

**LAUNCHING OF THE CLEAN ELECTIONS CAMPAIGN ON
WEDNESDAY 17th JANUARY 2007 AT THE BRITISH COUNCIL,
FREETOWN, SIERRA LEONE**



The opening prayer was given by Mrs. Emma Kamara, (left) Programme Co-ordinator of Children's Learning Services – Sierra Leone, and the Chairman of the Council of Imams, Sheik Tejan Sillah.

Mr. Morris Conteh, Acting Country Manager, Hope-Sierra Leone, welcomed everyone. During his address he gave a brief history of the growth of Hope-Sierra Leone since 2001 when it began working on peace and reconciliation through sustainable development.

He remarked that Hope-Sierra Leone has given particular attention to agriculture, giving opportunities to Sierra Leoneans, particularly the youth population and ex-combatants to engage in gainful employment. He also drew attention to the Moral Foundations for Democracy programme that has really helped to rebuild the lives of Sierra Leoneans morally and spiritually.

Mr. Conteh said that Hope-Sierra Leone has formed a Coalition with the Network on Collaborative Peace building – Sierra Leone (N C P – S L) to undertake voter education, monitoring, documenting and reporting on the 2007 parliamentary and presidential elections throughout the country. He stressed that a major aim of the campaign is to educate Sierra Leoneans on elections and basic values including politics of accommodation, tolerance, participation, making valid judgments and choices so as to have better leaders who would bring speedy growth and development to the country.



Mr. Pat Macaroni introduced the Chairman, Mr. Emmanuel Saffa Abdullah, (above) Executive Director of the Society for Democratic Initiatives. In his opening remarks Mr. Abdullah said that “there is no doubt that today is an important milestone in the history of our country”.

He went on to explain that the greatest impediment to the development of democracy, in the context of elections in the country, was that the new ruling party to which the military handed over power in 1968 swiftly adopted the African political ideology of the day: a single party political structure that quickly developed into an unchallengeable monolith. The consequence of this long period of single party political practice was the lack of political education of the citizens on the ideals and practice of multi party and participatory democracy, especially education that would enable them to make informed choices in elections.

Mr. Abdullah said that the war inflicted massive destruction, division and trauma on Sierra Leoneans and that the 2007 elections should be considered another opportunity



Front row: Senior police and military officers, who attended as observers, seated with Sheik Tejan Sillah, Chairman of the Council of Imams.

for the people to mandate political parties of their choice and unify the country through transitional justice processes. Without an understanding of the issues, the wrong choices could be made.

He also mentioned that there is the need for pre-electoral education for the 2007 elections since it needs a variety of approaches including community and institutional meetings that can make up for the inadequacies of the media, the high level of illiteracy and the income level of the ordinary citizens. He stressed the need for the encouragement of the Community Based Organisations (CBOs) in this direction as they have more and wider reach. He concluded by saying that security is a major issue since in the past the security apparatus was used as an instrument of suppression and oppression at election times.

The background to the Clean Elections Campaign was delivered by Mr. John Bangura. In his speech he said that a Clean Elections Campaign was launched by 'Initiatives of Change' in Kenya in 1995 and gathered support and momentum from a wide variety of civic and religious bodies. He said that after the 1995 campaign in Kenya, a Clean Elections Campaign in Sierra Leone played a significant role in the 2002 parliamentary and presidential elections, as well as in Kenya's elections in the same year.

He mentioned that Sierra Leone's chance to set a new trend and be a light for the African continent and the world is **now** and that every Sierra Leonean, young and old, has a significant part to play through a personal decision to refuse to act violently or corruptly at any level, and to see that the country's hard won democracy and precious votes are not sold, as they are part of our constitutional and God-given right - to put right what is wrong and save Sierra Leone.

He highlighted the Clean Elections Campaign's aims to give teeth to the longing of the people for a 'clean nation':

This campaign will not support any particular individual or party but will work for the good of Sierra Leone.

It will provide no personal benefit to any individual and will work unselfishly for the good of the country.

It will be totally positive in its approach.

It will not seek to blame any politician or party but will encourage all to take responsibility for the people and nation.

He also said that the CEC will challenge each voter to commit himself/herself to the following:

- ❖ To register as a voter
- ❖ To get a voter ID card
- ❖ To give no bribe of any sort
- ❖ To accept no bribe of any sort
- ❖ To cast only his/her individual vote.
- ❖ To refuse to take part in any violence and instead aim to promote good will and tolerance towards all.
- ❖ To report any irregularities during the whole electoral process to the relevant authorities.
- ❖ To encourage others to make these same commitments.

He said that the 2007 elections should be regarded as a national celebration of our



democratic rights, liberation from hate, destruction and suspicion - and not a declaration of war. “Our nation hasn’t got any resources left to survive another war and we are convinced that we can make a difference.” He pleaded with people to love and care, not to indulge in anger and blame and to recognize that “if we want to ‘clean-up’ the country we must start with ourselves.” Mr. Bangura said that to achieve this objective “we have decided to build a nationwide conscience bank” (personal commitment).

Mr. Edward Jombla, NCP-SL Co-ordinator, introduced the keynote speaker, Mr. Edward Kamara, (above) Programme Specialist, Democratic Governance, at UNDP (Sierra Leone Country Office). Mr. Kamara stressed that one of the valued principles of democracy was the concept of free and fair elections. He said that such elections

have become an increasingly vital requirement – governments needed to be legalized by their citizens and the international community. Electoral fairness, in turn, greatly affects the prospects for effective governance.

Mr. Kamara said that Sierra Leone is faced with a challenge - a big challenge - to withstand the test of conducting credible democratic elections. The plain fact is that “we can eliminate the prospects of electoral violence by making the electoral process ‘free’”. Citizens must have the right and the opportunity to choose their leaders or representatives. The electorate, candidates, parties, the media and observers should also enjoy the right to freedom of assembly, association, movement and speech.

In conclusion, Mr. Kamara said that it is very worth while considering the contribution of international and domestic election monitoring systems to genuine and concrete improvement in the equality of elections.



The Clean Elections Campaign was formally launched by Dr. Nana Pratt, (left) Secretary-General of the National Organisation of Women (SL).

A short but very educative statement was delivered by Miss Miatta

French, (right) who represented the National Electoral Commission. In her statement, she said that the duration of the voter registration exercise for the 2007 presidential and parliamentary elections will be twenty days. She emphasized that the process of voter registration is the best way to identify eligible voters and that only persons aged 18 by July 28th will be eligible to register and vote.



The launching ceremony ended with prayers followed by refreshments.

Photos: John Bangura
