REPORT

 OF THE

 SECOND NATIONAL CONSULTATIVE CONFERENCE

 ON THE

 ELECTORAL PROCESS

 BINTUMANI CONFERENCE CENTRE

 FREETOWN

 12 FEBRUARY 1996

 **SPONSORED BY THE NPRC GOVERNMENT**

 **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

 Page

**A. INTRODUCTION .............................................................................................................. 1**

**B.. OPENING CEREMONY:**

**a) Welcome Address - Prof. H Kandeh .............................................................................. 3**

**b) Chairman's Remarks - Mrs Shirley Gbujama .............................................................. 4**

**c) NCD Statement - Chairman Dr Kadi Sesay ............................................................... 7**

**d) INEC Statement - Chairman Dr James Jonah ........................................................... 9**

**e) Formal Opening - HE Brigadier-General Julius Maada Bio**

**Chairman, NPRC .............................................................................. 12**

**C. SCHEDULE FOR POLICY STATEMENTS .................................................................. 14**

**1. N.P.R.C. ........................................................................ 14**

**2. RUF ........................................................................ 15**

**3. Muslim Congress ........................................................................ 16**

**4. Paramount Chiefs (South) ........................................................................ 17**

**5. Political Party NUM ........................................................................ 18**

**6. NOW ........................................................................ 19**

**7. Council of Churches ........................................................................ 20**

**8. National Union of Students ........................................................................ 21**

**9. Political Party PPP ........................................................................ 22**

**10. University of Sierra Leone ........................................................................ 24**

**11. Bo District ........................................................................ 25**

**12. Freetown City Council ........................................................................ 26**

**13. Women's Movement for Peace ........................................................................ 27**

**14. Displaced Camps (South) ........................................................................ 28**

**15: Refugees (Guinea) ........................................................................ 29**

**16. Political Party PNC ........................................................................ 30**

**17. Petty Traders Association ........................................................................ 31**

**18. Bonthe District ........................................................................ 32**

**19. Women's Organisations (West) ......................................................................... 33**

**20. Displaced (North) ........................................................................ 34**

**21. Moyamba District ......................................................................... 35**

**22. Political Party APC ......................................................................... 36**

**23. The Armed Forces ......................................................................... 37**

**24. Labour Congress ......................................................................... 38**

**25. Pujehun District ......................................................................... 39**

**26. NCCP ...................................................................... 40**

**27. The Police Force ...................................................................... 42**

**28. Political Party PDP ...................................................................... 43**

**29. Teachers' Union ...................................................................... 44**

**30. Displaced Camps (East) ...................................................................... 46**

**31. Kailuhun District ...................................................................... 47**

**32. Women's Organisations (North) .................................................................. 48**

**33. Farmers' Association ...................................................................... 49**

**34. Kenema District ....................................................................... 50**

**35. Political Party NPP ...................................................................... 51**

**36. Catholic Church ...................................................................... 52**

**37. Academic Staff Association ...................................................................... 53**

**38. SLUDI ...................................................................... 55**

**39. Medical and Dental Association...................................................................... 57**

**40. Kono District ...................................................................... 58**

**41. Women's Organisations (South)...................................................................... 60**

**42. Motor Drivers' Union ...................................................................... 61**

**43. Chamber of Commerce ...................................................................... 62**

**44. Bombali District ...................................................................... 63**

**45. SILWODMO ...................................................................... 64**

**46. Political Party DCP ...................................................................... 65**

**47. Political Party NUP ...................................................................... 66**

**48. Displaced Camps (West) ...................................................................... 67**

**49. Women's Organisations (East) ...................................................................... 68**

**50. Bar Association ...................................................................... 69**

**51. Political Party NADP ...................................................................... 70**

**52. Kambia District ...................................................................... 71**

**53. Political Party SLPP ...................................................................... 72**

**54. FOMWASL ...................................................................... 73**

**55. Political Party UNPP ...................................................................... 74**

**56. SLAJ ...................................................................... 76**

**57. Koinadugu District ...................................................................... 77**

**58. Staff of Teachers' Colleges ...................................................................... 78**

**59. SLANGO ...................................................................... 79**

**60. Political Party NDA ...................................................................... 81**

**61. Port Loko District ..................................................................... 82**

**62. SLESA ..................................................................... 83**

**63. Tonkolili District ..................................................................... 84**

**64. Political Party NRP ..................................................................... 85**

**65. Paramount Chiefs (East) ..................................................................... 86**

**66. Makeni Town Council ..................................................................... 87**

**67. Western Area Rural Councils ..................................................................... 88**

**68. Paramount Chiefs (North) ..................................................................... 89**

**69. Kenema Town Council ..................................................................... 90**

**70. Bo Town Council ...................................................................... 92**

**71. Koidu Town Council ...................................................................... 93**

**72. Refugees (Liberia) ...................................................................... 94**

**73. Political Party SDP ...................................................................... 95**

**74. Political Party CPP ...................................................................... 96**

**D. FACTS ABOUT REGISTRATION - Prof. H. Kandeh ..****............................ 97**

**E. CONFERENCE PROGRAMME................................................................... 100**

**Introduction**

Early in 1996, INEC was engrossed in detailed preparations for the presidential and parliamentary elections to be held on 26 February. The NPRC government had changed leadership on 16 January, and the new Chairman and Head of State Brigadier-General Julius Maada Bio, reaffirmed the government's commitment to restoring constitutional rule as scheduled. The Head of State later informed the nation that in its search for peace and an end to the rebel war, the government had started fruitful deliberations with the RUF rebel leader Corporal Foday Sankoh, and that there was a chance of real peace returning to the country. The Head of State conveyed to the Chairman of INEC, that he was confronted with a dilemma as he had received mixed signals from the people, some of whom preferred elections to be deferred until peace had returned.

The NPRC therefore decided in view of all this, to reconvene the Bintumani conference and again get the views of the people in light of recent developments. The Chairman of INEC insisted that the sole purpose of this conference was to review the question of the date of the elections which was agreed in August 1995.

The one day conference, which was sponsored by the government but planned and organised by INEC, was arranged in a similar way as the previous conference. It was held at the same venue, with the same chairperson, Mrs Gbujama, and the same participants where possible were re-invited. Among the observers were the international community, including the Commonwealth Secretariat, foreign and local press, and national organisations. The SLBS/TV covered the events of the day. The RUF did not attend the conference, although in a special message to the conference, which was read by the Chairperson, it acknowledged the invitation. The Bar Association which was also absent at the first conference was represented at this one. The delegations representing Sierra Leoneans abroad, two political parties which did not obtain Final Certificates of Registration, and the National Advisory Council, which no longer existed, did not attend this second conference. It was made clear to all participants that the only objective of the conference was to determine whether the people wanted to maintain the election date of 26 February or not, in view of the peace overtures by Foday Sankoh. No other issues were to be discussed.

