

**PAPER TITLED “THE IMPACT OF MILITARIZATION ON THE CITY”
DELIVERED BY HIS WORSHIP THE MAYOR OF FREETOWN
COUNCILLOR WINSTANLEY BANKOLE JOHNSON (JP)
AT THE PLENARY OF THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION
OF PEACE MESSENGER CITIES CONFERENCE
JUNE 23 TO 26, 2006 IN VANCOUVER.**

Mr. Chairman, I bring you warm greetings from the Councillors and citizens of the ancient Municipality of Freetown with more than two centuries of fascinating history. We look forward to one day hosting such an august body in order to lavish you with our renowned hospitality, while treating you to some of the best beaches and other natural tourist attractions in the world.

Let me thank the organizers for the invitation and hospitality offered to a remote City in Sierra Leone, West Africa with an incredible history that does not belie its tiny size and a population of just fewer than six million.

At some point in the recent past, it nearly qualified as a failed and forgotten state with a near complete meltdown of law and order. It was for some time the subject of adverse publicity in the international press, because of the very topic I am now invited to talk on - “THE IMPACT OF MILITARIZATION ON THE CITY”

Much as we strive to relegate this to history and look forward to a future with hope, I still consider it a pleasurable duty to disseminate my experience to this assemblage, both for the purpose of information sharing, and as a learning curve for developing cities so that never again will the past be allowed to repeat itself.

*“Moral disarmament is to safe-guard the future;
Material disarmament is to save the present,
that there may be a future to safeguard.”*

- Elihu Root, American statesman and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize (1912).





Convoy moving refugees to camps

WAR AND DESTRUCTION

The peace of Sierra Leone and of my Municipality was shattered when, like a swarm of locusts, a total of some 45,000 combatants, including 5,600 child soldiers, wrecked havoc for 10

brutal years since March 1991, with over 75,000 lives lost. There ensued widespread destruction of homes, healthcare and education facilities, and other basic services and infrastructure. More than 3000 villages and towns virtually disappeared as their inhabitants were chased out, and what was left of the structures swallowed up by natural vegetation.

Almost half of the population became internally displaced, or refugees in neighboring countries. The main sources of economic prosperity – agriculture and mining – were severely disrupted. In the 2002 Human Development Index, Sierra Leone was the last of the 147 countries listed. The enormous social and economic costs of the



Patrolling the border

war are difficult to quantify. In 1999 the cost to private, businesses and government buildings caused by the attack on Freetown alone was estimated at US\$796 million, or 120% of GDP.

It is little wonder Napoleon Bonaparte, the greatest military genius of the 19th century, concluded that war was “*the business of barbarians*”.

I will now attempt a brief assessment of the impact of the war on the city as it affected various key sectors.

1) EDUCATION:

There was a sharp drop both in educational standards and the



Schooling – Starting from scratch

number of children and teachers in schools. Latest reports indicate teacher-pupil ratio is far higher than the official figure of 1 to 45, in some cases 1 to 70. In many instances over half of the teachers are unqualified, calling into doubt the quality of education.

With the introduction of free primary Education with free textbooks, for the first time school enrolment has exceeded pre-war levels. It is a constant struggle to build enough school facilities as well as train and attract enough teachers to catch up with the swelling school populations. There were 687 additional primary schools in 2003 than there were in 2002... enrolment in Class one went up by 2.2% from 292,896 to 299,496 from 2002 to 2003 respectively. The Education sector accounts for one of the highest Government expenditure areas. Though Government expenditure on education at all levels went from Le44billion in 2003 to Le58.7 billion, the sector is plagued by a lack of institutional capacity and accountability.

2) THE LOSS OF INNOCENCE:

Following the outbreak of the civil war in Sierra Leone in March 1991, children became the often-unwilling perpetrators and the victims of deliberate and arbitrary killings, rape and torture. Many lost parents or were separated from families, while others were recruited into the fighting forces as child soldiers.

An increased rate of juvenile delinquency is another undesirable residue of the war. The order of the day is truancy in favour of frequenting make-shift cinema halls and play station centers that have mushroomed overnight in every corner of the city.

Innocent minds (many already scarred by horrible memories of war) are further exposed to films replete with scenes of



Prisons crammed with youth

violence and explicit sex. There is as a result a sharp increase of violence, high sexual activity, teenage pregnancies, abortions and prostitution among students.

