recently appealed for logistics to establish one hundred and fifty (150) more polling centres in the country to address the chronic shortage of centres during the voter registration exercise recently. This will add to the current 2,740 centres to make a total of 2,870 for the upcoming elections. The Commission has even appealed to the political parties contesting the elections to contribute towards the placement of the proposed extra centres so as to ensure all voters get the chance to vote without hindrance.

The Commission has also been in dialogue with paramount chiefs, in collaboration with the PPRC and the NCD to chart a way forward for the elections, as well as exchange ideas and seek help from the traditional leaders to promote a peaceful and credible election process. To address the concerns of certain civil society groups about the elections, the Commissioner, Christiana Thorpe has reiterated that provision will be made for all voters including those in hard-to-access areas. She added that voting materials will be available at all polling centres on the day of the elections, just as the capacity of the Commission to work effectively has been improved greatly through funding, training and recruitment of professionals.

Regarding stipend or the payment of polling agents, the NEC chief says it will be better than the last time elections were held in the country, but stressed that patriotism and desire to get the work done will be very significant in the recruitment of such officials. Accreditation, it was learnt, will be given to as many national and international observers as is possible to determine the credibility of the process.

The Commission has also released a provisional voter’s results indicating that only

² The trip was funded by the Folke Bernadotte Academy.

2,626,313 people registered for the upcoming elections, short by 25,808 of the estimated 2,873,121 people expected to register. It is however the highest number of registered voters in the history of the country. It has also revised the timetable for nominations for the elections, which nominations for the president began on June 20 to end June 30, while for parliament, it was planned to commence June 4 and end June 9.

Role of Civil Society

Various Civil Society Organizations are also engaged in preparations for the upcoming elections. The West African Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) and other civil society groups recently concluded election assessment exercise in the country geared towards reviewing, among others, the legal and institutional frameworks currently in place for the elections, ascertain the level of preparedness for the election by all relevant actors especially NEC, government ministries, political parties, media, civil society, electorate and the international community.

The Network also assessed the current capacity and opportunities of civil society in Sierra Leone in relation to the elections, so as to determine appropriate support and collaboration between civil society and the international partners. WANEP collaborates with other organizations, including Hope Sierra Leone, to inform and sensitize the public in the four regions of the country on the necessity for hitch free, fair and transparent elections and sustainable peace in Sierra Leone.

Journalists for Human Rights (JHR), an international human rights organization of journalists, recently established in the country with a focus on empowering the media to combat human rights abuses through collaboration with the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) and other such organizations is also actively involved in the electoral process. Another organization, Democracy Salone, has trained and recruited up to fifty (50) trainers to train and sensitize local communities in the country on conflict resolution, management and mitigation during the 2007 elections. The program is sponsored by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The Disabled Rights Movement (DRIM) is another civil society group newly established in the Moyamba District to sensitize its members and the public on HIV/AIDS, gender issues, upcoming elections and mainstreaming disability issues in the country.

On the part of [Sierra Leone Association of Journalist SLAJ](#), its president has expressed its determination to ensure that the association monitors the election effectively, as well as seek justice for the murdered late editor of *For Di People* newspaper, Harry Yansaneh. The Center for the Coordination of Youth Activities (CCYA) has held a consultative conference on youth participation and engagement in the upcoming elections, so as to empower and sensitize the nation's youth about the August elections. The Council of Churches in Sierra Leone (CCSL) have also highlighted flaws in the voter's registration process.

The most prominent of the civil society organizations presently is without doubt the Fifty/Fifty Group of women's activists demanding equal representation for women and men in public affairs. This group, though criticized by many women for being too far removed from them, it has nevertheless championed gender issues in the country and made it the concern of all. Through training and advocacy they have continued to fight for the rights of women in parliament and other centres, and for the upcoming elections they have vowed to ensure that more of their members get to be the government of the

day. These are all in addition to the efforts of the main body of the country's civil society organizations in informing and educating their various communities about their role in the upcoming elections.