The Chairperson, Mrs Gbujama in her opening speech, set the tone of the conference and warned the delegates that theirs was a decision on which the whole future of the nation was hanging. In his speech, the Chairman of INEC, Dr James Jonah confirmed that INEC was prepared to conduct the elections on 26 February and that there was no technical reason to postpone it. He urged the participants to weigh the issues carefully before deciding whether or not they wanted to change their decision of the previous year. The Head of State and Chairman of the reformed NPRC, Brigadier General Julius Maada Bio in his speech stressed that while his government was still committed to the democratic process it would be foolhardy to ignore the peace moves initiated by Corporal Foday Sankoh at this stage. Since "permanent peace" was finally within reach, he recommended that the elections be postponed so that his government could actively pursue the peace process with Corporal Foday Sankoh, after which it would resume the democratic process - "Once peace is achieved, my government is committed to utilising all necessary means to acquire adequate assistance to maintain the peace and obtain financial support for building democracy and carry on with the democratic process".

Two minute policy statements were read by representatives of all the various groups in which they either maintained the mandate given to INEC in August 1995 or opted to postpone the elections. It was revealed during the various statements that there was a lot of misunderstanding and distortion of the facts and figures of the registration exercise. Prof. H.B.S. Kandeh, the Commissioner in charge of registration, gave details of the whole exercise, including the difficulties INEC was facing.

The chairperson announced at the end of the final policy statement, the result of the views expressed. She remarked that the statement from the armed forces to the effect that if the elections were held on 26 February, the army would not guarantee security for the people on that day, was very disturbing. There was no ballot and the record was obtained from the statements presented. The summary of the results is as follows:

**Elections on 26 February: 57**

**Peace before elections: 14**

**Neutral statements: 3**

There being no strong objections to the overwhelming voice of the majority, the conference reached a consensus, thereby authorising INEC to go ahead with plans for the election on 26 February.

**Conclusion**

This second conference marked a turning point in the history of Sierra Leone. In a way it was democracy already at work because the people themselves decided which way they wanted the country to move. There were people with very strong views either way, and despite the tense atmosphere nobody was afraid to stand up and say what he/she thought. Notwithstanding the serious security problems a mood of hope mixed with cautuous optimism was evident as the conference concluded. People became aware of the power they could wield in a democratic society. Finally, the NPRC government graciously accepted the views of the majority and stepped aside.

 **WELCOME ADDRESS BY**

 **PROFESSOR H B S KANDEH**

 **COMMISSIONER, SOUTHERN PROVINCE**

Your Excellency, C hairman of the National Provisional Ruling Council and Head of State, Brigadier Julius Maada Bio,

Deputy Chairman,

Members of the Supreme Council of State

Secretaries and Undersecretaries of State

My Lord the Acting Chief Justice

Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps

Distinguished Guests.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Good morning and welcome back to another session of the National Consultative Conference.

You will recall that our last session ended on Thursday 17th August 1995.

I therefore expect that you have had enough time to reflect on the recommendations we accepted at that last session and are eager to address the issue before all of us today.

Without any further ado, I present our able conference Chairperson Mrs Shirley Gbujama.

 **OPENING REMARKS BY THE CHAIRPERSON**

 **MRS SHIRLEY Y. GBUJAMA**

Your Excellency, Chairman of the NPRC and Head of State,

Members of the Supreme Council of State,

Chief Secretary and Members of the Council of Secretaries of State,

Excellencies, the Heads of Diplomatic Missions,

Paramount Chiefs,

Excellencies, the UN Resident Representative and UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy, Dr. Berhanu Dinka, Chairman, Committee of Management, Freetown City Council,

Chairman, Interim National Electoral Commission,

Chairman, National Commission for Democracy,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Today we meet in a resumed session of the National Consultative Conference convened on the electoral process from 15th-17th August. At the last session you made a historic choice, and gave your mandate to the Interim National Electoral Commission as representatives of the people of this country to hold Presidential and Parliamentary Elections before, but not later than end of February 1996. You will recall that the month of February was not chosen without compromise - a compromise which has since become known as the Spirit of Bintumani. Following that decision INEC took up the matter with Government recommending 26th February as the date of the Presidential and Parliamentary Election. Government subsequently approved that date. Since then a lot has happened.

I am informed that at a meeting held with His Excellency the Chairman of the National Provisional Ruling Council and Head of State Brigadier-General Julius Maada Bio it was agreed that efforts be made to re-convene a one-day session of this Conference to revisit the issue of the date for elections. You have therefore been re-invited to this conference for one purpose only - to discuss and take a decision on whether you wish, as representatives of the people of our beloved country, to change your choice and the mandate which you reached by consensus at Bintumani Last year, on the electoral process and time of elections.

The Spirit of Bintumani was established in the conviction that it was necessary to find a political solution to our problem without prejudice to the judicial positions we might be tempted to take and are so often exempted to take - for the purpose of securing a rapprochement without adversaries real and imagined.

You meet here today to invest that possession of wisdom into the future of this country to rekindle the Spirit of Bintumani - The Spirit of Compromise that made those three days in August last year so memorable and illuminating.

Coming to the point - you have before you as a matter of great national importance, - Election now or later? A more sensorial version of that question is elections or peace. Allowing the Oxymoron, that question assumes a complex simplicity.

On the one hand and in the reality of our situation - a situation of unremitting civil terror - peace before election has an awesome merit and virtue. War is the final resort in the struggle for power. Civil wars are concerned with the struggle for power within a nation state. International wars - between nation states - are concerned either with extending or maintaining the power that a nation exercises over another nation in its own interest in the world outside its borders or in some cases with containing the threat of absorption of all or part of one nation into another. Why do nations or groups of people within nations and individuals within those groups wish to exercise power? Partly because power brings influence which can be used for their own national, group or personal benefit; partly in order that society may be organised according to the ideas that the individual, group or nation favours for one reason or another; partly because again for various reasons the individual group or nation claims or aspires to superiority over other.