3) HEALTH

Violence, characterized by the rebels' terror tactics including rape, led to marked increases in the incidence of sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS, and physical and psychological

trauma.

In April 2002, a national zero-prevalence survey showed a national HIV prevalence of 0.9%; 2.1% in Freetown and 0.7% outside Freetown. Also, the preliminary results of the first antenatal prevalence study reported an overall national prevalence of 3.4%, and 4.7% for Freetown. These figures underline why the country needs urgent assistance to stem a potential post conflict epidemic. According to these estimates at least 100,000 Sierra Leoneans may be living with HIV.

In 1997, about 68,000 people in the age group 0-49 years were affected with HIV/AIDS. The development loss of all of these is

particularly reflected in the damage to the productive population whose participation in the development process has been greatly hindered.

According to the 2004 population census report, some 50% of the population is youth – the sexually active segment. And contraceptive prevalence rate is a mere 4%. The National HIV/AIDS Secretariat (NAS) is currently decentralizing its activities to the 19 local Councils like Freetown in order to ensure the anti-aids campaign takes on fresh momentum.

The state of health of Sierra Leone's population is poor. Life expectancy at birth declined to 34.3 years in 2002 from 42 years in 1990. Infant Mortality Rate is 165 deaths per 1000 births, while



Attending a pregnant woman



Under-five clinic



Queue at a Public Health Unit

under-five mortality rate is 284 / 1000. Maternal Mortality Rate is 1,800 / 100,000 live births. Only 40% have access to Health services, 57% have access to safe water, while 66% have access to Sanitation.



AIDS patient

Health is wealth. The provision of basic healthcare is considered a major priority for poverty reduction in Sierra Leone. To that end, the provision of Primary Health Care has been devolved to Freetown and other local Councils. Freetown in partnership with Glocal Forum is itself pioneering its own health and nutrition

education and care project for children. This project, called WAF (We Are the Future), is also responding to other needs of deprived children in the following areas: ICT; Sports and recreation; Arts and culture.

4) SOCIAL / DOMESTIC PROBLEMS

The offspring of rape victims, as well as fatherless children left behind by peace-keeping troops, has accentuated the plight of children, many of whom have been exposed to all manner of vices as street children. Domestic violence has increased, as has the number of orphans and single-parent homes. Hordes of restless youths roam the streets jobless, and there is no lack of mischief being hatched in these idle and unproductive minds.

The City Council has provided employment for some as sanitation labourers, but that is only the tip of the iceberg. Predictably with the proliferation of firearms, armed robbery has increased. Several arms collection initiatives have helped to somewhat reduce the number at large.



Mother and child in prison

5) **INFRASTRUCTURAL DAMAGE**

The impact on infrastructure and property is also substantial, taking into consideration the destruction of a large number of schools, roads and bridges, health centers, community centers, hotels, dwelling houses, electricity and telephone infrastructures. Various assessments of the war reveal consequences for socio-economic development, with huge chunks of resources are going into the rebuilding process.

Local Councils like Freetown are utilizing development grants secured by the Government from a World Bank loan, to rebuild their localities. But this amount is like a drop in an ocean of pressing social demands.

6) **OVERCROWDING IN THE CITY**

Even with the return of peace, the bulk of the rural refuge seekers have stayed put in the city, causing a severe strain on infrastructure and natural resources. Deforestation of the hills which are a prominent feature of the city, is leading to fatal flooding and landslides. The Guma Valley Water Dam which has experienced a drop in the water level, further limiting its ability to meet the rising demand for water in the city.

Shanty settlements have sprouted all over the city, defacing its scenic beauty, increasing water and sanitation problems, and stressing overstretched facilities. Demolition of illegal structures have met with fatality and very limited success.



Use of streams

7) **BRAIN DRAIN**

Major demographic shifts were occasioned by the war, with some 2.5 million displaced, including hundreds of thousands fleeing the country. The downside is that it accelerated the brain drain, with neighbouring countries like Gambia, Liberia and Guinea attracting and benefiting from the exodus of skilled and qualified personnel. A



Handicap guys at work

good number of the best brains migrated to Europe and the Americas, considered greener pastures. Thus weakening institutional capacity has been a major hindrance to development due to a dearth in the supply of quality human resource.

