

Grassroots Magazine



Sierra Leone

Grassroots Magazine is a monthly publication dedicated to issues affecting Sierra Leone and its people. This is our maiden issue. We will present our Editorial Board and other relevant information in subsequent publications.

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Forward — 63rd Independence Anniversary

Permit me to start this forward with the words of a Rasta Man from yesteryears: “Serum of Truth, Serum of Truth, season the minds of men so that through fear they may lose fear and become fearsome”

Since 1954 the Colonialist British Government decided that the People of Sierra Leone should start governing themselves. The outcome of that decision led to Sir Milton Margai assuming public office as Chief Minister of the Government establishment that was set up. That was seventy (70) years ago.

On 27th April 1961, Sierra Leone was formally granted “Political Independence” with liberty to elect governments by themselves through the assumed process of voting by the ballot box under a supposed “Democratic Process”. By all intents and purposes this process, albeit with varying and various flawed dispositions, has been going on when, roughly after every five (5) or so years, the incumbent government will decide to go to the Polls. This Process has witnessed the change of governments between the two (2) largely established Political Parties – The Sierra Leone People’s Party (SLPP) and the All-People’s Congress (APC).

These seemingly two political parties are largely ethnocentrically based with to a very large extent having and governing with very similar world outlook and ideologies. (Pillage and Plunder). They have even merged under some circumstances as a one-party government. Whenever one or the other is ruling, corruption is always rife and tribalism, favouritism, nepotism and other Anti-People and negative vices are still prevalent to more or lesser degrees. Our People and Nation as a whole do not visibly seem to be

making any progress at all. In fact, retrogression and stagnation seem to be more evident than anything else.

This year, 2024, marks sixty-three (63) years after formal Political Independence. Some of us do believe that Our People should be boasting of and enjoying better qualities of life now, generally, and sustained and consistent power generation, clean pipe-borne water supply and sanitation, better and affordable health and educational facilities, good and serviceable roads and water travel systems for passengers and goods; and agricultural activities that enable our nation to produce what we eat. **The core values of our nation, generally, those of citizens and public functionaries especially, must revolve around Honesty, Integrity, Discipline, Humility, Agriculture, and Technology.**

For some of us, The Most-High God or Allah and Nature endowed this country to be the best on earth – Small land mass – 27.7 square miles (71.7sq.km); small population, about 8.6 million; huge concentrations of highly valuable mineral resources, approximately six months each of rain and sun; rivers and streams that could generate water supply and power supply. Ocean that could sustain our needs for fish. Vast airable land that could sustain what we need to grow and eat. All we need is to organise as a People to progress and develop ourselves.

This is why we believe we will start organising as Grassroots Initiatives (G.I.) to conscientise and organise our People to take their destinies in their hands to uplift themselves from the sad history these two political parties have plotted for them over these painful and sad sixty-three years.

Jeff Bowlay-Williams

EDITORIAL: THE SIERRA LEONE I WANT TO SEE

INTRODUCTION

On the 27th of April 1961, Sierra Leone attained self-rule and became a sovereign State. As we reflect on 63 years of self-rule, it becomes absolutely clear, that the hopes and aspirations of the people that accompanied self-rule have not been realized. Sierra Leone has not prospered as was expected neither do the people live a better life. Instead, the country has moved in a reverse direction with a small elite enjoying and living affluent lives from ill-gotten gains and corrupt dealings. This has been going on over and over for the past 63 year regardless of the political outfit or party that has governed the country. The elite does not care about the people. They have organized themselves into two tribal alliances masquerading as political parties. The elites of the south-eastern tribes have mainly formed themselves into the SLPP party while the north-westerners into the APC party. These parties have become the instruments of access to national resources. Whatever party finds themselves in power control and loot national resources, leaving the masses and youth in desperate squalor. Young Sierra Leoneans these days graduate from universities and join these parties with the sole aim of having access to the national cake through political appointments and contracts and enriching themselves. The result is that Sierra Leone has sunk into an unrecognizable abyss of poverty and underdevelopment even by third world standards. In the next few parts of this piece, we will first, lament on the current state of affairs; second, taking an individual lens, we will reflect on the

Sierra Leone that we want to see; and third, conclude with a call to action.

A SYNOPSIS OF THE CURRENT STATE OF AFFAIRS

Cataloguing the current state of Sierra Leone does not require a long narrative as citizens are more than familiar with the state of decay. Endemic poverty has resulted from corruption and kleptocracy. The state of poverty has totally eroded the moral fibre of the society. 57% of the population lives below US\$1.25 a day. The ordinary Sierra Leonean see their politicians and public servants living affluent lives and conclude that if those at the top live by theft, so can they. The young think that a life of theft and dishonesty is a smart way of life. According to the recent census estimates, 45.8% of the population of Sierra Leone is approximately under the age of 15, and 74.8% below the age of 35. Employment-generation, especially among youth, the majority of whom are unemployed or underemployed with low levels of literacy, remains a major challenge. Youth unemployment has been an historic grievance and conflict driver. The literacy rate of 2021 was 47.70%, very low for a country that had established formal schools since the 19th century and the first modern university in sub-Saharan Africa which was established in 1827. Recent efforts by the government to introduce free quality education was badly conceptualised and implemented, lacks finance and is not sustainable.

Low agricultural production contributes toward 43% of Sierra Leoneans being categorized as food insecure, (Food

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Security Monitoring System, WFP and MAF) whilst poor dietary diversity results in one third (31.3%) of children being chronically malnourished (SMART Nutrition survey, UNICEF and MOHS). Overall inequality continues to increase. For every 100,000 live births, 970 women die from pregnancy related causes.

Finally, the country, and particularly its capital Freetown, remains vulnerable to disasters. Floods account for 85% of disaster-related mortality in the country, followed by landslides, storms and fire accidents (Sierra Leone Country Climate Action Reports).

The Sierra Leone political landscape has been dominated by two political forces, the APC and SLPP, with corridors of military rule. However, these political parties have appropriated the governance space and converted it into a looting shed, colluding with multi-nationals especially in the mining industry, signing bad contracts for kickbacks that go into their private pockets.

Government officials remain unaccountable for budgetary allocations and the Auditor General and her deputy were recently suspended and subjected to a sham tribunal for questioning illegitimate and unsubstantiated spending by the president during frequent and unnecessary official trips abroad.