Generally speaking all these motives fuse to inspire a strong feeling of cohesion reinforced by the fear that if one's group does not press its claim to power and influence, it will be submerged by another, suffering material cultural and psychological disadvantages as a result. So internal disorder and disputes over real estate cause most of the wars and most of the deaths. The struggle for power can therefore be represented as the need to preserve one's own society. The individuals who feed such struggles often genuinely believe that they are doing their best for the sake of their fellow citizens. The war in Sierra Leone falls into this category. However, what is of importance for our purpose here today and the days and months ahead is the fact that whatever their defining goals all wars and - the sequence is Peace War Peace - end by the process of negotiations. That is the reality. So let it be in Sierra Leone.

On the other hand, election presents us with the only known theory for democratic choice - an empowering device for informed decision making which in turn has an overarching influence on peace. In the search for peace we must be guided by that immortal possession of wisdom under pinned by patience. In the conduct of elections one is guided by laws - the electoral laws. Law is a means and not an end; a device for manifestation of policy, and for securing obedience to it.

Law like nature does nothing in vein. Law has to be believed in or it will not work, it involves not only reason and will but also emotion, intuition and faith. It involves a total social commitment. We have the laws and decrees to guide us. Let us believe them and be committed to them, and use them.

Nothing conduces more to the making our life happy here at home than to know things as they are: and this wisdom must be acquired by frequent reflections upon other such situations in our world.

Liberal democracy which derives its legitimacy from elections which devices into the affirmation that only the people are sovereign and that government is legitimate only when it is the explicit delegate of that sovereignty has a peculiar ring of reality since the American revolution when government become a conscious constitutional creation. Liberal democracy is a political and moral framework, is most conducive to human peace, dignity, freedom and prosperity. Please permit me at this juncture to observe that every historic choice involves a challenge as well as opportunity - The right decision for us is to accept the challenge, seize the opportunity etc. etc. and more besides - the right decisions takes an adult mind, reinforced by an adult knowledge and fortified by an adult experience - that was what the Spirit of Bintumani was all about. Much wisdom can only be appreciated when it is fertilized with experience gained by living and by personal contact with life's problems. And such experience is one advantage which save in rare cases, youth cannot possess. On the other hand if the young have no experience, they certainly have time on their side and that is an immense advantage. Remember however that of all our possessions wisdom alone is important.

Sierra Leone lives in a world community with other nations. We are not living in a vacuum but in a world of people made up of our friends, regrettably our enemies too and the in-between, and there are those who do not even know us, but who would want to win our friendship because of what they hear about us, and to hold us in high esteem. For our friends, if it had not been for them the last six years since the beginning of the rebel war would have been far more difficult to handle.

Therefore the assistance and moral support of our friends are important for the future. So are their views, feelings, and attitudes. For our enemies, because of them, we need our friends, more friends. For those who hardly know us, reputation is important. Second, Peace is vital. No matter how many friends we have without peace even our friends would be uncomfortable, and their friendship would not bring meaningful gains and awards. A new situation for peace has been created. I should hope that there is no Sierra Leonean now living that does not desire peace and I am certain that we all welcome any and all genuine attempts and avenues for peace.

Question becomes will elections now be inimical to peace, whether with the Revolutionary United Front fighters and/or other such fighters. We must remember that Alimamy Sankoh once speaking for RUF and its leader Foday Sankoh has been disowned by his colleagues. Peace must therefore be approached at two fronts at least. How long will that take? What is the time frame for peace talks? 2 months, 3 months? 2 years, 4 years, life time?

A nation in turmoil is bad enough. A nation in turmoil and isolated from her friends, from the world, and exposed to its enemies, will hardly be the situation for which the Government of the NPRC has worked so hard. These are the issues that have brought us here for fresh decisions. In taking these decisions I am trusting that you will not think of yourselves and of your own well-placed situation or mine, but of all those who are not as fortunate as we are to move around freely back and forth by planes and helicopters, of those who cannot have a square meal a day, and even of those who cannot return to homes. You will have to decide which is best at this stage especially for those people not for yourselves.

I permit myself the avowal that truth, honour and knowledge are too sacred to us all, not to pursue them always with the purest zeal. Let us therefore resolve that what we decide here today bears the mark of truth, honour and knowledge, fully convinced that the supreme prize of democracy is peace and prosperity for all. Let us avoid the doctrinaire and the idiosyncratic - Let, above, all, intellectual orderliness prevail. It gives more pleasure to understanding men and women than to judge them.

Finally on the question before you let us, like Lord Macauley, never allow doubt as a permissible state of mind. Be clear in your mind on the issues.

With these remarks I join INEC to welcome you all to this meeting and trust that we shall have fruitful discussions under God's Almighty guidance which we need now at this time in the history of our nation than any other time, so that we will leave here once again with the Bintumani Spirit of Unity prevailing and from here to our beloved people.

I thank you for your attention.

 **STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN**

 **NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR DEMOCRACY**

 **DR KADI SESAY**

Your Excellency, Brigadier General Maada Bio,

Madam Chairperson,

Secretaries of State & Members of the Supreme Council,

Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps,

Madam Chairman Committee of Management, Freetown City Council,

Paramount Chiefs,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:

The role of NCD is to formulate and implement a civic education programme which will empower the citizens of Sierra Leone to understand and defend their rights. The NCD's role as far as the elections are concerned is to ensure that the citizens are kept informed and exposed to the issues of national concern and programmes of political parties so that they can make an informed choice. The Commission works with all political parties and maintains a non-partisan stand.

The job of this Commission is to enhance the achievement of sustainable democracy in Sierra Leone. That is why at the August Consultative Conference, I clearly stated that the NCD supports the democratization process and the preparation for elections because elections are a gateway to democracy and are a necessity.

The NCD made a statement then which somehow has been widely misinterpreted and misconstrued that the original date of December 1995 for Elections was non-achievable and therefore the NCD recommended for elections to be held anytime within the first 6 months of 1996 - not after the first 6 months. The reasons given in August are still valid. February 26, 1996 was therefore easily acceptable to the Commission at the time because if fell within the then recommended NCD time frame.

In preparation for the elections, the commission has been carrying out several programmes:-

(1) As I am speaking to you now the NCD Commissioners for the North, East and South are in their regions sensitizing the public on the elections.

These visits have been made possible by the financial support of the British High Commission.

2) The Commission believes there is a need to bring the party Presidential Candidates or their Running Mates to the people through television and the short wave Radio which now has an extended coverage to the whole country, so that these candidates can present their ideas and programmes and answer questions sent in by the members of the public. These programmes, which began on Thursday 8th February, almost failed to see the light of day because the SLBS demanded that the NCD pay for them Le1.6 million leones. Appreciating the many demands and other priorities competing for government funds, I personally appealed to the British High Commissioner who readily made the money available to NCD. I wish to publicly express our appreciation and thanks to the British High Commissioner for his continued and unfailing support for democracy in Sierra Leone.

