

## **Celebrating America's Independence**

On July 3, 2012, Ambassador and Mrs. Owen hosted more than 200 guests at an Embassy cocktail reception to celebrate the 236<sup>th</sup> Independence Anniversary of the United States of America. The program was graced by several dignitaries including Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Mrs. Ebum Jusu as guest of honour representing the Government of Sierra Leone. In his speech, the Ambassador emphasized the large scope and variety of assistance projects sponsored by the United States Government as well as the growing number of private America investors and NGOs contributing to the development of Sierra Leone. Highlights of the evening included renditions of the United States and Sierra Leone national anthems by singers from the Ballanta Academy of Music and a toast proposed to lasting bilateral relations.

**Remarks by Michael S. Owen  
Ambassador of the United States of America  
to the Republic of Sierra Leone**

**U.S. Independence Day Reception  
U.S. Embassy Atrium  
Tuesday, July 3, 2012**

- I am pleased to welcome you here for the celebration of the ***two hundredth and thirty-sixth anniversary*** of the signing of the American Declaration of Independence.
- This document is perhaps the most clear and concise statement of our values as Americans. It embodies our belief in basic human rights and democratic principles. It continues to inspire all Americans – as well as our friends and allies throughout the world.

- Sierra Leone is an excellent example of the enduring friendship between the people of the United States and our African partners. Our shared history is long and – despite the painful legacy of slavery – this relationship has matured and born fruit in ways that the authors of the Declaration of Independence could never have imagined.
- From both sides of the Atlantic, we can look at this partnership with pride. Sierra Leoneans continue to distinguish themselves in America. Every year dozens of exchange visitors, scholars, and students travel to the United States to share ideas with their American counterparts – and then come back to contribute to the development of this nation.
- Similarly, many **Americans** of Sierra Leonean heritage have made a return voyage to these shores. They come to share their expertise in technology, business, and education. They come to invest, to build, to teach. They come to show that the future of America and Africa is still intertwined – but this time on the basis of mutual interests. They come to show that peace, stability, and prosperity have no borders – and the American Embassy is committed to working with them to advance our shared goals.

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- Even as we look toward the future, I am also proud to look back at what the United States has accomplished in cooperation with the government and people of Sierra Leone.
- Since my arrival almost two years ago, I have visited every province in Sierra Leone. In each place – no matter how remote -- I have seen examples of projects supported by the United States government or private American organizations.
- Since 2010, the Economic Section at the Embassy has reached out to the Sierra Leonean diaspora, and has created an American Chamber of Commerce in Freetown -- to support not only the U.S. private sector in Sierra Leone, but any business that wants to engage with the U.S. economy.

- Sierra Leoneans in the U.S. , as well as returnees living here, are actively investing in their homeland. An estimated 86 percent of Sierra Leoneans in the U.S. send money home regularly, totaling approximately **168 million dollars annually** or around **12 percent of GDP** -- one of the highest remittance rates in Africa.
- American companies have led the way in petroleum exploration projects here in Sierra Leone. The U.S. corporation Anadarko was the first company to drill in Sierra Leone and continues to operate off shore. Over the last year, Anadarko drilled two more wells and is currently analyzing the samples and data from those drills. A number of other U.S. companies have also shown interest in applying for petroleum exploration licenses in Sierra Leone. These include Chevron, Kosmos Energy, and Noble Energy.
- The U.S.-led private equity firm, Joule Africa, won the tender to build Phase Two of the Bumbuna hydroelectric power dam. Work is now underway and engineering assessments have begun. This **650 million dollar project** aims to increase the dam's output by **ten times** -- from 28 megawatts to 280 megawatts – over the next five years.
- In addition, Sierra Leone has gained the attention of the American tourism and hospitality industries. The hotel companies Hilton and Radisson are already operating in Sierra Leone, and Marriott has shown interest as well.
- Delta Airlines now partners with Air France for flights to Freetown. And only last month, the United States and Sierra Leone initialed the text of an **“Open Skies Agreement”** that will liberalize the bilateral aviation relationship between our nations.
- This agreement will strengthen U.S. trade and tourism links with Sierra Leone, benefit American and Sierra Leonean business travelers, expand air service, and encourage competition -- while also promoting aviation safety and security.
- I plan to continue working closely with American companies and individual investors who want to come to Sierra Leone, to establish businesses, trade

and invest, and create jobs. We will do all we can to establish partnerships, make linkages, and put people together who have a vision for business that can advance economic prosperity in Sierra Leone.