THE SIERRA LEONE I WANT TO SEE

The Sierra Leone I want to see is written in the first person to individualise the aspirations of all citizens. All Sierra Leoneans are called upon to visit the Grassroots Initiatives (GI) website and add their voice to the Sierra Leone they want to see in the comments section and state how they want it to happen. This should be the new narrative for all Sierra Leoneans. Whenever you see a public

official, tell them about the Sierra Leone you want to see. Talk about this in schools, churches, mosques, universities, offices, market places and in the media.

I want to see a Sierra Leone where equal opportunities are afforded to all, especially the youth. A Sierra Leone where the youth are provided with sound education and skills training that enable them to be self-employed rather than depend on kush and other drugs.

Sierra Leone needs a political system where the judiciary and parliament are independent from the executive. A parliament that is not a rubber stamp institution that is subjected to brown envelopes.

A judiciary that does not accept bribes and can limit and overturn unlawful and constitutional executive action through

judicial review. In other words, a judiciary that can say to the president – “No! you are wrong,” without any repercussions. We need strong institutions that are responsive and answerable to the concerns of the public. An independent electoral commission that does not take instructions from the executive but able to organise transparent and credible elections, and to see the end of corruption. Elections must represent the will of the people and their votes must be respected. Harnessing national resources requires stemming corruption and ensuring that no sacred cows means just that! By stemming corruption,

national funds will be available to pay liveable salaries

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and provide public services.

I want to see Sierra Leone transformed into a middle income country in a space of 10 years. I want to see a Sierra Leone where those who are corrupt and embezzle public funds are sent to PRISON! Sierra Leone is not a poor country and does not need to rely on donor aid. Every Sierra Leonean should be able to live a respectable life and be able to afford their basic necessities if the resources of the country are managed honestly.

I want to see a Sierra Leone where the rights of citizens are respected. Freedom of speech, expression and the right to protest as critical. The executive must refrain from colluding with the police and from silencing and subjugating citizens who disagree with government.

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I want to see a Sierra Leone where the health care system is properly equipped and the doctors and nurses well trained and properly remunerated to provide first call medical services in every part of the country right down to the chiefdom and

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village level. Sierra Leoneans need to travel to Ghana and Senegal for basic medical health care services or face preventable death.

Why should this be happening? The majority who cannot afford the trip face certain death. Is this acceptable? Moreover, I want to see a Sierra Leone that can produce 24 hours electricity for its people, safe drinking water for the majority and the capacity to manage garbage and dispose of its waste efficiently.

CALL TO ACTION

Sierra Leoneans! Over the past 63 years we have had 6 elected leaders and a military leader who was in power for a reasonable period. They all came with lofty promises but failed to deliver. They start off with short-lived high sounding flagship projects that go nowhere and soon start looting public resources. Must we allow this to continue? Our APC and SLPP politicians and their small elite of looters stay in power by manipulating tribesmen in the villages to vote for them, telling them that the other side is a threat to their existence.

Things need to change. It's time to educate the masses. These parties belong to small tribal elites who dish out crumbs of handouts to them and fool them that these are their parties. This hegemony needs to change. Temne man, Limba man, APC is not your party. Mende man, Sherbro man, SLPP

is not your party. Do not be fooled. These parties belong to small tribal elitist enclaves who are

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manipulating you. The system needs to change. The grassroots need to forge out their own path. I want to see a Sierra Leone where truly patriotic leaders are elected. We need to relegate the current APC/SLPP led system to the dustbin of history and birth a new and revolutionary grassroots and people-led system where leaders are not all-powerful emperors but listen to the people or be recalled. 2028 is just round the corner. We cannot continue like this. **LET'S TAKE OUR COUNTRY BACK!**

If you support this message, go to Grassroots Initiatives web page on <https://grassrootsinitiatives-sl.org/> and make a comment regarding the Sierra Leone you want to see and how this should be achieved.

THE ILLUSION OF INDEPENDENCE

For decades now, many African countries have been celebrating their independence from their white colonizers, be it the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Portugal and Spain, among others. The independence struggle gained momentum across the continent from the 1950s and lasted until the 1960s and 70s, and the 1990s with Namibia's independence on March 21, 1990, which coincided with the end of Apartheid in South Africa between May 4, 1990 to April 27, 1994.

So, for Africans, independence was a break from bondage, oppression, servitude, economic enslavement, mental manipulation, among other forms of cruelty. But the meaning of independence for African countries seemed to have a different meaning for the colonizers. For them (the colonizers) it was merely a process of physical freedom for the Africans but never economic or political freedom.

My country, Sierra Leone, situated on the West Coast of Africa, is observing its 63rd independence anniversary from Britain on April 27. After sixty-three years of gaining freedom Sierra Leone still portrays a picture of an independence that has very little meaning for the vast majority of its population.

The liberation struggle for some countries was brutal and resulted in untold suffering and the loss of many lives. Of course, slavery in the earlier years had caused

tremendous damage to the continent and its people.

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the Africans but never economic or political freedom. In essence the Africans were still going to be remotely controlled and economically exploited by their former masters. In a nutshell, independence was just a written consent for the West to vacate the driver's seat while maintaining control of the direction each country was heading to, politically and economically.

My country, Sierra Leone, situated on the West Coast of Africa, is observing its 63rd independence anniversary from Britain on April 27. After sixty-three years of gaining freedom, Sierra Leone still portrays a picture

of an independence that has very little meaning for the vast majority of its population. The euphoria of liberation, emancipation from the political and economic stranglehold of the British appears to have been based on expectations yet to be realised. The transfer of political power to a local elite political group has not yielded the much-cherished fruits of freedom. Year in year out, the true meaning of independence for successive generations appears to be just an illusion.

Since 1961 the levers of political power have been the domain of two major political powers, the South-

Eastern dominated SLPP and the North-Western dominated APC. The history of these two parties is a topic for another day. Apart from brief military interruptions, the country has been ruled by these two parties at different times

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with very little differences in terms of ideology or delivering for the majority of citizens.

It is gut wrenching to painfully observe that even what the British left like pipe borne water and electricity supply are now serious challenges in terms of availability. Sierra

Leoneans have endured the effects of demonic political carnage throughout the ages. Many citizens continue to wonder why their leaders treat them with such disdain and cruelty. Citizens see little difference from the barbarism of colonialism to the perennial subjugation by the local political class. This reality sounds more like being between the devil and the deep sea.