3) Yesterday, Sunday 11th February, the NCD brought together all the Presidential Candidates and their Running Mates to present and defend their programmes to the Sierra Leone Indigenous Traders Associations and other members of the public.

4) The NCD has produced posters on Democracy and the elections which are currently being distributed in all regions, copies of which have also been presented to all the political parties.

The Commission believes strongly in the democratization process and the need for and right of the people of this country to freely choose a group of people who will run the affairs of the country. A group which must be given advance warning that the will of the Sierra Leone public will remove them from power if they do not carry out their wishes.

Ladies and gentlemen, there is a rebirth of democracy in Sierra Leone. Sovereignty of the people is the first pillar of democracy and this is being born in Sierra Leone in a way that has never been seen before. We must, as citizens of this country, thank the NPRC government for creating this enabling environment. The supremacy of the people is being upheld by this government to the point where the date for the next elections is again before you, the citizens of this country, to decide. The right of the people is sovereign but with this right goes great responsibility. The citizens have the ultimate power but they also have the ultimate responsibility.

The decision that will be taken here today should go towards the building and nurturing of the future of this country. It must not be taken lightly. It must not be taken irresponsibly with emotions and self or group interest. We must with clear-heads take a decision that future generations will thank us for and not one for which we will be cursed by future generations. In the words of our National Pledge, we must put the interest of the Nation above all other interests.

And finally, we must realize that Democracy requires, respect, understanding and tolerance. In a Democracy, the majority wins and the losers are expected to accept the result gracefully whilst the majority is also expected to protect the rights of the minority.

We must as responsible citizens that love their nation, whose hearts bleed for the devastation and wanton killing this country has seen, whose women's painfully swollen breasts cry for the children they have lost, weigh the pros and cons of each of the possible scenarios and take a decision that we believe will lead to a better future.

**PEACE OR ELECTIONS? THE DECISION IS YOURS TO MAKE.**

 **STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN**

 **INTERIM NATIONAL ELECTORAL COMMISSION**

 **DR JAMES JONAH**

Madam Chairperson, Chairman of the NPRC and Head of State, Distinguished guests, Delegates,

I come to you this morning in peace and hope very much that we all leave here today peacefully. Mr Chairman, you must believe me when I tell you that I have the highest regard for the office you occupy. As a patriot and a Sierra Leonean, I have to respect my Head of State. Therefore I consider as obscene, the article which appeared last Saturday with a ridiculous question AWho runs this country?@ Mr Chairman, you as Head of State, you run Sierra Leone.

I am torn as to how to address this conference. I am aware that there are those who would wish that James Omotayo Christian Jonah remains silent. The wish is so strong that they wanted me in the graveyard. But God Almighty has made it possible for me to be here today. There are others not only in Sierra Leone, but in the wider international community who call regularly on me to make an assessment of developments in our country. For these people, I cannot remain silent.

Mr Chairman, when you summoned me to your office last week to discuss the dilemma in which you find yourself, I told you that, strictly in accordance with the decisions of this conference last year, we could only reconvene if INEC was unable for technical reasons, to meet the date of 26 February. But I sympathise with you and I told you then that I would do everything possible to ensure the reconvening of this conference. I also want to assure you, Mr Chairman, that I bear no grudge or malice towards you or towards any member of the Supreme Council or other officials of the government. The problem , if there is a problem, is the kind of man I am; the kind of man I have always been - I do not believe in betraying the trust of people and friends. There are times when I may appear inflexible or, to use the words of Virgil in Georgics as being >obstinate to yield= to pressure. It is my nature, it did not start with you Mr Chairman.

Just a few months ago before we commenced the registration of political parties, I gave the former Chairman and Head of State a copy of a commencement address which I gave in 1976 in the United States. I said to him >we have been friends, we meet regularly and discuss; you may think you know me and maybe you do=. I then urged him to read it carefully because only after absorbing it would he know who James Jonah is. That address was entitled AWhat Price Integrity?@ The price could be very heavy and may even result in ending one=s life. But I honestly have no choice.

The issue before you today in my view is simple. We reached a firm decision last year. In fact it was not a decision, it was a mandate and INEC has been faithful in carrying out that mandate. I think it is erroneous and a misconception to believe that only James Jonah is fighting for elections in Sierra Leone. I can assure you that INEC is prepared to accept whatever your verdict is, and we will carry it out faithfully.

>Peace before elections or elections now=, I believe is a false issue or a false choice. But I have decided to restrain myself on this issue. Madam Chairperson, I can make a long discourse on peace and the search for peace. As someone whose almost entire adult life has been devoted to negotiation, as a writer, as a teacher and a practitioner, it seems strange to me that anyone can accuse me of >spoiling the delicacy= of the negotiation with the RUF. I will therefore make no further comment on that.

I would like though to make two statements. The first one is addressed to you Mr Chairman, and the other to the delegates and through them to the people. Mr Chairman, there was a very decent man, an honourable man, who also headed a government, the Prime Minister of Great Britain. A man who loved peace, a man who would go anywhere in search of peace. Chamberlain went to Munich and came back from Munich in 1938, as you may all recall, with a piece of paper and was waving it in London saying, >we have achieved peace in our time=. What that honourable decent gentleman did not realise, was that he was facing a dictator, Hitler who was only using peace as a prelude to the ravages of Europe and the world. We know the consequences and what became of that great, decent man. Today, every school child looks at Chamberlain with his umbrella as a symbol of naive appeasement. We should therefore be very careful. We have just had a very interesting and sad example in Ireland. Many people were euphoric when the IRA called for a cease fire to pursue peace. After a year, peace has not been achieved and unfortunately - and my sympathies to our British colleagues, - war has returned to Northern Ireland and Britain. These are lessons that you should bear in mind.

To our fellow delegates and Sierra Leoneans, my comment to you is to bear in mind that Foday Sankoh as head of the RUF, apart from ravaging our country and killing our brothers and sisters, has only one aim and that is to prevent the people of Sierra Leone from making a free choice of their own government. That is Foday Sankoh=s sole purpose. I would make no more comments about peace and war. In terms of the mandate given to INEC, we have completed all arrangements necessary to allow you to make a choice, if you so wish, on 26 February this year.

During the course of your deliberations other commissioners will be answering some of the queries that you may have, about our preparation. But enough of INEC=s preparation. As you all know, we have told you over and over again about our plans and difficulties. But I think all of you must realise that you have been brought here to make a fateful decision. One whose repercussions you may not foresee at the moment. So you must carefully weigh the issues before you decide whether or not you want to change your decision of last year. This is very important.

