

SIERRA LEONE TRC EXECUTIVE SUMMARY - TRUE SAY TOK ME

All

Please note that:

"The commission, as it's first and primary finding, found that the conflict represented an extraordinary failure of leadership on the part of ALL THOSE INVOLVED IN GOVERNMENT, PUBLIC LIFE AND CIVIL SOCIETY. NO ENLIGHTENED AND VISIONARY LEADER EMERGED TO STEER THE COUNTRY AWAY FROM THE SLIDE INTO CHAOS AND BLOODY CIVIL WAR."

Whilst these words are meant to reflect a historic situation, sadly they are somewhat prophetic in signaling that the underlying causes of the war in Sierra Leone remains unchanged. Indeed the report states this explicitly and cautions that perhaps the conditions which existed before the war have been somewhat aggravated by the war itself.

The TRC is not the whitewash it was expected to be. Indeed chief skeptic here (yours truly) went to a viewing of a video edition of the report, to confirm that it was not credible. I have since become a champion of the report and urge you to fulfill your national and family responsibilities and patriotic duties by familiarizing yourself with the content. It is an imperfect document, but it is the most comprehensive document that I have seen which addresses not just the war, but Sierra Leone society at large. Its scope includes the divisive colonial administration through to that fateful day in January 6th 1999, which epitomizes the worst excesses of the war and a government at its knees. To understand the causes, conduct, impact and consequences of the war, it is inevitable that there is a comprehensive review of Sierra Leone society.

There is not a lot that we may not already know intuitively, however it is all pulled together into a formidable package. Additionally it dispels myths that have pervaded. E.g. it concludes that that war was primarily amongst and between Sierra Leoneans (Foreign elements play an important but minor role) and that the war was not about Diamonds but Diamonds helped to fuel it. The report also mentions the fluidity between the players and notes that many Kamajors (CDF) were former RUF who sought to use another vehicle to attain their equally selfish goals. (Now, who knew that?) Bear in mind that Sankoh himself had alluded to the fact that some members of the SLPP government had been RUF leaders or sympathizers. Ironically the Report fails to acknowledge the relationship between members of the NPRC and the RUF. E.g. Maada Bio's sister Agnes Deen-Jalloh (nee Bio) was a senior RUF diplomat. Or that Tom Nyumah (the mysteriously successful NPRC Minister/combatant/chief looter was the nephew of Fayia Musa (One time RUF spokesman).

The full report is an 895-page document that is yet to be published. I have had an opportunity to review parts of it. I will provide you with links when they become available. I also include here a link to the children's version of the report. <http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/files/TRCCF9SeptFINAL.pdf>. Let us teach the children in the hope and belief that they will learn to be better, more patriotic and more progressive citizens of Sierra Leone from within or without.

The TRC Report culminates in a chapter called the National Vision for Sierra Leone. Through 350+ items of art, poetry, essays and even wood models, Sierra Leoneans of all persuasions (including RUF prisoners) express their respective vision for Sierra Leone. (More on this later.)

To my generation, I say - We have a duty and an opportunity to demonstrate "Enlightened, Visionary and Committed Leadership." We will not all be in government or parliament, but politics and nation building requires a strong civil society, which holds its elected leadership accountable. The overseas Sierra Leonean community is critical in this regard.

Note that the TRC was mandated as part of the Lome Peace Accords and subsequently legislated into being. The act that established the TRC states that the government is obligated to implement the recommendations of the TRC. Consequently, we have the opportunity to support the government in its duty either by providing resources or by holding them accountable. Either way, we must not squander this opportunity to give our people greater hope and bequeath a legacy to our grand children which they will be proud to inherit.

Let me recount to you the words of a young man I met in Freetown back in 2000. He was a non-combatant associated with the AFRC who went to the bush because his family was in the Military and they got chased out in 1998. To paraphrase him he expressed that the Sierra Leone Motto of "Unity, Freedom and Justice" was in reverse order "first we must have justice and then we can enjoy freedom and unity" These words continue to haunt me as I grapple with the myriad of recommendations that the TRC has submitted to government.

As we in the US celebrate Martin Luther King's birthday with a federal holiday today, let me share with you a favorite quote of mine which is to be found on the walls of the Massachusetts Supreme Court in Boston and reads:

"Where justice is denied and any one class is made to feel that society is no more than an organized conspiracy to oppress, rob and degrade them, then neither persons nor property will be safe."
Frederik Douglass 1886

Whether they are former Baathists, Palestinians, former Slaves or just poverty stricken citizens of the world, these words continue to hold true. Human dignity and the pursuit of it can push people to extraordinary lengths. Good or bad is not relevant. It is what it is.

Lonta

Niyi Robin-Coker
1/17/05