In this day and age, it is but hard to understand why the country cannot provide constant electricity for its citizens. It is baffling to comprehend why there is hardly any running clean water in most homes in the country, the almost seven months of rains and the many rivers with fresh water the country is blessed with notwithstanding. It is heart-breaking to see mostly children and women dying from treatable diseases due to lack of medicine and proper equipment at our hospitals. A recent case at the PCMH (Cottage Hospital) where a baby died soon after birth (reportedly due to lack of electricity) should prick the conscience of us all. The unemployment rate of youths, young graduates from our institutions of higher

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learning keeps increasing at an alarming rate. Politics in Sierra Leone seems to be more of a destructive menu than a social contract that benefits ordinary citizens. Is this what independence means for Sierra Leoneans? Why has our governance system not produced a better life for the majority?

The political class has over many decades ruthlessly infiltrated and suffocated our institutions, depriving them of their independence to serve the country. These institutions for the most part do the bidding of the party in power.

Many civil society organisations, once the voice of the people, have lost their vocal cords to advocate for the ordinary people. Trust in the judiciary is at an all-time low. Student unions, in years gone by, served as champions for the masses as happened in the 1977 uprising against Siaka Stevens, demonstrations against Momoh in 1992 before the NPRC military takeover, the 1997 revolt against the AFRC and so

on. For years now successive student union governments do not even make press statements that favour the masses. Politics have

undermined and weakened student activism. Trade unions are now in a state

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of coma. Many journalists have seen it fit to take political sides. Freedom of expression and association have been largely strangled. Corruption continues to rear its ugly head in public offices.

It is very clear that our constitution, which gives immense power to the executive, does not serve the best interest of the nation. “Political clientelism” has made our politics a do or die exercise

as many are ready to do anything to take political power or serve the interest of those in power. Generally, many people believe in the notion that proximity to power affords them opportunities and in some cases immunity. Hence, they sometimes engage in illegal acts that serve their personal interest at the detriment of the nation. The use of tribal and regional sentiments in our political discourse continues to undermine the unity of the nation, contrary to what our motto calls for. We continue to put our politicians on a pedestal that gives them leverage to sometimes abuse their office with no consequence. We continue to put party above country as we destroy the

spirit of patriotism. Political patronage is deeply imbedded in our governance system that efficiency is often mortgaged

For most Sierra Leoneans independence seems to be just an illusion and would remain so until they see changes that impact their lives positively. Our motto, “Unity, Freedom and Justice” is a far cry from our reality.

All these must change if the nation is to enjoy the long-awaited fruits of independence. Neutrality is not the best option when it comes to issues affecting our nation.

As most citizens continue to wallow in poverty the political class continues to live large at the expense of common people. The cost

of living has cast a stranglehold on the majority that they can hardly “breathe”. So, what does the average citizen has to celebrate on Independence Day? For most Sierra Leoneans independence seems to be just an illusion and would remain so until they see changes that impact their lives positively. Our motto, “Unity, Freedom and Justice” is a far cry from our reality. It is incumbent upon all well-meaning Sierra Leoneans to ensure that we serve the interest of our nation and hold political leaders accountable. We are all entitled to the land we call Sierra Leone.

A. Mansaray.

Reflections on Sixty-three (63) Years of Sierra Leone's 'Independence' – Between Quest for Nationhood and Free Dependence

Alhaji U. N'jai

I first wrote this piece in 2018 and it represented my introspection on the state of the nation Sierra Leone at 57.

It was also a time of great optimism as the nation had just ushered in the “new direction” government of President Julius Maada Bio. Expectations across the country were high that the new Bio led administration will correct some of the wrongs of the previous governments. It has been my fervent desire that much of the narrative on this piece would have changed for the better in the last six years, but unfortunately except for few areas, it seems to have largely tilted towards the worse, with prayers, fasting, supernatural or ancestral spiritual interventions now been called upon.

So why has President Bio's New Direction failed so far in its effort to create meaningful changes in the lives of average Sierra Leoneans. Why have previous governments from Milton Margai, Siaka Stevens, Joseph Momoh, Valentine Strasser, Ahmed Tejan Kabba to Ernest Bai Koroma also failed to do so, and woefully. Why is poverty, ‘d gron dry’, and abject food poverty still a major factor in a land of abundant natural resources? Why has the country become a place where dreams of young people die and wither out (they get grey) without realizing them? Why does it seem like we are retrogressing rather than progressing as far as quality of life is concerned? Is it something borne out of the people aka the bad heart? Is it a

leadership deficit? Is it that we lack true transformational leadership? Is it widespread greed, lip service and systemic corruption? Is it politics and ethnic polarization? Is it the lack of ideology with our politics? Is it the lack of prioritization of what is important? Is it that we lack patriotism and basic civic responsibilities like integrity, empathy, honesty, mindfulness? Is it the lack of capability and capacity or is it because incompetency is rewarded? Is it because mediocrity has taken center stage and excellence has been marginalized? Is it due to our colonial and neocolonial legacies? Is it because of our perennial dependencies on external donors/investors for our development? Is it that we lack ownership and sustainability plans in our development agenda? Is it our educational curriculum that has not been fully decolonized and domesticated to our needs? I simply do not have the answers, however, to understand the roots of our present-day condition, historical antecedent matters.

On April 27th, 2024, Sierra Leone as a nation turns 63. Celebrations across the country to mark Independence Day have become a usual tradition. There is nothing bad with fellow Sierra Leoneans celebrating Independence. After all, our colonial era began with the British Crown Colony establishment in 1808 and annexation of the entire country through establishment of a British Protectorate in 1896. Colonial era was a period of harsh, crude, and inhuman deculturation of our people. All forms of resistance including Bai Bureh and many others were met and crushed with heavy force. So, in 1961, Sierra Leone gained independence, thanks in part to our deadly mosquitoes that made it unbearable for the British, and in part to the steadfast endeavors of our many

ancestor's nationalists from across the country, who organized themselves under the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP). The country was ushered into Independence by Sir Milton Margai of the SLPP, who was considered a "nice person" and a "good leader" at the time. Mr. Margai, though a nice gentleman then, lacked the transformative vision to carve a unique decolonization direction and national agenda for Sierra Leone beyond the British legacy. As a result, the formation of a genuine national agenda was replaced by political party and regional agenda, which up to date continues to plague national development efforts.