Last week, a group of religious leaders came to my office and I told them that I thought God had sent them to me because I was finding a way to send a message to the religious leaders of this country - Christians and Muslims alike. I told them that I wanted them to pray in their mosques and in their churches, that when the delegates came to this conference, they would make their choice with a clear conscience. I did not ask them (and they can testify to that, some of them are here) to pray that delegates choose to maintain the 26 February election date. You know how passionately I believe that we as a people must begin to practise democracy. It is an obligation on some of us who have lived outside this country for several years, and who know the benefits of democracy and the value of an open society. We know that even though it may be very difficult, there is no greater benefit to a people than to have a well set up democratic system and an open society, where you can sleep peacefully at night and not be afraid. But even with my passion for elections in February, I would never give anyone of you delegates one Leone to vote against your conscience. Let me say to those of you who share our view about the 26 February date, that if you have made a mistake in offering any material inducement to any of these delegates, at the end of this session please go back to them and say >keep it but vote according to your conscience=.

 Madame Chairperson, I cannot conclude without talking about the security of my person. I have refused to give any interviews to the international media even though I have been bombarded continuously, because I wanted to express my views first to you brothers and sisters. Since I have been here, people have been concerned about my security. The NPRC government has done its best in providing me with security, but people have never been satisfied. They have always feared that my commitment to integrity will put me at cross purposes with what I have referred to as that >small band of wilful and desperate men=. I have said over and over again that I am not afraid to die for my country. All I ask is that innocent people are not killed with me. When however that heinous crime would have been committed, you can be certain that within six hours, the international community and you Sierra Leoneans will know the names and motives of those who have their hands stained with my blood. They will be seen for who they are.

A friend asked me recently why I was persisting to stay in Sierra Leone in the face of all this danger. I will give an answer to that now. This beautiful country of ours has become so rotten to the core with corruption, with power seekers, with liars, that I believe perhaps we need a sacrificial lamb to cleanse this nation of ours. As a student of History, I know that >the blood of the martyr is the seed of the church=.

So please don=t weep for me, weep for Sierra Leone. I have said >wake up Sierra Leone, wake up, wake up=. This is our country, no one should frighten you, you must be ready to give up your life so that this country can start moving once again. I have placed my faith in the people of this country, I believe there is a reservoir of goodwill. We have to tap that reservoir.

Above my faith in the people, I know that we all, Muslims and Christians put our trust in God. Therefore I say to you:

Have faith in God,

Have faith in God

Wonderful things will happen to you

If you have faith in God

Now I want to appeal to all of you to calmly and quietly listen to our Head of State, because what he has to say may help you to make up your minds.

Thank you very much.

 **FORMAL OPENING SPEECH BY THE CHAIRMAN, NPRC AND HEAD OF STATE**

 **HE BRIGADIER-GENERAL JULIUS MAADA BIO**

My Fellow Citizens,

In my address to the nation on the 17th January 1996, shortly after subscribing to the oath of office as Chairman of the NPRC, and Head of State, my government immediately allayed the fears of you my compatriots and the international community, that the NPRC government was still preoccupied with the two major issues of peace and the on-going democratic process. During my address, I also mentioned that since our country had suffered for far too long, it was important that we adopt all measures necessary to put that suffering, especially of our displaced population behind us. My government has continually held out an olive branch to the RUF as a means of ending the suffering of our people and the nation and for the eventual restoration of civilian rule. We believe and are still convinced that the ultimate solution to ending this conflict is through direct dialogue and not by continued violence.

You will all recall that at the last National Consultative Conference on the electoral process held at the same venue, it was decided that subject to prevailing changes in the circumstances, this conference could be revisited. Following our preoccupation of peace, the development since the arrival of my government and most notably within the last fortnight on this issue of peace, is an immediate factor which has warranted the revisiting of this conference.

As you all know, this conflict with the RUF has been going on for the past four years and several peace overtures to the RUF in the past fell on deaf ears. Notwithstanding, our resolve to bring peace to our people and nation remains paramount. Therefore, whilst taking all necessary action to protect our people, we left the more humane option of peace through negotiation open. In pursuance of achieving peace through dialogue, I visited our neighbours in Guinea, Nigeria, Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso. I was given the necessary assurances by my colleagues and friends that they would do all within their power to assist us in achieving lasting peace which is based on long term permanent solution to our nation's problem, and not short term goals which are likely to have the effect of instability. Once peace is achieved, my government is committed to utilising all necessary means to acquire adequate assistance to maintain the peace and obtain financial support for building democracy and carry on with the democratic process.

Today, my government is pleased to report that the RUF leader Corporal Foday Sankoh, apart from having declared a one week cease fire, has opened the dialogue with my government on radio communication on Wednesday 7 February 1996 for peace talks. We used that opportunity for him to talk to two paramount chiefs - Madam Ella Koblo Gulama and Bai Kuru Sankara Kroma III. He also gave a short interview to an SLBS stringer, Isaac Massaquoi. That occasion is not only considered historic in our relationship with the RUF but also a real break through that should lead to finding a lasting solution to our present conflict in the name of our beloved nation. In addition on Saturday 10 February 1996, in fulfilment of the promise he made during our Wednesday conversation, again he opened dialogue with my government on radio communication in the presence of a number of viewers. Our conversation this time was more positive and reassuring to the extent that he made a genuine commitment to send a high powered RUF delegation to meet with the government delegation in Cote d'Ivoire on the 28th of this month to work out the modalities for our eventual face to face discussion that will eventually lead to permanent peace in Sierra Leone with the help of God.

Fellow citizens, in that regard, the army being an integral part of the destiny of this nation believes in pursuing peace that has been elusive over the years. Now that the opportunity has arisen, today we should all take cognisance of one fact, that regardless of our personal biases, Corporal Foday Sankoh wants peace and an opportunity to consider participation in an eventual electoral process. In the name of peace for us all, we should negotiate a peaceful settlement to our conflict keeping in mind that our failure to act now could bring about increased instability in our beloved country. We must also know that without lasting peace, not only will any future government find it difficult to govern but even the true tenets of democracy will be impossible to realise.

While each and everyone of us has contributed in one way to the desolation of our country, and cannot therefore escape blame at the individual and collective level, we must now turn this tide in the name of peace. Inevitably, the armed forces will cede power to a democratically elected government. At this point in time, it is important for us to close ranks and embrace peace, understanding and corporation. In the process of negotiation and the eventual democratic transition, we must pledge to become involved in the promotion of peace, development and stability. The moral imperative for us is to become active, as we all are our brothers' keepers with one destiny and a common future for our present and future generation.