- With that in mind, I want to personally thank the American, local, and international businesses whose generosity has made tonight's reception possible.
- Our supporters this year are: Africell; the American Chamber of Commerce in Sierra Leone; Anadarko; Commodities Trading Company; First Step; Joule Africa; Karl Travel Agency; Prime Logistics; Sam King Group; and Universal Trading and Supplies.
- We appreciate your involvement and look forward to working with you to expand economic opportunities in Sierra Leone.

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- I'd also like to note the development assistance that has been provided by the United States Agency for International Development to the people of Sierra Leone for almost **51 years**. USAID was the brainchild of President Kennedy, who called for the creation of an agency that would support economic opportunity and democratic freedom for all people -- as central to America's domestic security, prosperity and national conscience.
- Those principles are still at the forefront of our development programs. In Sierra Leone, agricultural productivity projects supported by USAID have provided assistance to more than 14,000 rural households, as well as providing training to over 5,000 farmers and producers' organizations.
- In 2010, USAID launched a 5-year sustainable nutrition and agriculture program at a cost of \$12 million annually. The program is supporting more than 45,000 Sierra Leonean families through improved access to health services, clean water, and fortified food.
- As Sierra Leone prepares for parliamentary and presidential elections in November, the United States stands ready to assist. Since 2011, USAID has

committed more than **six million dollars** towards supporting inclusive elections, rule of law, and effective local government institutions that will broaden political participation in Sierra Leone, particularly among women and the handicapped.

- We are also promoting civic education, judicial reform, and the strengthened capacity of local government officials to deliver better community services.

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- Ensuring the security of your nation is also fundamental to democratic development. In light of this, the high level of cooperation between the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces and the United States Department of Defense is very encouraging. The U.S. Africa Command has sponsored a number of ship visits to Freetown by U.S. Navy and Coast Guard vessels – and continues to provide training and assistance programs for our Sierra Leonean military counterparts.
- I am also proud that the U.S. Department of State has provided training and support to Sierra Leonean troops preparing to participate in peacekeeping missions in Sudan and Somalia. The ***Africa Contingency Operations Training and Assistance*** program, or ***ACOTA***, has played a vital part in making these soldiers ready to function effectively in some of the world's most dangerous environments.
- Throughout their training, RSLAF soldiers have worked closely with American civilians and military who have acted as instructors, mentors, and friends. Indeed, it should be a source of national pride to all Sierra Leoneans that this beautiful country – in the space of ten short years – has gone from being a country that ***requires*** peacekeepers to a country that ***supplies*** peacekeepers.
- It also important to focus on the ***internal*** security apparatus, especially the police. Since 2011, USAID and the U.S. Department of Justice have been working with the Sierra Leone Police to promote professionalism and the

ideals of community service – without which no police force can function effectively.

- I encourage the Sierra Leone Police to make a concerted effort to fulfill their mandate as the guardians of public order for the civilian population. This is a difficult task for any nation, especially one emerging from civil conflict – but it is an essential component of public safety.

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- Yet another sign that peace is being consolidated in Sierra Leone has been the continued expansion of **Peace Corps**, which returned in 2010 following a 16-year absence. Earlier this month, the **third group** of volunteers to arrive in the past two years began training in Bo. There are now more than 100 volunteers in-country, working as teachers of English, Math and Science.
- In fact, however, Peace Corps volunteers are much more than teachers – each volunteer is also an **ambassador**, demonstrating the best that America has to offer. More than anything else, these Americans – who live and work in the same environment as their Sierra Leonean colleagues and students – epitomize the friendship between our nations.

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- Finally, I want to recognize the achievements of our hosts – the government and people of Sierra Leone. We recognize that you have come a long way in a relatively short time. We share your optimism and enthusiasm for the future, and are happy to see tangible improvements in many sectors.
- The most important step in securing these gains will be free, fair, and credible elections this November. It is my genuine wish that on the **day after** the election, the people of Sierra Leone will be satisfied with the results – whether their candidate won or lost – and will join hands to move forward. Indeed, it is important to remember that democracy is not designed to **please** everyone. It is designed, rather, to give everyone an

opportunity to take part in a **process** that is larger than themselves. Larger than any political party. Larger than any personal desire.

- Democracy is a system of compromise. And compromise depends on the recognition of shared interests. In a democracy, the winner does not **take** all – but **leaves** a legacy that everyone can believe in. So, once again, it is my wish that these coming elections will be yet another foundation stone in constructing a peaceful and prosperous future for Sierra Leone.
- And so -- I ask you to join me in a toast to the health and well-being of His Excellency, Ernest Bai Koroma, President of the Republic of Sierra Leone, and to the people of Sierra Leone – and the enduring friendship between our two nations.