Sixty-three years later, we are as dependent as ever; dependent mentally, psychologically, socially, economically, politically, scientifically, technologically, and in all things considered. Is it Happy free dependence day? Are we as a country Sierra Leone free, politically, economically, and culturally? The argument could be made that we are free politically, in as much as we are 'freely electing' and changing governments. This then brings me to the core of why I chose to merely just reflect on the day, what our ancestors had to go through under colonial rule, and how they must be turning around in their graves from our failures and lack of direction to lead our societies to prosperity. I often reflect on this ancestral curse and our inability to completely decolonize ourselves leading to new forms of colonialism, imperialism, slavery, low self-esteem, and reduction to beggar donor driven nations. It was Patrice Lumumba who famously said that "the Belgian's have granted us (Zaire now Democratic Republic of Congo) political independence on the one hand and the

other taken economic independence away from us." These words hold true to this day, political independence minus economic independence. The question to be asked today is, are we as independent nations politically, culturally, and economically free.? Can we re-write our history with a new paradigm that has Sierra Leone and Africa interests front and center.? If development is modernization minus dependency, can we assert that true development is taking place.?

Let us revisit the case for political independence with regards to the nation state and political dispensation in Sierra Leone. In 1884, 14 European Countries gathered in Berlin to partition Africa among themselves. No African or country was invited. Today European Union (EU) is sending observers to Sierra Leone and other African Elections to make sure that the colonial hegemony continues in the great disguise of democracy. In the psycho-affective realm of funding our elections, economic and cultural emancipation are never the consideration. It simply ensures the colonialists unfettered access and control of the colony's natural resources and political economy. What we simply have in the last 63 years in Sierra Leone is a kind of old wine in new bottles paradigm and a welcome to neocolonialism, the British Sovereign Club aka Commonwealth club. All aspects of our lives have been and continues to be "Britishmanism" with colonial acculturation to the highest degree. The same colonial education with limited connections to our cultural experience; same old colonial laws and legal systems for a different cultural experience; same economic systems that are largely extractive, exploitative, and geared towards supporting our British Colonial

or western societies. There is no emphasis or attempts at economic emancipation from the colonial master or creating opportunities and the conditions for local economic stimulation or boom that creates wealth and thriving healthy society. Rather, we have become perennially dependent on donors, International Monetary Fund (IMF), Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), or World Bank loans, and a whole host of non-governmental organizations, and foreign nations helping us run our country. This foreign domination syndrome is aptly captured by Dr. Y.K. Amoako of the UN Commission for Africa Executive Secretary “Africa is the only region in the world where foreign development paradigms dominate her development process.” Not only does this indicate that Africa’s development process is not “culturally close” to Africans, but also a revelation that African elites are mediocre in both their intellectualizing and their direction of the continent’s progress.”

Indeed, that intellectual mediocrity along with a heavy affinity and taste for the colonial lifestyle has become endemic, permeating all facets of our cultural space. In fact, the nature of westernization and acculturation in Sierra Leone and many other African countries surpasses all regions of the world. Prof. Ali A. Mazrui succinctly describes the nature of westernization in Africa as compared to the Japanese experience, “the nature of westernization in Africa has been very different. Far from emphasizing western productive technology and reducing western lifestyles and verbal culture, Africa has reversed the Japanese order of emphasis. Among the factors which have facilitated this reversal has been the role of the

African university as a vehicle of Western influence on African culture.” Yes, the African University and systems of education that emphasizes western culture and lifestyles as superior to the African way has played a huge role. There has been limited emphasis on indigenization or domestication of modernization based on our habits, norms, and value systems. In fact, we have simply handed our colonial masters or the west ownership of knowledge and any form of intellectualization process. Our knowledgebase systems are insufficient, archaic and does not meet modern standards. For any African knowledgebase in Science, Arts, Engineering, Literature, History, Humanities, and the like to be accepted, it must have a colonial master or western validation or seal of approval.

We “the colonized” have now been reduced to accepting this as our fate, a kind of status quo that we cannot change. Hence, we remain impotent, disable and unable to effectively change the course of the colonial master. You cannot blame our current leaders for being retrogressive since their minds are still heavily colonized. Colonization has clouded their minds to the extent that they lack the know-how and wherewithal for true sustainable development that requires as in Japan domestication of modernization and indigenization. Hence, the only way out for many is continuous dependence on western nations and ties such as the commonwealth, UN, or Francophone. We are so colonized that we celebrate our Sierra Leone or African leaders meeting and dining with the Queen of London. African leaders attending Commonwealth summit and dining with Queen is a sucker punch in the face for all Africans, specifically our African

ancestors who suffered the wreath of British colonial rule. A colonial loot, the Queen continues to enjoy at the expense of us Africans. The commonwealth has never been common, and it is wealth stolen from Africa, India and others. This is our wealth and must be given back to Africa, India, and all where it was forcibly looted or where we were sheepishly brainwashed with the illusion that human capital development comes with western education as in the elementary school lyrics “we are all going to our classes with clean hands and faces, to pay great attention to what we are told. Or else we shall never be happy and clever; for learning is better than silver and gold.” This lyric represents both a superficial academic assertion and a ploy by the colonialist to loot our gold, silver, and diamond in exchange for some western brainwashed education that lacks commerce or entrepreneurship.

In essence, we got elitism in place of rural agriculture and feeding ourselves, our silver and gold ended in their hands, and we continue to obey them in a hegemonic master and servant relationship. Our relationship should no longer be one of master and colonized. It should be based on equal partnership and not “Laybelleh” relationship. If that relationship must continue, we must take on the leadership. This is no longer time for Queen/royal family and colonial subjects. It’s about complete decolonization and forging our own paths as well as destiny. And decolonization means complete decolonization and not replacing one colonist with another aka China, India or others. Frantz Fanon must be turning around in his grave from the realization that the complete decolonization from the colonizer has not occurred since

Wretched of the Earth came out in 1961. Indeed, if Frantz Fanon was alive today, he would have seen an Africa that is largely independent from the colonizer but an Africa still at war with itself captured beautifully in Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*. The colonizer may be gone but the colonized mind is still with us, and we are at war with ourselves. The totality of being a Sierra Leonean and an African will come with decolonization of the mind. This process of decolonization is liberating and aligns the mind to the body physique. We breathe again as Sierra Leoneans with a renewed vigor and sense of purpose to effectively utilize our resources for social good.