The causes of the conflict were rooted in a mix of bad governance, denial of fundamental rights, economic mismanagement and social exclusion. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was set up, and its recommendations have been awaiting Government implementation for some time now. The irony and source of frustration is that the perpetrators rather than the victims have been compensated. Ex-combatants have received attractive demobilization packages, including career training and allowances.

National elections were peacefully held in May 2002, followed by elections for 19 local councils nationwide in 2004. These are encouraging signs, but to ensure consolidation of peace, there is a need for sustained commitment from both national and international actors.

For Sierra Leone, the attainment of the noble Millenium Development Goals which were so strenuously put together, can be jeopardized or at least deferred as a result of the impact of this war.

8) POVERTY

WAR ON HUNGER

In his 2002 re-election speech, the President His Excellency Alhaji Ahmad Tejan Kabbah declared a new war – War on Hunger – with the promise that no Sierra Leonean would go to bed hungry by the year 2007.

High inflation and rising cost of living has left impoverished



Hard farm labour

citizens' diminished ability to meet tax obligations. It is worse in rural areas. Standard of living is therefore still dropping, with rising oil prices being a major factor.

INCULCATING A CULTURE OF PEACE

***“Since wars begin in the minds of men,
it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed”.***

- **UNESCO Charter**

SECURITY CONSCIOUSNESS

Certain tendencies have emerged in the post-war city. Among others, there has tended to be greater security alertness among citizens. Neighbourhood watches, high barbed-wire perimeter fences, steel doors and windows have become a common feature. Construction workers and building material sellers are doing brisk business. Security firms, a previously unknown phenomena, have mushroomed overnight, also cashing in on this new market. At least they are providing jobs for thousands of otherwise jobless youths. The vocabulary of the city has also changed to reflect military terms, eg. deploy, off-load.

In recognition of the danger of nurturing another generation of gun-toters, advocacy groups championed by the CCSL (Council of Churches in Sierra Leone) mounted a relatively successful campaign against the sale or distribution of toy guns. But as the Paulina Liusi, the Hungarian Diplomat rather comically said:

“Even toy soldiers should be abolished. We must disarm the nursery!”

On the subject of disarming, the American lawyer and financier who drew up the Reparation plans after the Second World War Owen D. Young, was reflecting on the futility of curtailing arms flow, without stemming the poverty and frustration engendered by unfair world trade practices that kept some in servitude, while enriching the few when he advised:

“We wake up to find the whole world building competitive trade barriers, just as we found it a few years ago building competitive armaments. We are trying to reduce armaments to preserve the world’s solvency. We shall have to reduce competitive trade barriers to preserve the world’s sanity. As between the two, trade barriers are more destructive than armaments and more threatening to the peace of the world.”

As a departure from traditionally looking to the West or Northwards for commerce, new and more advantageous south-south trading ties are being forged, notably within the ECOWAS

Zone (Economic Community of West African States), and as far East as Dubai and China. A trade fair involving some ECOWAS states was recently organized by a revamped Chamber of Trade, Industry and Agriculture, who are also seeking to take advantage of trade agreements like the AGOA (American Growth and Opportunity Act).

An investors' forum was recently held in the Capital, showcasing the myriads of lucrative investment opportunities. The new Investment Code was also unveiled, greatly simplifying the investment process.

The Local Government Act 2004 (LGA 04) provided for a decentralized, participatory local government. For the first time citizens can attend Council meetings, and have access to financial and other reports on the operations of their Councils. This ended an era of some 32 years of unaccountable politically appointed Committees of Management whose allegiance was clearly not to the citizens of their locality. This new dispensation of participatory local Government affords outlets for frustrations to be expressed, as compared to the pre-war era when pent-up frustrations served to ignite the war fuse.

The national security apparatus have been streamlined, and Freetown like other Local Councils, is represented on an inter-agency security committee that meets regularly to review the security situation.

A South-African style Truth and Reconciliation Commission was created with the following objectives:

- To create an impartial historical record of violations of human rights
- To address impunity
- To respond to the needs of victims
- To promote healing and reconciliation
- To prevent a repetition of the violations and abuses suffered

Its report concluded over a year ago, is still awaiting Government implementation of its recommendations.

Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, I thank you for your rapt attention.