Our aversion to national commitment, dedication and sacrifice to our country is perhaps responsible for the great tragedy that engulfs us. In this context we can look back and understand why certain sad events took place in our history and why our people stood back paralysed by inaction and unable to arrest or resolve the situation. Let us as a people avoid being judged as history has the tendency to do not by what we did but what we failed to do. Edmond Burke once said evil exists because good men and women refuse to do something. If we refuse to seek peace now, we shall be judged harshly by history because we would have collectively refused to do that which is good in the best interest of our people and the nation. Any misguided action on our part will serve to implicitly sanction the tragedies that now befall our beloved country. As a people, there has been a tendency for us to be indifferent to our national affairs especially when their development does not affect us directly. Let us today shelve this attitude in working to resolve our present situation.

As we have convened this National Consultative Conference in the light of the prevailing changes in circumstances, it is up to each and every one to honestly consider the future of our country and to come to a decision that is acceptable for the common good of our entire nation. Let us bury the hatchet of mistrust, anger, mere self interest and vindictiveness. In our deliberations, let us also take the time to compliment the change of heart that has come upon Corporal Foday Sankoh. We hope that the Almighty God showers his mercies on us and assists our efforts in bringing lasting peace to our nation.

It now gives me great pleasure to declare this all important National Consultative Conference open. My government very much looks forward to working with all of you to achieve peace and to develop an environment in which democracy can thrive, while keeping in mind that the welfare of our citizens is the supreme law of the land. I wish you all fruitful deliberations. Long live the Republic of Sierra Leone.

I thank you all.

 **STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL, NPRC**

Madam Chairperson, His Excellency Brigadier-General Julius Maada Bio, Chairman of the

Reformed NPRC & Head of State, Fellow Delegates, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

When we met here in August 1995 we deliberated on and arrived at a consensus on many issues relating to the electoral process including the date for both Presidential and Parliamentary elections, the Electoral Code of Conduct, Financial Regulations for political parties, the security situation and the matter of proportional representation. In pursuance of the Conference's recommendations Government has since provided funds for INEC to carry out its mandate; that is, registration of political parties; introduction of voter education; ensuring that all political parties are allowed to campaign freely; undertaking voter registration and the like. Government has also considered, approved and promulgated the necessary legislatures in order to keep the electoral process on course.

However, it is worthwhile to note that what our people have been and are still crying for, is peace. In his maiden address to the nation, the Head of State said, "Let me emphasize, that, we shall play our part in ensuring that unity, peace, democracy and human rights are upheld throughout the very limited period of our stay in office".

Since that statement the Chairman has made several moves to ensure that unity, peace, democracy and human rights are fully achievable. This has led to trips to neighbouring countries including Ghana, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, La Cote D'Ivoire and Guinea to discuss the possibilities of peaceful negotiation to the crisis in Sierra Leone. Within the country, His Excellency has visited all provincial Headquarter towns; opened up dialogue with all political parties through APPA; set up a Committee comprising members of NPRC and APPA to advise Government on all Decrees promulgated, and a Reconciliation Committee, comprising all shades of Sierra Leonean society, is being set up to work out modalities for national reconciliation.

In view of the peace moves undertaken by His Excellency, dialogue has been opened between the NPRC and RUF. This dialogue was preceded by a cease fire declared by RUF and endorsed by Government which facilitated free movement of goods and people, fall in the prices of commodities on the market, strengthening of the Leone against the Dollar and a reduction of tension in the country, culminating in the clarion call for peace before elections.

Whilst we are not against the holding of elections, we strongly believe that a peaceful atmosphere will facilitate greater voter registration, voter education, and free movement of people; all of which will promote free and fair elections. It is an open secret that many people, particularly in the East, South and parts of the Northern Regions, including a good number of Sierra Leonean refugees in the neighbouring countries have not been registered, due to the rebel crisis.

Ladies and Gentlemen, from all that has been said, it is but crystal clear that peace, which has been standing miles and miles away from us, is now within our reach. It is now left with this Gathering to recommend whether we should grab it or let it go.

Elections for elections' sake will not only heighten the rebel crisis but will also leave our people worse off than ever before. This will not augur well for our beloved Sierra Leone. On this note, I would like to appeal to all of you to give peace a chance. Peace should be our guiding principle.

May the Almighty, guide and bless us all. I thank you for your attention.

 **STATEMENT BY THE REVOLUTIONARY UNITED FRONT (RUF)**

 **(READ BY THE CHAIRPERSON)**

**FROM: THE PEOPLE'S WAR COUNCIL CHAIRMAN AND HIGH COMND. RUF SL.**

**TO: THE CHAIRMAN, RECONVENED CONSULTATIVE CONFERENCE**

**SUBJ.: RESPONSE TO THE INVITATION FROM THE CONVENED CONFERENCE C/MAN**

**DATE: 10 FEB 1996**

TEXT (.) PSE EXTEND OUR WARMEST GREETINGS AND SOLIDARITY TO ALL DELEGATES ATTENDING THE RECONVENED CONSULTATIVE CONFERENCE (.) AN INVITATION FM THE RUF SL TO PARTICIPATE HAS BEEN RECD. (.) IT IS WITH REGRET THAT PREVAILING CONDITIONS PREVENT US FM. SENDING A DELEGATION TO THE CONFERENCE (.) WE ARE WITH YOU IN SPIRIT (.) WE WISH YOU GOD'S BLESSING IN YOUR DELIBERATION (.) THE RUF SL. IS FOR A SUSTAINABLE PEACE THAT DEALS WITH THE ROOT CAUSE OF OUR INTERNAL CIVIL CONFLICT (.) THEREFORE WE DO NOT SEEK IN OUR OWN NATIONAL INTEREST, ELECTION BEFORE PEACE (.) THIS WILL DIVIDE AND FURTHER DESTROY OUR NATION (.) EXAMPLE, INTERIM NATIONAL ELECTORAL COMMISSION SAYS THAT IT HAS REGISTERED 809 ELIGIBLE VOTERS IN THE NORTH COMPARED TO 239 IN THE SOUTH AND EAST (.) THESE DIFFERENTIALS ARE A RECIPE FOR DISASTER (.) HOW CAN ELECTION BE CONDUCTED TO THE BENEFIT OF ONE'S PROGRESS? WHY SHOULD OTHERS BE DISENFRANCHISED? RUF SL ADDS ITS VOICE TO THE VAST MAJORITY OF SIERRA LEONEANS WHO ARE DEMANDING FOR PEACE BEFORE ELECTION (.) LET US NOT SACRIFICE THE FUTURE IN FURTHERANCE FOR PEACE//

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 **STATEMENT BY THE SIERRA LEONE MUSLIM CONGRESS**

Brothers and sisters in Sierra Leone, I greet you in the name of Allah, the most Beneficent, and the most Merciful. I speak under the direction of the Sierra Leone Muslim Congress. I thank the Interim National Electoral Commission in requesting for a confirmation on the 26th February 1996 Election date agreed upon on the first, National Consultative Conference held on the 15th - 17th August, 1995.