The nation state of Sierra Leone still suffers from the residual effects of colonialism and systemic racism that now interestingly intersect with poor leadership, corruption, greed, mediocrity, short sightedness, lack of transformational vision, and ethnic based divisive politics. Over 150 years of colonialism and systemic racism in Sierra Leone and the region sowed the seeds of self-hate and self-doubt. We all have been conditioned to hate ourselves; to hate our dark skins; to hate ourselves based on imaginary national boundaries of colonial construct. We are Sierra Leoneans, Guineans, Liberians, Gambians, Senegalese, Malians divided by a colonial construct despite strong family and ethnic ties. The Ebola virus disease taught us the hard lesson that we are all connected as a people, but we continue to work in silos and in line with our colonial masters (Sierra Leone with Britain, Liberia with US, and Guinea with France). We cannot get ECOWAS or Mano River Union to work for us and address common issues simply because of colonial allegiances. As a nation state Sierra Leone, we practice democracy

based on ethnic numbers and self-hate; we elect our political leaders, hire and fire people based on ethnic sentiments and differences; we care less whether our actions hurt others or communities, if we perceive them to be different. We have in effect tied resource allocation to ethnicity or political tribes and at some point, weaponized tribalism as a mechanism of oppressing progressive voices, which have in effect held us as national hostages. As Frantz Fanon, notes “there is always a danger of the nation states in Africa to disintegrate along ethnic lines”. National Consciousness and a National Agenda should be borne out of the concerted action of the people, which embodies the actual aspirations of the people and transforms the state, which depends on exceptionally inventive cultural manifestations for its very existence.

In the post-colonial African states, all aspects of our traditional African value systems have been replaced by the values and even vices of the colonizer and their neo-liberal allies. First, Greed and individual material self-interests replaces the traditional communal sharing systems; Britishmanism, Frenchmanism, and Europeanisms have become the order of the day. Second, African education systems replaced by a colonial western formal education that has enhanced both academic (Science, technology, engineering, arts, mathematics, and humanities) and cultural dependency, therefore everything African has to be evaluated and validated from a Eurocentric lens, the culture of dominance and power; This has essentially led to the crave for degrees and academic titles even fake ones like the Yea Dominion University saga in Sierra Leone. Third, long-sighted

visionary and transformational Panafrican Independence leaders replaced by mediocre leaders, whose shortsightedness are enjoyed by the western donors or colonialists as it ensures the chain of dependency and unfettered access to Africa's resources is maintained. Fourth, African traditional pluralistic religions replaced by monotheism and strong tendencies for dichotomy; you are either Christian or not, Muslim or not, and no tendency to combine them. By contrast, African traditional religions are less dichotomous, less monotheistic, and are readily accepting of other religions, which allows for greater plurality and acceptance of diversity. Fifth, African ingenuity, self-reliance, and economic activity replaced by donor funding, foreign investments (world bank, IMF), International NGOs, foreign aid, multinational investments, and variety of half-sighted neoliberal foreign economic models that are unsustainable, inimical to the African needs, and ensures economic dependency. Therefore, continental Africans continue to be trapped in some form of neo-colonialism, systemic racism, mediocre leaderships, ethnic polarization, and dependency, respectively. In the same vein, the vicious cycle of poverty, despair, violence, wars, and underdevelopment has taken hold in communities and countries. The divide and rule actions of the oppressor also makes it impossible for unity of the oppressed African people; many of whom are caught up in self-hate, ethnic rivalries, disunity, and distorted views of their own histories provided by the same oppressors bent on keeping them apart.

So, at 63 years of independence, Sierra Leone is somewhat of a paradox. A nation with tremendous natural and

human resources potentials that has shown deep resilience through war, deadly Ebola epidemic, landslide, and Covid19. But, sadly as a nation, we are as dependent as ever, we are as hungry (food poor and insecure) as ever, we are as corrupt as ever, and we are ranked among lowest in human development index across Africa despite being one of the most naturally endowed in the continent. In the last 30 years of the 60 years of "Independence", we have become the land of survivors or rather the bland simulacrum of desolate living standards. Yes oh, War Survivors, Ebola Survivors, Landslide Survivors, EDSA Blackout Survivors, Kush Survivors, Tollgate Survivors, Covid19 Survivors, Austerity Survivors, Timber logging Survivors, Wealth Builder Survivors, Super Advertis Survivors, Flood Survivors, August 10 Survivors, Tombo Survivors, Makeni Survivors, Lunsar Survivors, November 26 Survivors, Okada Survivors, WASSCE Survivors, College Survivors, Prayer/Evangelical Survivors, CSO/NGO Survivors, Ramadan Survivors, No Job Survivors, Job Low Pay Beggar Beggar Survivors, Trafficking or Kuwait Survivors, Suck Air Survivors, Beggar Beggar Survivors, Political Rally Survivors, Police Brutality Survivors, Foreign Debt Survivors, Land Scam Survivors, Gender-based Violence Survivors, Workshop Survivors, Temple Run Survivors, Inflation Survivors, Fake Degrees Survivors, and All Things Considered Survivors, and so on. The Temple Run and Middle East Trafficking Survivors just simply re-iterates the lack of hope in Sierra Leone for young people. How can we as a nation celebrate independence when a significant proportion will rather die in the Mediterranean seas off Libya than live here. People are risking it all, including

been sold as slaves in Libya, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar or other countries just to leave. Migration in the independent state should be about choice and hope. UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres nicely states that "migration should be an active hope, and not despair." Yet, in Sierra Leone these hopes have now been replaced by despair and act of survivorship aka "we dae manage" has become normalized.