These developments, and many others not highlighted here, are part of the preparations by the various organizations and institutions in the country with a stake in the scheduled August 11 elections. Despite problems with finance and logistics, all indications point to a determination by all participants in this election process to ensure a peaceful and successful conclusion to the process.

Security of the Polls and Electorate

A letter posted recently to various news houses, purportedly from disgruntled soldiers in the country's army raised a lot of alarm. It is however suggested that this alarm may very well have emanated from any of the political parties or disgruntled groups opposed to the present government. Since the army is at present supposedly largely professional and apolitical in nature, the possibility of the army getting involved in the elections to ensure that a particular political party is denied the right to rule is minimal. Individual officers and soldiers with their won political sentiments can nevertheless connive with politicians and disrupt the democratic process.

Security institutions like the newly established Office of National Security (ONS), the Army and Police are being organized or reformed and provided with adequate logistics to address any security situation that may arise in the country. These institutions constitute tools or instruments at the disposal of the government, coupled with the civil society and other stakeholders in the country's security architecture, to respond to any adverse outcome of the August 11 elections. In the same way, they could also be induced or manipulated by the ruling party.

In terms of preparedness by the security forces (police, army and ONS) for the elections, the Deputy Minister of Defence, Joe Blell recently stated categorically that no foreign troops will be invited to secure the election as the army and police were well equipped with adequate man power, logistics and training to ensure the highest standards of professionalism. In fact, heads of both the police and army have reaffirmed their confidence in their capacity to handle any that and occurrence that could emerge from the elections. However, the heads of both the country's police and army have sought to alley the fears of the public by emphasizing that they are prepared to handle any kind of scenario that emerges from the elections.

Given the political tension and violence already registered, the responsibility of political parties in educating its followers is also very critical. Sensationalism and incitement to violence as well as hate speech suffices to plunge the country into chaos. Quoting from a statement not long ago by the Secretary General of the main opposition in parliament, the All Peoples Congress (APC), Victor Foe, "the presidency of Alhaji Dr. Ahmad Tejan Kabbah have been wasted years", and that only a recourse to the rule of the APC will bring salvation to the people of Sierra Leone. Due to this perceived failure of the government to fulfil its promises to the people, the opposition is of the opinion that the government can only win the elections through rigging and massive electoral malpractices. In this regard many in the opposition parties have resolved to contest the results of the elections if the ruling party (the Sierra Leone Peoples Party) declares victory in the elections. Mind sets have been built. Judging from the political history of the country, efforts must be redoubled by all stakeholders in the country to ensure that

the majority of the people are not carried away by the manipulations and whims and caprices of disgruntled politicians, both in the ruling party and the opposition.

4. POTENTIAL SCENARIOS (During and Immediate Post-elections period)

Good case Scenario (*Premised on fact that elections hold as planned on August 11, 2007*)

Despite the heated political landscape, elections hold and polls are adjudged free and fair and the verdict accepted by stakeholders, national and international observers. The Electoral Commission and political parties as well civil society ensure a level playing field in accordance with internationally accepted standards, thus creating a conducive environment for the organization of credible elections. The will of the majority is respected and power changes hands and the winners respect the losers, while the losers congratulate the winners. This scenario would however be characterized by

- ❑ Massive election turn-out, minimal reported cases of election malpractices, and speedy publication of election results.
- ❑ Skirmishes and ‘thuggery’ activities that are brought under control;
- ❑ Isolated contentious cases of fraud and rigging leading to recourse to election tribunals;
- ❑ Demonstration that the country may not only have grown beyond the war years, but have inculcated the tenets of true democracy into its governance and is ready for development in an environment of peace and stability.

Bad case scenario (*premised on growing violence and opening of wounds of war*)

Judging from reports in the country’s newspapers, radio broadcasts and public opinion, the reigning perception propagated mainly by the opposition that ruling party cannot win elections except through rigging becomes entrenched. Given the image propagated mainly by the opposition parties and their supporters that the government has done nothing to deserve another term, the polling day is marred by violence and bloody clashes between rival parties. A break down of law and order occasions the declaration of a state of emergency and the transitional process is aborted. The military steps in and Sierra Leon once again glides into anarchy and armed rebellion resurfaces.