As we emphasised in our last statement; the Sierra Leone Muslim Congress main concern is the welfare of all people. In this vein, considering the strength of our gallant soldiers and the opinion of the populace at all levels, Muslims all over Sierra Leone have been urged to continuously pray for a speedy election on February 26th 1996 to go ahead and this is to be followed by peace talks to be taken over by a democratically elected government. This should be a broad based government of the people.

In so many words, Foday Sankoh has told the people of this country through the Media and B.B.C. Focus on Africa (African Service) that he (Foday Sankoh) will not talk peace with a military government, even where peace overtures were given to him by the then Strasser government; with no election. If Foday Sankoh is now talking about talks for peace, he should be encouraged to do the talks with a government which is democratically mandated by the people. When the democratically elected government is settling all chores the army will concentrate on its defensive role as prescribed by the law of the land.

May Allah guide us in the right direction. I thank you for your attention.

 **STATEMENT BY THE PARAMOUNT CHIEFS (SOUTH)**

Madam Chairperson, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I want to say here this afternoon that no chief worth his salt will say that there should be no election. We want to say here that because of our people, we will go all out to find out what is really wrong with them. One classical example is, most of my people in the villages have not been registered, and we talk of constitution. If those people are not registered, how are they going to exercise their constitutional rights? So I want to say here Madam Chairperson, that I recommend that some two/three months be given that all these issues will be addressed true before elections takes place.

 **STATEMENT BY THE NATIONAL UNITY MOVEMENT, NUM**

Madam Chairperson, Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the NUM, I am mandated to make the following statement.

It is our view that the reconstituted National Provisional Ruling Council government has failed to pursue the honest dialogue with political parties promised by Chairman Bio, at the meeting between the Chairman of the NPRC and the political parties held at Cockeril on the 17th January, 1996, as one means of solving many of our problems today. The Secretary General of the NPRC has just made mention of a committee between APPA and the NPRC set up at the same time. That committee has never met despite several requests. I am a member of that committee. On that occasion, Chairman Bio, not only gave the firmest possible commitment to free and fair elections, come February the 26th, but explained to all assembled that the reason for the change of leadership in the NPRC, was because former Chairman Strasser wanted to derail the democratic process and stay in power after February 26th, 1996. Something the rest of the NPRC knew would bring chaos to our beloved country.

We all hailed Brigadier General Bio. Instead of honouring the agreement reached and pursuing the honest dialogue promised, the present government has since that date, orchestrated and stage managed what is said to be an overwhelming call for a postponement of the February 26th, 1996 elections.

Madam Chairperson, is it only the NPRC government than can commence peace negotiations? Is it only the present NPRC government that can commence peace negotiations? The nation is not only at war, yet there are those adding fuel to the fire. Those are indeed wicked men. The wickedness is almost incomprehensible. And we all know what is at stake for this nation. We all know that it is the future of this nation that we are talking about. It is as a result of this, that I am mandated by the NUM to reaffirm our position, that the elections on the 26th of February 1996, a one-way towards the rebirth of this nation. It is as a result of this conviction that throughout the years we at the NUM have tried to promote democracy, the rule of law, dignity and respect for the rights of the Sierra Leoneans as one way of leading us out of the middle ages and the barbaric deeds of which we are capable and into the 21st century which is only four years away.

Madam Chairperson, it is a very, very important moment in the history of our nation. We must not let personal greed and over ambition allow the decision to be hijacked here today, whether by stage managing the proceedings here or by replacing delegates or by seeking to increase the number of delegations.

Madam Chairperson, come February 26th, 1996, if there are no General Elections in Sierra Leone, then it would be a very sad day not only for me and you, but even for the people who are presently trying to wreck this nation.

 **STATEMENT BY THE NATIONAL ORGANISATION OF WOMEN(SL)**

 **(NOW) MEMBER OF THE WOMEN'S FORUM**

Madam Chairperson, All other Protocols Observed.

I am Nana Pratt representing the NOW(SL) a member of the Women's Forum.

Whilst we emphasise the view that the achievements of a peaceful condition in our beloved Sierra Leone is the priority issue in our agenda now, we are convinced that in the process of pursuing the peace agenda, two components are major, basic and essential. \*The two interact in a complimentary manner - reinforcing each other to create lasting peace and stability. These two are peace talks and Democratisation - beginning with holding of elections. The two we see and agree as not mutually exclusive, thus they go hand in hand. Both are required at the same time. One without the other simultaneously does not bring lasting peace.

The recent political changes seem to be bringing into play more confusing circumstances, and these have necessitated our resumed discussion here today.

 The Government of Sierra Leone and its people - the suffering masses are being pressed to choose between the devil and the deep blue sea. Bringing in a chicken and an egg situation - which comes first. Before and After is not an essential issue, if it were Lebanon we would have achieved peace by now. Either way, in the light of recent political changes, the consequences are grave. We agree we must count the consequence. Either way we are already on the floor from where we need to be lifted.

We, women, men and children have been maimed, plundered, raped etc. An analysis of the peace dialogue last Saturday, 10th February indicate that the other side is sill unwilling to give the people respite peace even before its chosen date for further talks on 28th February 1996 in Cote D' Ivoire. We must allow good sense to prevail, we must weigh the pros and cons in a reasonable manner devoid of fear and coercion. One is reminded of the Hymn by James Howell and I quote various parts of its verses:

"Once to every man and Nation

 Comes the moment to decide

 In the strife of truth with falsehood

 For the good or evil side;

 Then to side with truth is noble

 and 'tis prosperous to be just".

We in NOW as part of the FORUM and most mindful of the pain we are all going through, have carefully weighed the issues with a clear conscience.

In the best interest of the majority of the suffering masses, and to at least impart assurance that displaced and non-displaced, refugees and non-refugees, rebels and non-rebels, continue to have access to relief and sustenance, the women have decided to maintain the democratic process as scheduled. The lesser of the two evils must be pursued and i.e. go forward with elections on the 26th February, 1996.

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble and he will give us peace, if we pursue our course faithfully and truthfully.