Survivorship and hardships brought on by greed, corruption, power intoxication by politicians and leadership that is as narcissistic and vainglorious as ever. Hence, clouded by the narcissism and desire for public praise where there is none, Politicians want the poor ignorant victims of their loot to thank them for making roads, hospitals, and providing basic services for which they are elected to make happen. It's often as if they are doing the populace a favor and of course it works well because they have succeeded in keeping the populace ignorant through a failed educational system. Apart from a failed educational system that has put mediocrity at the center and marginalized excellence, we are a nation without a holistic transportation solution, food security solution, access to portable water supply, energy or electricity (still struggling with lighting a bulb yet alone industrial energy despite abundant hydro, solar and other renewable potentials), tourism (despite beautiful mountains, landscapes, beaches, and incredible biodiversity), health care and public health (case management is so poor that a basic condition requires a trip to Ghana and maternal mortality remains one of the highest in the region), and so on. Freetown, the capital city is largely unplanned, risky and hazardous from uncontrolled sprawl, deforestation and

environmental degradation. Despite the formation of a Ministry of Environment and four agencies dealing with environment, our precious forest resources are being depleted for timber at an alarming rate in the north and successive governments seem unable to protect our environments. Ironically, our leaders travel to Climate change meetings, are signatories to climate change accords, and still drive V8 SUVs and do nothing to protect our environments. Instead, they are busy selling precious natural habitats like Black Johnson to shady investors and busy traveling without regards to their carbon footprint, in the name of attracting investors.

Interestingly, shady investors are all too aware of the dysfunctionality of our state systems and greed among the political elites. Hence for short term gains by our leaderships, shady investors can reap huge profits at the expense of the indigenous people. Lack of political ideology accounts for some of the greed, unscrupulous exploitation of the masses by shady investors, and lack of a transformational vision. In fact, since Independence in Sierra Leone, the only ideology that seems to operate is 'now we turn for eat'; largely between APC versus SLPP. For the last 63 years, we have been held hostage by the two thieves (APC and SLPP) and the ideology of 'now we turn for eat' by their supporters. Yet, we love our hostage takers (APC and SLPP) akin to the Stockholm Syndrome; are willing to protect them and vote for them continuously. This in turn creates vicious cycles of looting, deepens mediocrity, retrogression, and decadence.

Our current political systems in Sierra Leone bereft of a viable political ideology cannot yield economic

freedom, self-reliance, and the necessary cultural empowerments needed for domestication of development. For example, how do we stimulate local production to minimize our dependencies on imports of basic commodities like rice, flour, and food stuffs. How do we eat what we grow and grow what we eat, reducing our external dependencies? How do empower use of local building materials and indigenous architectures, and thereby minimize importation of cements, which also has a high carbon footprint and bad for climate? True sustainable development in Sierra Leone requires political, economic, and cultural independence. In other words, a complete decolonization of our minds, institutions, structures, and functions. It requires a paradigm shift that puts our Sierra Leone/African values front and center "an inward thinking and outward outlook approach." Thinking first from within African values, national agendas and matching African values with the enabling aspects of their colonial legacies and the global values. In addition, intellectually linking our Sierra Leonean and African values to the wider world of scholarship, science, engineering, and technology.

To break the cycle of dependency in Sierra Leone and across Africa, may require nothing short of a revolution, a break with current capitalist structures that ensures Western hegemonic dominance. The series of revolutions that won't be televised, should at the very least include: a Blue Intellectual revolution from which new sources of knowledge should emerge; a green revolution for food security, greater control of Sierra Leone/Africa's natural resources; a black revolution that culturally empowers Sierra Leoneans; a red revolution that creates strong sense

of national consciousness, unity, identity, and cohesion, that links young and old through mentorship, service, volunteerism, projects, and cultural education; a yellow revolution that ushers industrialization and wealth creation; and a white, pink, purple, orange, and so revolutions that ensues all aspects of self-reliance and sustainability are attained. Ultimately, Sierra Leone requires development that is closely aligned with our cultural space, economic emancipation and taking ownership of our resources at all stages of the value chain. It requires imagination, vision and building capacity at all levels, functions, and disciplines in the country. This ultimately requires building a strong University system and domesticating modern systems to suit local needs or modernizing from local systems and architecture. However, it ultimately requires a unique African leadership and governance that is devoid of corruption, greed and can put forward bold, transformational, phenomenal vision for the country to make a difference in lives at all ages and the build resilient thriving population and communities. Finally, as Fanon put its aptly in *The Wretched of the Earth*, “Imperialism leaves behind germs of rot which we must clinically detect and remove from our land but from our minds as well.” Therefore, to

achieve full and total liberation of the African people will require unification of thoughts, economic freedom, self-reliance, and politically powerful Africa. An economically and politically powerful federated Africa (including the Diaspora) will restore the dignity of its people and ensure that its resources are utilized to the benefits of its people and preserve the diverse cultures of its people. We must work towards a collective national and continental agenda for Sierra Leone and Africa, decolonize our systems, de-link resource allocation along party or ethnic lines and refrain from utilizing tribalism as a weapon of mass oppression that favors the bourgeoisie class elites strangle hold of power. We must now as individual citizens of Sierra Leone and as a government retrospect on what is our National Agenda. We must strive for a national identity and oneness borne out of patriotism and culture that is seen and felt by everyone.

About the author: Alhaji Umar N’jai is a Senior Scientist, Professor, Panafrikan Scholar, Founder & Chief Strategist of Project 1808, Inc., and Freelance writer ‘Roaming in the Mountains of Kabala Republic’. #Jata #Meejoh #ThePeoplesScientist

**APRIL 27 BLUES:
A POET'S MESSAGE ON OUR 63RD
IN-DEPENDENCE ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION**

At sixty-three: a lament!

How cowardly at sixty-three
to fault others for our debacle!
We cowered our people to see
living the pains we put them
through are what makes them
resilient and hopeful survivors
of the system we fail to design
for present & future generations.

At sixty-three our people are still
subjected to the bleakness we will
on them, to the perennial poverty
we layout for them and the weight
of our lack of vision in making life
worth living in the self-governance
that should have transformed lives.

At sixty-three our people still thirst
for the basics of living a worthy life;
for equal rights, freedom and justice;
for the benefits of our independence
which remains an economic fiction,
not the political self-determination
that could have transformed the lives
of our people; not the temple run and
the cemetery of dreams in search of
the gains we could offer our youth in
the independence we commemorate
and the brain-drain we manufacture.

At sixty-three we bash the erstwhile
for the sustainable leadership we fail
our people; for the hopelessness we
offer them in the nightmare they live
in the absence of visionary leadership.
At sixty-three, I retire from excuses!
I blame none for failing at sixty-three!

Saidu Bangura, Praia, March 10, 2024.

