



Communique

National Cohesion for Sustainable Peace and Development

Workshop at Mammy Yoko Radisson Blu Hotel

18th-20th November 2019

Background

Sierra Leone is still struggling to address the scourge of an eleven-year civil war (1991-2002) with many challenges re-emerging that threatens our shared value and national cohesion. As highlighted in Sierra Leone's Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report (2004), the causes of conflict were 'many and diverse'. While some emanated from colonialism, the Commission highlighted pervasive corruption and dire failings of governance where leaders were impervious to the needs of the public. These conditions characterised all regimes prior to the conflict. By 1991 at the onset of conflict, Sierra Leone was a deeply divided society, with a significant portion of its citizenry living in deep deprivation.

While a number of initiatives have emerged to follow up on the TRC recommendations, there exists the need to sustain the discussion around peace and national cohesion. At the national level, this was articulated by the implementation of a national dialogue forum or 'Bintumani III' that took place in May 2019. It sought to cohere a mandate of the proposed Commission and to generate consensus on the nature of a National Peace Infrastructure.

National cohesion is also a key priority of the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding ([IDPS](#)) – the first forum for political dialogue to bring together countries affected by conflict and fragility, development partners, and civil society.¹ Recently the Dialogue has advanced a new [Peace Vision](#), prioritising national cohesion, alongside advancing the equality of women and the Women Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda and supporting a peace-promoting private sector at its core. As presently articulated in this vision, national cohesion is a foundation for peace and development. It is linked to the notion of the social contract, requiring vertical efforts between state and society, particularly around service provision, and horizontally, around strengthening relations among people. Key is '*a focus on political reforms that address grievances and structural sources of conflict and inequality, as well as supporting the development, political and security priorities of all segments of society*'.

Catalysing national cohesion is a job that must be embraced by all stakeholders in society. Evidence suggests that such processes can have valuable outcomes when driven by civil society. Presently, there exists a window of opportunity for Sierra Leone civil society to build a bottom top conversation

¹ The Sierra Leone government is the Co-Chair of this policy dialogue and of the [g7+](#) group of fragile and conflict-affected states, one of three constituencies of the Dialogue, along with members of the International Network on Conflict and Fragility ([INCAF](#)) of the OECD-DAC, and civil society, through the Civil Society Platform on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding ([CSPPS](#)).

on national cohesion. Civil society roles as advocates, service providers and representatives of people, communities and stakeholders of varying interests, promise an invaluable set of partnerships with government. This is key to deepening this conversation in ways that build ownership, and can ultimately meet the developmental aspirations of Sierra Leonean citizens.

Representatives from the Government: Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, Ministry of Political Affairs and development partners UNDP, witnessed the opening and presentation of findings sharing their perspectives. Ambassador Foday Yumkellay, Minister of Political Affairs presented the key note and launched the conference. We acknowledge the partnership of the Sierra Leone War Trust, the Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (CSPSS), Prof. Erin McCandless from Wits University, and financial support from CSPSS.

The workshop served as an opportunity for civil society to continue the discussion around peace and national cohesion in Sierra Leone, with cross learning from Liberian civil society representatives and Ivory Coast. Participants reflected upon the strategies, obstacles, challenges and setbacks, and national frameworks to strengthen national cohesion, and developed the following communique with recommendations for all stakeholders. The workshop closed with a collective agreement to design an action plan to ensure the implementation and monitoring of the recommendations.

NATIONAL COHESION IMPERATIVES

A number of challenges for national cohesion were discussed throughout the workshop. These include:

- Mismanagement and unequal distribution of national and natural resources
- Exclusion and limited citizen's participation
- Lack of respect for the rule of law and limited enforcement of existing laws
- Inadequate acknowledgement, forgiveness and reconciliation
- Inequitable and poor quality service delivery
- Politicisation of national institutions and winner-takes-all political culture
- Lack of continuity, coherence and institutional memory in implementing national agreements, frameworks and policies.

PREAMBLE

Acknowledging on-going initiatives at the local, national, regional and continental levels to build and sustain peace and security through the establishment of peace and security architectures directed towards addressing root causes of conflict and efforts to transform the structural dynamics of conflict through the enhancement of national reconciliation and social cohesion;

Realising that a number of initiatives have emerged as follow up on the TRC recommendations, including the May 2019 National Dialogue Forum or ‘Bintumani III’ that seek to cohere a mandate of the proposed Commission and to generate consensus on the nature of a National Peace Infrastructure;

Cognisant of the measurable progress the Mano River Region has made in promoting values that uphold democratic culture, peace, security and development in the past two decades;

Cognisant of the existence of initiatives, structures and institutions for early warning and conflict prevention at various levels of maturity, harmonization, and coordination at the local, national and regional levels;

Considering that sustaining peace in Sierra Leone requires efforts by all Sierra Leoneans to prevent backsliding of national cohesion in the country, illustrated by the crumbling of a sense of national belonging, tribalism and divisiveness in governance processes ;

Noting that national cohesion must be embraced and promoted by all stakeholders, especially in fragile states:

We the participants of this National Cohesion Workshop encourage all stakeholders – government, international partners, civil society, communities and citizens – to take action on the following recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. FINALIZE AND COMPLETE THE CONSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BY THE END OF 2021.