The negative scenario would be characterized by:

- ❑ Widespread political apathy and threats civil disobedience as result of perception that the Electoral Commission is not independent and would only stage manage and play script of ruling party;
- ❑ Flaring of tension by local media and increased polarization along ethnic lines;
- ❑ Rioting, destruction of property and looting as well as settlement of political scores;
- ❑ Threats of a military coup.

6. OPTIONS FOR RESPONSE AND ACTION

WANEP proposes the following recommendations or options for response:

Key Stakeholders (Electoral Commission, Political Parties, Security Forces, Judiciary, Civil Society, Media)

Electoral Commission

The other area of concern for many in the opposition is the independence of the National Electoral Commission. Its Chairlady, Christiana Thorpe, is suspected of being a SLPP (ruling party) supporter. There is no plausible way in which the present government or any government for that matter will replace her with someone opposed to it simply because it wants to be fair with the opposition.

- ❑ The chairlady must remain a professional and ensure the Commission is staffed with professionals who are very much independent in their work, and cannot be easily manipulated.
- ❑ The critical role of the Electoral Commission to the success and credibility of the elections as well as the maintenance of lasting peace in the country entails it should be treated with the utmost importance by the government and its partners in the peace process. Government must do more to assure the public that it does not have any influence on the Commission.
- ❑ The government and its partners must do more to capacitate the Commission so that it will avoid some of the criticisms from the public.

Political Parties

The role of political parties in any political transition is very instrumental. The win-at-all-cost mentality must be discouraged in a politically fragile country like Sierra Leone. Politicians are capable of everything, including unearthing the buried grudges of the war years that may undermine years of socio-economic reconstruction and political reconciliation. Therefore, for violence free elections, the following measures should be considered.

- ❑ The arsonists in the Pujehun and Moyamba Districts, and the Sunday July 17 culprits of the political violence in Kailahun must be sought out and made to face the force of the law. This would be dissuasive to prevent those who lie in wait for the elections day to unveil their dastardly plans on the country.
- ❑ Political parties must be held accountable for the behaviours of their militants. Party education and sensitization must be intensified. Culprits must be traced and denounced and persecuted.
- ❑ Parties must also respect and adhere to the code of conduct they all signed to. It is clear that the burning of the houses and villages is merely the start of a prolonged campaign by whoever that is behind the fires, to ensure that the people of that region and in fact all Sierra Leoneans are denied the peace and security that they deserve to carry on with their lives.

- ❑ The governing ruling party must ensure that the question of disgruntled teachers must be addressed before the elections so as to avert any form of dissent on the basis of the failure of the government to fulfil its commitments to people on its payroll.

Judiciary

A great pillar of democracy is the judiciary. The recklessness of politicians and the executive can only be curtailed by a strong judiciary. Sierra Leone needs such confidence assuring system.

- ❑ The country's judiciary and other avenues of seeking redress should be fortified and facilitated to work efficiently so that all aggrieved parties in the elections are addressed without fear or favour.
- ❑ Timely and vigorous judgements of elections related litigations (unlike the slow and resource consuming international court cases) would constitute a violence arresting valve. In this regard, the country's judiciary must be seen to be independent and capable of making decisions without taking orders "from above."
- ❑ There seems to be a lot of disaffection within the country's judicial system, thus a lot must be done to bring it to the level of independence that is required by a desperate political opposition.

Security Forces

Adequate security of the ballot box and protecting the votes of the Sierra Leonean citizen is a critical requirement for peace and stability.