If we must celebrate our independence

If we must celebrate our independence,
let it not be under economic stillbirth
nor any form of financial dependence
which strangulates our people's lives.

If we must celebrate political sovereignty,
let it be in consonance with our déjà vu
and in tandem with our economic dignity
which we have lost for over six decades.

If we must jubilate on independence day,
let it be because there is a worthy cause
to celebrate, not because of the very day
itself: for we have nothing to show for it.

If we must celebrate our independence
this year, let it be a day of reflection for
all the asphyxiation our in-dependency
leaders put us through all these years.

And if we insist on commemorating this day,
let us be bold enough to reprehend the day –
and show how retrogressive we have been,
and show all our misplaced priorities and
missed opportunities we have had to make
our people possess the resources we have,
the resources we are blessed with as a people,
how we failed to transform them into wealth;
and how we have suffocated our own people –
let us not celebrate the day because we are;
let us celebrate our independence because
we can show we are really independent!

Saidu Bangura, Praia, March 29, 2024.

April: a melancholic month

April is a bewildering month – for it
 platitudinizes unity and freedom
relegating justice to the gutters with an
 independence that does not mean the
liberation that self-determination should imply –
 to a people.

April is a mischievous month – for it
propagates a false sense of change and progress
 rebuffing a people the development that
independence brings to a land and its people while
 (its) leaders lavish the resources meant –
 for the people.

April is a terribly untrustworthy month – for it
 promises what it cannot deliver to its
relentless and tolerant people who have been
 incessantly lied to by its leaders in the
Lion Mountains, the mountains alas collapsing –
 on the people.

April is a severely painful month – for it
presents defrauding moments for people in the
 realm of the free which we thought could
improve the living conditions of the citizens in the
 land that we love, but alas the

struggle still continues in the Lion Mountains
and its inhabitants even in this sixty-third April
devastatingly leaving its people in deep suffering:

April is the mischief that kills the roaring lion
 in the realm of the free.

Saidu Bangura, Praia, April 1, 2024.

The enigmas of a people

all the lives we have lived
all the ones we never lived
and the ones we are yet to live
the ones we are not sure to live
are punctuated by the mystery
of an overflow of a stop and go
sign signaling simultaneously
with the contemptible beauty
in this mystery we call home
where misery is the best one
can hope for, the only chance
one has in this enigmatic home,
a home that offers its residents
a conflicting choice between
pain and suffering as alternatives
to comfort and happiness –
a home that possesses all that
can make its owners live well
but whose servants prefer to
eat all the best the home offers
while the homeowners wait for
the leftovers of their servers –
the only thing residents hope for;
an avant-garde way of life not assured,
is not what people hope for in this,
this enigma of a place called home –
all we get are the enigmas of a people.

Saidu Bangura, Praia, April 3, 2024.

A new epiphany

We have moaned
we have mourned
in all the dawns that have ever dawned
in all the false epiphanies we have seen
in this hurt land of the duo kaleidoscopic
changes that never mitigated the people's
moaning and mourning in this debilitated
land that is constantly bleeding, groaning;
this land, a natural allure that can only be
falsely personified, imperfectly replicated;
a metaphor of the mutilation of hopefulness,
a simile of helplessness of peerless laziness,
a conceit of wealth not translated in our lives.

We quietly complain
we gently groan
we fearfully question
we comfortably wait for a miracle to happen
we calmly wait for a Moses to lead us through
this dark wilderness, this endless hopelessness
designed and sustained by the conjoined twins
as our people suffocate under the duo colours
that we have perennially chosen our reps from,
the reps who have inhumanely mistreated us,
the reps who are worse than the white vultures.

This April 27
we clamour for a new epiphany
we want to shout eureka this April 27
in the reflection of the day we claim gave us hope,
a hope that has hopelessly made us sufferers,
wounded our pride, and gave us a begging bowl
carried by the reps from the duo colours we have,
a forever begging people from a land of resources:
we clamour for a new epiphany this April 27 –
the light of our new epiphany must light up
this April 27!

Saidu Bangura, Praia, April 20, 2024.

Sierra Leone at 63: what does the future hold for its citizens?

We are today, April 27th, 2024, observing another 'Year/Day of Independence'. This august, yearly occasion offers us new opportunities for new resolves. So as we celebrate this day of our gaining independence from the colonial past, I have just been brainstorming some thoughts.

Generally, celebrating anniversaries are times for reflections of the past and anticipations of the possibilities that the future holds. For our country, Sierra Leone, it should be a moment to assess the preceding 63 years of Independence and determine what we wish to do or accomplish in the future.

Our country has come a mighty long, weary way. The country falls short of credible leadership and all State duties/functions have been marred by rampant corruption and unaccountability. The people are in disparate conditions and adapting reckless means of coping: from the rampant use of 'Kush' by the young unemployed population, thuggery by government sponsored tribal/ethnic outfits, to high level misuse of our national resources and the country is still wallowing in poverty that is worse than where we were at independence. Our people are tired of governments, both APC and SLPP, who have ruled them these 63 years and have yet to provide the basic services and amenities that citizens of All Nations are expected to have.

Why is it that a country with citizens of the highest IQ (91) in Africa and one of

best globally, putting up with the joke of leadership that they have had for over six decades; a leadership that has run their country to the ground?

It is not that Sierra Leoneans are lacking in intelligence; what's lacking is a cohesive value system that thrives in integrity, honesty, hard work, selflessness and individual/collective responsibility/accountability and mutualism. What Sierra Leone lacks is a citizenry that works for the collective good rather than for very slim segments or cleavages of society. What developed since independence is a superimposition of those fringes over the whole/entire population.

Sierra Leone has gone through the greater part of 63 years in tremendous pains and failures in grabbing opportunities or moments that could have made positive changes for the general citizenry's wellbeing. Instead, with heavy hearts, our generation should be asking ourselves if we are doing our very best to leave this World, our Continent and our Nation better than we met it?

Also, we should be asking what Grade does this and past generations give ourselves for our actions in the past 63 years? And what do we intend to do or do better in the future?

