



**UNITED STATES EMBASSY
FREETOWN, SIERRA LEONE
LOCAL PRESS SUMMARIES
26-27 JANUARY, 2012**



The following local reports are summarized as published to indicate what stories are circulating in Sierra Leone. Readers are advised to seek Embassy corroboration and amplification before relying on press reports.

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Sierra Leone Conference Starts on Monday

On January 30, there will be a three-day meeting to chart the next 50 years forward, at the Miatta Conference Centre in Freetown. The conference, an initiative of President Koroma, is about aligning the entire population behind the goal of transforming Sierra Leone into a prosperous country in 25 – 30 years. It will also re-examine all aspects of the country's development as a nation, since independence. The Conference will be opened by the President, H.E Dr Ernest Bai Koroma, and will provide Sierra Leoneans the opportunity to have a say for the very first time on the strategy for the development of the nation. Four hundred participants from every spectrum of society will participate at the three-day conference. (Thursday January 26, Concord Times; page 3)

Commonwealth & Salone Dialogue with Media

On January 25, the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Government of Sierra Leone started a three-day conference to stimulate debate on the emerging issues on development and democracy as well as professional journalism in West Africa, at the Miatta Conference Hall, Youyi Building. The Commonwealth Acting Director, Communications and Public Affairs, Manoah Esipisu said the conference is to discuss the role of the media in post war reconstruction, politics and growth, which is of importance to the African continent and the Commonwealth. Minister of Information and Communication, Ibrahim Ben Kargbo, disclosed that, “The legal and institutional environment for media freedom is quite in place in Sierra Leone and the government is committed to promoting high standards of media ethics so that we can ensure balanced reporting and professional journalism.” The forum brought together media owners, executives of the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ), the Independent Media Commission (IMC) and civil society groups.

(Thursday January 26, Awoko; page 2, Friday January 27; New Vision; front page cont'd page 6, Premier News; page 6)

“Ernest Koroma is our Redeemer” ... Commercial Motor Bike Riders

On January 25, hundreds of commercial motorbike riders in the east end of Freetown, described President Ernest Bai Koroma as their redeemer and savior. They made this disclosure during a sensitization meeting with the President on the need for them to register in the ongoing biometric voter registration. They referred to President Koroma as a man committed to the peace, stability and development of the country.

(Thursday January 26, New Vision; front page cont'd page 6)

President Koroma Urges MRU to Unite Against New Threats

On January 24, President Ernest Bai Koroma underscored the scary reality of the sub region's “new security threats” of “drug trafficking, small arms proliferation, youth unemployment and terrorism.” He expressed concern over the grave political difficulties experienced by the Mano River Union (MRU), within the past twenty years. He noted that the region experienced miasmatic and brutal civil wars in Liberia, Sierra Leone,

and Ivory Coast in the 1990s and 2000s. The President made this disclosure while speaking to delegations of security, trade chiefs and experts from the MRU countries at State House.

(Thursday January 26, Premier News; page 2, Friday January 27, Global Times; page 9)

ERSG Michael von der Schulenburg May Go

On January 27, in an exclusive interview with Radio Democracy 98.1, Minister of Information and Communications Alhaji Ibrahim Ben Kargbo denied allegations that the government has declared the UN's Executive Representative of the Secretary General (ERSG), Michael von der Schulenburg, to be persona non grata. He said the government is not aware of anything like that – but noted that if it were to be true, it would be because of Mr. Schulenburg's disagreement with some political parties. Nonetheless, the Radio Democracy reporter also said that she had heard the ERSG was in fact leaving the country and would depart on February 9.

(Friday January 27, Radio Democracy 98.1; Good morning Salone)

Embassy Comment: After the United Nations General Assembly in September 2011, Interim Leader of the United Democratic Movement (UDM) Mohamed Bangura alleged in some local newspapers and a number of radio interviews to have had meetings at the United Nations Secretariat in New York. He claimed that he made a number of assertions against the ERSG's impartiality. The United Nations Integrated Peace Building Office in Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL) later issued a press release refuting the allegations. The release states that Mr. Bangura never had a meeting with the UN Secretary General, his Chief of Staff or any other pertinent UN official in New York. Some observers believed the Sierra Leonean government orchestrated this incident with Mohamed Bangura to discredit the ERSG. On October 19, Deputy Government Spokesman Sylvester Swarray stated that the All People's Congress (APC)-led administration does not in any way condone Bangura's activities against Mr. Michael von der Schulenburg, nor does it have any comment concerning the legitimacy of the allegations levied against him.

Salone Can't Prosper Without Women

On Thursday January 27, the Gender Expert for the Sierra Leone Conference on Development and Transformation (SLDT), Naasu Fofana, disclosed that Sierra Leone is endowed with natural resources that are yet to be harnessed, pointing at women's empowerment for self reliance as a significant tool for political, social and economic transformation of the country. Naasu considered the importance of women's participation at all level of human endeavors. Ms. Naasu Fofana made these disclosures in an exclusive interview with Concord Times.

(Friday January 27, Concord Times; page 3)

Citizens Slam Biometric Sensitization

Reports from around the country have indicated that public education campaigns for the biometric voter registration (BVR) have not effectively explained the registration process to illiterate voters. The BVR system was introduced by the National Electoral Commission (NEC) to avoid duplication of voters' names and to ensure a fair and accountable voters list ahead of the November 17 general elections.

(Friday January 27, Concord Times; page 3)

APC Angry With Bad Press

On January 26, the Deputy Government Spokesman, Sylvester Swaray, expressed disappointment over the continuous bad press that the All People's Congress (APC) led government have been receiving locally and internationally within the past few weeks with particular reference to the Ministry of Energy and Water Resources. Mr. Swaray explained that it has come to the attention of Government that some sections of both the local and international press have been publishing stories that are not only misleading but totally untrue, regarding Government's efforts at electrifying the capital city - Freetown. He cited a publication on January 6, 2012 in the African Confidential, in which he said the article carried untrue insinuations meant to tarnish the good image of the Government. The release stated that the Africa Confidential report suggested that when Bumbuna Phase Two is completed, one of the mining companies operating in Sierra Leone stands to benefit most from the project.

(Friday January 27, AYV Magazine; page 6)

Health Minister Welcomes 29 Cuban Medics

On January 26, twenty-nine medical specialists from Cuba arrived in Sierra Leone to support doctors in the West African nation, which has some of the world's worst health indicators. The doctors met with Health Minister Haja Zainab Bangura who said their assistance will "contribute towards enhancing the free health care initiative" launched by President Ernest Koroma two years ago. The Cuban doctors, who are in Sierra

Leone for a three-year programme funded by South Africa, include psychiatrists, biomedical engineers, obstetricians and specialist surgeons.

(Friday January 27, Awoko; page 6, SLBC; News Hour at 3pm)