- ❑ For the maintenance of peace before and after the elections, the country's security forces' morale must be boosted. In addition, their capacity should be enhanced with adequate logistics to ensure that they are capable of maintaining the peace, mindless of the resultant scenario.
- ❑ More effort should also be made by the government and its partners to promote the living standard of the members of the security forces, on whom the security and peace of the country finally depends.
- ❑ A strong, disciplined and neutral police force as well as the Office of National Security (ONS) would go a long way in addressing and curtailing the excesses of those sections of the society who may want to take the law in their hands, even if they are from the ruling government.
- ❑ The army chief and hierarchy must also be united in their defence of the country's democracy and constitution. The threatening letter from so-called disgruntled soldiers to media houses is an indication that there is likelihood of a rift in the army. Hence the institution needs to redouble its efforts to forestall any violent disruption of the country's democratic process.

Civil Society & Media

Although not an immediate threat to the peace, another issue that must also be

addressed by the government and its partners in the country's peace process as we approach the election date is that of gender relations in the country, which is gradually gaining momentum, considering especially the number of organizations and groups being established to promote and fight for or promote women's rights and issues.

- ❑ As emphasized by the United Nations in Resolution 1325 of December 2000 on Women, Peace and Security, there can be no lasting peace in a society where the women are subordinated and discriminated against by the men. With greater gender equality, the UN is certain that there can be more peace for everyone.
- ❑ Gender issues should be part of the political process for all involved in the electoral process as a way of mainstreaming these concerns into the election and governance of the country.
- ❑ Civil society organizations and media groups working to sensitize and educate the public about the elections must also be supported to expand their operations to areas that are difficult to reach. In this way the results of the elections would be more representative of the wishes of the people especially from the far flung regions of the country, where the voices of the people are hardly heard.
- ❑ Those in the business of peace building must redouble their efforts to educate and raise awareness of the politicians, political parties and the general public about the true tenets of democracy and that no political problem can be solved by violence.

ECOWAS, the UN and International Community

Sierra Leone is still a largely dependent country. Like a baby that must be nursed to adulthood, the international community still has a great role to play in ensuring a smooth transition (whether it would be ruling party to ruling party transition or power alternation from SLPP to opposition hands).

- ❑ ECOWAS that played a fundamental role in Sierra Leone at the outbreak of the crisis (they have always received the burning fire before the UN takes over in the sub-region) should increase its role especially during the critical forthcoming elections. Beyond the observations, technical assistance in elections organization should be contemplated.
- ❑ ECOWAS should also make it known that it would not entertain the disruption of the electoral process and undermine efforts that the Sierra Leoneans, ECOWAS and the international community have invested to bring the nation to this level.
- ❑ The United Nations Peace Building Commission, which is presently collaborating with the Government of Sierra Leone in its drive to achieve lasting peace in the country, should increase its visibility and relevance.
- ❑ Re-focus on Sierra Leone and avert a glide to anarchy that may be politically suicidal for the entire Mano River Basin peace process. This re-focus should be focused on ensuring credible elections and assistance in delivering the dividends of democracy because average Sierra Leonean citizens and desperate youths do not "eat democracy".

CONCLUSION

The August 11, 2007 elections have once more put Sierra Leone on the political radar of the international community. The elections are very significant. First, President Tejan Kabbah is quitting the political scene and his vice, Solomon Berewa is vying to step in his shoes. Secondly, there was a split within the ruling party and one of aspirants, Charles Margai (son of a former president), who never made it decided to create his own party-the PMDC. Consequently, the traditional opposition APC now shares the opposition status with a formidable and potential ally, the PMDC. This means that the political scene would be hotly contested and whatever the outcome, the political landscape in Sierra Leone would no longer be the same. A critical responsibility of all stakeholders now must be to work towards violence free elections and smooth post-elections period. Whoever wins the elections has the onerous task of reconciling the country under a common vision and addressing the mounting youth unemployment and dependence on the international community for national survival. The politicking and the quest for votes must seek genuine and democratically accepted norms. And if there is one thing Sierra Leone needs most at this moment, it is peace and national unity. This must not be sacrificed on the political rostrum.