I dare to submit that, it is in this era that the country has finally been knocked to its knees: families cannot feed themselves, no reasonable power supply, steep prices of goods and services, miserable and backward healthcare and educational systems, a youth population

Why is it that a country with citizens of the highest IQ (91) in Africa and one of best globally, putting up with the joke of leadership that they have had for over six decades; a leadership that has run their country to the ground?

that is strung on drugs (Kush) and in the midst of all this, the country is still putting forth a very corrupt and dumb leadership that has no clue in governance. To compensate for these deficiencies, tribal loyalties are the pivot around which our country functions.

I also observe that the deliberate creation of ethnic divisions and the brutal suppression of citizens' rights and freedoms are now the lens through which governments create and implement their policies. The sum of which are breathtaking and vile.

So, as we observe another anniversary - there's nothing really to celebrate or be happy about - I challenge my fellow citizens to come back to the noble ideals upon which our nation was founded. I still see a subservient but really good people who have just been corrupted by the prevailing circumstances in our country.

But likewise, I implore my people to resist the urge of self-aggrandizement and greed. Truth and what's right are non-negotiable and are still worth fighting for.

Let's do individual introspections and reflect/think about these troubling facts and trends that have cropped up on us. Negative or selfish thinking will not do us or our country any good.

A lack of focus in the past 63 years has allowed a rogue mentality to gain ground in this nation; we should stop yielding to reckless thinking and realize the urgency to rescue our country's political, and socio-economic future.

The most recent trends have finally put our country at the precipice of disaster

for the humble citizens, who still cannot even fully comprehend the magnitude of the disaster that lurks ahead.

While assessing some of the unnecessary cruelty and selfishness that plagued our past, let's look forward to the opportunities or possibilities of the future. I suggest that we use this anniversary as a platform to renew our obligations to our nation and address the critical issues we are facing, including

but not limited to the following:

(1) Governments that have not been fostering growth and development.

We should hold our country's leadership accountable. The open, in-your-face thievery of our country's resources must be challenged by the majority. It

is incredulous to see how a relatively small country like ours, with so much natural resources can only survive by panhandling; what a shame on us!

(2) State sponsored tribal/ethnic divisions. Sierra Leoneans of All Ethnic Groups must resist the cynicism that promotes one tribe or ethnic group over another. This is the weakest form of political engagement and history has demonstrated the devastating outcomes of such attitudes.

(3) Address the rampant corruption that permeates our society. Citizens must take the bold and would be painful step of reeding our country of the rampant corruptions that are now entrenched in the fabrics of society.

I dare to submit that, it is in this era that the country has finally been knocked to its knees: families cannot feed themselves, no reasonable power supply, steep prices of goods and services, miserable and backward healthcare and educational systems, a youth population that is strung on drugs (Kush) and in the midst of all this, the country is still putting forth a very corrupt and dumb leadership that has no clue in governance.

(4) Community support through local engagement and empowerment. We should start developing grassroots, out-of-the-box thinking initiatives that address the problems in our communities.

(5) Support a credible grassroots 'Third Force' that implements its manifesto and not just another band of thieves. There should be support for a 'credible' third force, whose leadership are not remnants of or disgruntled members of the APC and SLPP; parties which have been the bane of ours.

Let us use this 63rd Anniversary of our Independence as a moment for introspection and renewal. There are variety of reasons for the degeneration of the cohesive character that this country was supposed to enjoy. Our unity and the ideals that wielded us together have been compromised. We are now dealing with a Godfather mentality; its hierarchy and

attending vices have weaved their tentacles into our country's systems and we are now in a state of potential permanent decadence if citizens do not halt this trend.

Sierra Leone has a catalogue of stubborn problems that require 'out of the box' solutions. And these solutions have to be guided by the principles of truth and right.

As I finish the thoughts that inspired this piece, and as I observe this Independence Anniversary in my little corner, the lyrics of Mutabaruka are flooding my mind: "Any which way, Freedom must come..."

Ours is a Unity, Freedom and Justice dispensation; let's reflect on our future along those lines.

Have a Blessed Anniversary.

Foday Sulimani, USA.

Mourning the Betrayal of Independence: Sierra Leone's Cry for Unity, Freedom, and Justice

As Sierra Leoneans, we stand on the precipice of another Independence Day, but the question looms heavy: why should we celebrate a nationhood that has failed to deliver on its promises? For far too long, our people have endured the bitter fruits of a freedom that rings hollow, a unity shattered by greed, and a justice system that favors the powerful over the powerless.

When our founding fathers stood at Lancaster House in London, they envisioned a future where their children and grandchildren would bask in the glory of unity, freedom, and justice. Yet, what we have inherited is a legacy tainted by corruption, division, and violence.

As we mark yet another year of independence, we cannot help but mourn the loss of what could have been. Our streets, once filled with hope and promise, now echo with the cries of pain and despair. Hunger, disease, and poverty ravage our land, while those in power line their pockets with the sweat and blood of the masses.

It is time for us, the people of Sierra Leone, to rise up and reclaim the dream that was stolen from us. We cannot continue to stand idly by as our country descends further into chaos and despair. We must demand accountability from those who have betrayed our trust and our future.

To President Julius Maada Bio and all those in power, we say: your time is up. We will no longer tolerate your greed,

your arrogance, and your indifference to the plight of the people. We demand an end to the extra-judicial killings that stain our streets with the blood of the innocent.

But our call for change does not end with the government alone. Both the APC and the SLPP must heed our cry for justice and unity. Their endless power struggles have only served to deepen the wounds of our nation. The time has come for them to step aside and make way for a new era of leadership. They have proven that they cannot be trusted. Thus, we need a leadership that is truly committed to the principles of **“UNITY, FREEDOM, and JUSTICE”**.

On the 27th day of April 2024, let us come together as one nation, united in mourning for the Sierra Leone that could have been. Let us don the black of sorrow and take to the streets, not in celebration, but in a peaceful defiance. Defiance against a system that has failed us, and defiance in the face of those who seek to divide us by letting them know no matter what, we are one people, we are Sierra Leoneans and Sierra Leone is the only place we call home, we cannot sacrifice our **Unity, Freedom and Justice** once given to us by our forefathers to those who seek only their personal interest.

Sierra Leoneans, the time for change is now. Let us stand together and demand the future that we deserve. It is time to reclaim our independence, not as a day of celebration, but as a day of peaceful defiance. The day when we say enough is enough and demand a new dawn for our beloved Mama Salone. **Imagine Athens in Darkness!**

Alpha Amadu Jalloh - The Fox 🦊