The Constitution is the basis of our social contract – a foundation for national cohesion. Concerted effort by all stakeholders should be taken to finalise the constitutional review process as mandated by the Lome Peace Accord (1999) and reiterated in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report (2004).

2. HARMONISE, COHERE AND IMPLEMENT EXISTING VISIONS, FRAMEWORKS AND PROCESSES.

Acknowledging the wealth of existing visions, frameworks and processes (including Vision 2025 through to Bintumani III) representing agreements between the state and its citizens, that remain poorly or not fully implemented, action should be taken by all stakeholders to:

- Revisit, identify and ensure complementarities and synergies;
- Popularize and educate government and the public on their content and value;
- Ensure effective and timely implementation;
- Ensure ongoing harmonisation with other relevant regional / international frameworks.

3. FINALISE AND SHARE BINTUMANI III REPORT AND PROCESS BY END OF FIRST QUARTER 2020.

Noting the concerns that inspired the Bintumani III conference, the contributions, and the national interest this inspired, progress and accountability is needed and desired to take the recommendations forward. The report should be produced, and widely disseminated as soon as possible, to keep the dialogue going, and catalyse wider national processes of national cohesion.

4. ENSURE TIMELY AND EFFECTIVE ROLLOUT OF THE DECENTRALISATION PROCESS.

Accelerate the effective implementation of the decentralisation process and strengthen the requisite systems and institutions at local level – to facilitate effective and fair service delivery and accountability, good governance and inclusive development.

5. TRANSFORM WINNER-TAKES-ALL / ZERO-SUM POLITICAL SYSTEM.

The winner-take-all culture is undermining national cohesion and holding national progress back. Leadership and action is required at all levels and across sectors to break the vicious cycle and depolarise politics and society. This will require transforming institutions, practices and mindsets.

6. ENHANCE INCLUSION OF ALL MARGINALISED AND VULNERABLE GROUPS.

Given that women and youth constitute far more than half of the country's population, urgent action is required to ensure their active and required participation in decision-making at all levels. Affirmative Action as recommended in the TRC report requires a minimum of 30% quota for candidates for public elections are women, and at least the same for Cabinet and other political posts, and minimum of 10% youth for participation in governance. More concerted efforts to realise inclusion goals are needed across marginalised groups, including rural communities, persons living with disability, victims and survivors – of conflict, Ebola, mudslides, *etc.* *Implementing international and regional commitments such as the Women, Peace and Security agenda and the Youth Peace and Security Agenda.*

7. EMPOWER AND INVEST IN COMMUNITIES.

Communities serve as the nucleus of national cohesion both horizontally and vertically. Efforts should tap into and build communities capacity to advance inclusive peace and development.

8. CONSOLIDATE AND PROTECT A RESILIENT, INCLUSIVE SOCIAL CONTRACT.

Realising this in Sierra Leone requires:

- a responsive and accountable state and political class that deliver on the expectations of citizens in fair and effective ways;
- widespread access to information and civic and political education;
- stronger and depoliticised institutions;
- foster horizontal ties by building on existing proven capacities in society, i.e. religious and social tolerance, community peacebuilding mechanisms.

9. MOVE THE NATIONAL COHESION AGENDA FORWARD

A strategy forum to drive forward the national cohesion agenda is needed. Noting evidence that civil society driven cohesion initiatives produce positive results, civil society must play a key role.

***Done this day 20th November 2019 at the Mammy Yoko Radisson Blu Hotel,
Freetown, Sierra Leone***

Participating Organisations

Civil Society Participants	
<p>Sierra Leone War Trust West African Network for Peacebuilding Water, Sanitation and Health Network Centre for Accountability and Rule of Law Advocacy Movement Sierra Leone Campaign for Good Governance Fambul Tok International Accountability Alert Peace Africa Alliance Consulting Education and Training Centre Sierra Leone Association of Journalist Sky Women Network Inter-religious Council Campaign for Human rights and Development International Civil Society Movement Market Women Association Sierra Leone Association for Non - Governmental Organisation National Advocacy Coalition on Extractives Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Democracy and Development National Commission for Democracy Market Women Association</p>	<p>Regional CSO representatives from: Northern region: Bombali; Tonkolili; Koinadugu North-west region: Kambia; Portloko Southern region: Bo; Bonthe; Moyamba Eastern region: Kono; Kenema</p> <p><u>International Guests</u> Erin McCandless, Wits School of Governance <i>Liberians</i> The New African Research and Development Agency (NARDA)</p> <p>Messengers of Peace-Liberia Inc(MOP) Global Youth, Peace&Security Advocate/UNSCR2250</p> <p>Platform for Dialogue and Peace (P4DP),</p>