

NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF PARAMOUNT CHIEFS

19-22 April 2011

BO CITY

Acknowledgements:

The Government of Sierra Leone, Council of Paramount Chiefs and its Implementing Partner, HOPE Sierra Leone, wishes to acknowledge with much gratitude the United Nations Integrated Peace Building Office in Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL) for its great encouragement and efforts in providing funds for this distinguished Conference. Without such efforts, it is unlikely that the hosting of this very successful conference would have been possible.



PC Koble Queen II (Outgoing Chair, NCPC)



The High Table with H.E., V-P and Diplomatic Missions in Sierra Leone.



ERSG of the UN in SL Mr. Michael Schulenburg

Attentively listening Paramount Chiefs



Executive Summary

The National Conference of Paramount Chiefs, which took place in the southern city of Bo, was symbolically and politically important. The conference was well-timed to coincide with Sierra Leone's 50th Independence Anniversary celebrations. It was preceded by a Durbar of Paramount Chiefs at the Bo Coronation Field and it was the first time since the visit of the British Monarch (Queen Elizabeth II) to Sierra Leone (and to Bo) in November-December 1961 that all the Paramount Chiefs had again congregated in Bo for such an event.



Durbar of Paramount Chiefs



Exchange of staff of office

The durbar showcased the cultural regalia connected with the institution of chieftaincy in the various regions of the country. Another highlight of the event was the replacement of the old staff (which represented the symbol of authority of the Paramount Chiefs but which still bore the vestiges of colonial rule) with a new one that truly portrayed the sovereign state of Sierra Leone. President Ernest Bai Koroma officially gave the new staff to the Paramount Chiefs at a very colourful ceremony.

During the ceremony, the President underscored the vital role Paramount Chiefs had played in the country's march towards independence and implored them to take a critical look at their institution with a view to making it more relevant in the overall governance system. To this end, the Head of State called on the chiefs to come up with concrete proposals for better chiefdom administration.

On the second and succeeding days, technical papers were presented on the following themes:

- (a) The role of Paramount Chiefs in modern-day governance and the maintenance of law and order.
- (b) The role of Paramount Chiefs in conflict prevention/resolution and peace consolidation.
- (c) The role of Paramount Chiefs in ensuring peaceful, free and fair elections.
- (d) The role of Paramount Chiefs in multi-party democracy.
- (e) The customs and traditions of chieftaincy in relation to gender issues.
- (f) Code of ethics for Paramount Chiefs.

In the group discussions that followed the presentations, the Paramount Chiefs themselves proposed measures that would guarantee improved chiefdom governance, humane justice systems, better accountability and services for their people. They included:

- An open and transparent chieftom administration
- Even-handedness in their dealings with their citizens
- Regular consultations with their people
- Provision to be made for women and youths to be represented in the decision-making processes
- Paramount Chiefs to be open to change
- Paramount Chiefs to resist the temptation of being used by political parties for their own ends (put differently, Paramount Chiefs should not be engaged in partisan politics)
- Discouraging the imposition of exorbitant fines and fees
- Promoting those cultural practices that enhance societal cohesion and at the same time discouraging those that are inimical to modern ideas of governance and which are clear violations of human rights
- Finding ways of improving the revenue base of the chieftoms without necessarily over-taxing the citizens
- Judicious use of chieftom resources
- Prohibiting the cultivation of harmful substances like marijuana (*jamba*) in the chieftoms.

The Paramount Chiefs also discussed their draft constitution. Their goal is for the statutory recognition of a House of Paramount Chiefs which will be apolitical and will serve, among other things, as a regular forum where the chiefs would meet to exchange ideas and discuss matters affecting their institution and the chieftoms.

The climax of the meeting was the election of a new executive and the issuing of a communiqué which succinctly captured all the major decisions of the conference. These were grouped under the following headings:

- (a) Enhancing the honour, dignity and prestige of the institution of Paramount Chieftaincy
- (b) Remuneration and welfare of Paramount Chiefs
- (c) Neutrality and impartiality in political party activities
- (d) Promoting good governance and human rights
- (e) Maintenance of law and order
- (f) Cultivation and use of harmful substances
- (g) Cooperation with other governance structures
- (h) Commitment to the transformation of cultural practices
- (i) Encouraging greater participation of women and youths in chieftom governance
- (j) Partnership with development partners
- (k) Settlement of land, boundary and other disputes
- (l) Election of Paramount Chiefs
- (m) Statutory recognition of Paramount Chiefs.

Challenges

It was evident that while there were many progressive Paramount Chiefs, there were many more that were not in tune with the principles of good governance, and these chiefs had to be brought in line. One major drawback of the conference was the seemingly towering presence of high-ranking operatives of the Ministry of Local Government (including the Minister and his Deputy)

some of whom were actively involved in the conference proceedings. Their presence may have inhibited frank debate of critical issues that affect the Paramount Chiefs.

Although all the chiefs felt the need to depoliticise their institution for peace, stability and development in their chiefdoms, it was clear that some were active agents of the government and were intolerant of alternative political views in their domains. Considering that the Presidential and Parliamentary elections would be held in a year's time, such posture on the part of certain chiefs is a recipe for political instability.

At the moment, Paramount Chiefs are not well-resourced to effectively and efficiently perform their traditional extractive, distributive and regulatory functions. The major impediments are:

- (a) Inadequate salaries and poor conditions of service for the chiefs and their functionaries.
- (b) Limited capacity in terms of exposure to contemporary governance principles and practices.
- (c) Dysfunctional chiefdom committees.
- (d) Weak revenue base.
- (e) Tensions between the local councils and the chiefdom councils with respect to the collection and use of local tax monies. The Local Council Act of 2004 stipulates that the councils are responsible for development at the local level. Yet the Chieftaincy Act of 2009 states that the Paramount Chief should serve as an "agent of development in the chiefdom." The Paramount Chiefs cannot perform this all-important role if they are under-resourced.

Recommendations

There is no doubt that Paramount Chieftaincy is still germane in the country's governance architecture. However, the institution must be adequately capacitated for it to adapt and better respond to the new realities of post-war Sierra Leone. As a first step, the establishment of a House of Chiefs must be given immediate priority. Thereafter, Paramount Chiefs will be removed from Parliament where, in the opinion of the chiefs themselves, their presence is of little relevance. The assembly of chiefs should be given enough powers and authority and resources for it to function well. Outside assistance may be sought in the beginning.

Despite the Chieftaincy Act, 2009 which establishes guidelines for the election of Paramount Chiefs and their sub-chiefs, there are many loopholes in the Act which make the legislation open to abuse. The chiefs must examine the Act carefully and suggest improvements. Also, many chiefdom authorities are not au fait with the Act and there is an urgent need for greater public education on the Act. Furthermore, a comprehensive compilation of Ruling Houses in all the 149 chiefdoms should be undertaken to discourage impostors from contesting in Paramount Chieftaincy elections. However, the politically sensitive nature of this exercise should not be overlooked.

In future, the role of the Local Government Ministry in Paramount Chiefs' conferences should be considerably reduced to allow for candid conversation.

Presented by
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