Let's continue the peace dialogue and elections together. Therefore our Government, the NPRC must not be afraid, the people are with them. The Government should provide security on polling day to secure its people and make polling free from fear as it is today here in Bintumani in the spirit of Bintumani.

 **STATEMENT BY THE COUNCIL OF CHURCHES IN SIERRA LEONE**

The Council of Churches in Sierra Leone (CCSL) notes with appreciation the pronouncement of the Chairman of the reformed National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) and Head of State, Brigadier Julius Maada Bio, on assumption of that office, that he and his government are committed to the electoral and peace processes.

As a Religious Body, the CCSL has been praying for and working towards these two very vital issues. Cognizant of the fact that some progress has been made in the peace process, aware of the fact that much effort and resources have been put into the scheduled elections by both local and international bodies including the NPRC Government and Political Parties, and conscious that the elections are part of the peace process, the Council of Churches in Sierra Leone, in line with the declaration of the reformed NPRC Chairman and Head of State, maintains its earlier stance that the elections should go on as scheduled i.e. 26th February 1996 while the peace process is further pursued. To this end, CCSL is bringing in international elections monitors/observers and will continue to use its local and international networks and relationships in the pursuit of lasting peace. God bless us all in these endeavours.

 **STATEMENT BY THE NATIONAL UNION OF SIERRA LEONE STUDENTS (NUSS)**

We, the National Union of Sierra Leone Students, having been always seen as the bastion or mouth-piece of students and of the hopeless masses, remain mindful of the role in national politics. Students' views have always been hatched in national conventions - National Conventions that always serve a bed rock for solid democracy.

In a Convention held in 1995 in Makeni, it was the general view of students all over Sierra Leone, that peace was primary recipe for a solid foundation for democracy

Notwithstanding, students are again caught up in a confusing political climate. And with the dynamic nature of the human life and its activities, we today stoutly believe in the conduct of a free and fair elections on February 26 1996, as was previously resolved in this same conference hall. As we believe in the principles of democracy our statement here this morning is a true representation of students democratic views.

And so in this statement, we solemnly declare our love and loyalty for our beloved Sierra Leone, as we fervently support the conduct of free and fair elections on February 26 1996. So help us God.

 **STATEMENT BY THE PEOPLE'S PROGRESSIVE PARTY (PPP)**

Madam Chairperson, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen

For the second time in less than six months, we are gathered here in the Bintumani Conference Centre to deliberate on issues of great national importance. They are issues that define the destiny of our country, shape the direction of the future as well as chart the actual path we shall tread in the next half decade. We shall all be judged on the altar of history by the decisions we make here today. If we make the right decisions - that is if we make decisions that truly reflect and interpret public conscience and public thinking, I am confident that future generations will exonerate us from blame. If, on the other hand, we make the wrong decisions - that is, if we make decisions that are meant to satisfy the whims and caprices of only a few desperate and power - thirty despots masquerading as peace-lovers and liberators, then we would not only have darkened the future of our country but we stand to be chastised by posterity as the people who sacrificed the prosperity of this country for their own self - centred selfish interests. Even worse, unwittingly, we would have created an environment and laid a foundation for deepening and widening the divides which have already surfaced within our nation. May Allah save us all from the ravages and consequences of dividing this nation further against itself.

Madam Chairperson, last August, the people of this country spoke through this Bintumani Conference. They gave to INEC to organise Presidential and Parliamentary Elections not later than February 1996. That conference brought together under one roof all shades of opinion in the country. Civilians, Military, Police and the NPRC were all represented. They were all privy to that mandate.

Now, suddenly, the NPRC, and only the NPRC, is saying it is confused. It wants the elections to be postponed but it has not said for how long. Then suddenly again, two nights ago, the NPRC announced its agreement with the RUF to meet for talks in Abidjan on February 28, two days after the scheduled elections on February 26. Is this a mere coincidence or a deliberate decision? It is interesting that after almost five years of settling the conflict by force or arms between the Amy and the RUF, the nation is being asked, on the eve of the elections, to postpone the elections because the Army and the RUF want to talk peace. In those five years, they have been fighting, killing and maiming innocent and defenceless civilians in their hundreds of thousands throughout the length and breadth of this country. No family in this country has escaped bereavement from this senseless war. When the civilians called for peace; the warring men did not listen; when the religious leaders called for peace, the warlords did not listen; when the women and children called for peace, again they did not listen. The only time they say they want to talk peace is when the entire nation has prepared itself to choose its leaders by democratic elections and right on the eve of those elections.

Our party, the PPP, does not consider this approach by the NPRC acceptable. We believe the people of this country will not accept it. The reasonable thing to do now is again to mandate INEC to go ahead with the elections on February 26 and to endeavour to declare the result by February 28 latest. The elected president should be mandated by this conference to commence peace talks with the RUF within seven days of his assumption of office. By proceeding in this manner, nothing is lost by the nation. On the contrary, much is gained. Peace will be negotiated by the Government freely chosen by the people and truly representing their aspirations.

To allow the NPRC to negotiate peace in the open - ended fiat they want, is to postpone peace indefinitely. We do not know the RUF's agenda nor can we be certain how long the negotiations will take; may be two, five or ten years.

As long as the negotiations last, who governs the country? It is still the unelected military junta of the NPRC. Even if they create a so-called national unity govern, it is still an undemocratic, unelected junta led by the military that will govern the country.

The position of the PPP is thus clear. We want elections on February 26, 1996. We want the peace process to start now, if possible, or at the latest within seven days of the swearing-in of the new democratically elected president. Peace is a process and the elections are an essential ingredient of that process. But peace takes time to make. To talk of peace before elections therefore is tantamount to postponing elections ad infinitum, because no-one can predict how long the negotiations will take. And here I speak from experience, very long experience for that matter, gained in different parts of the world. And spanning over 20 years in the field of conflict resolution.

We say yes to elections and we want elections on February 26, 1996. This should not stop the peace process. The NPRC can go ahead and start the peace talks anytime whether before or after the elections and the elected government will continue the talks from where the NPRC stops. The important thing is that the guns that liberate must not rule. The guns should liberate the people but the ballot box must rule the country. This way, Sierra Leone shall once more regain its lost freedom and national unity.

My campaign vehicle, my driver, brother-in-law and cousin were arbitrarily arrested and detained at the CID headquarters yesterday evening. All attempts to have them released have so far failed. They have not still being told why they are detained. I cannot think of a better example of an unbridled abuse of power by the I.G than this. God help us but we now have a police station.

 **STATEMENT BY THE UNIVERSITY OF SIERRA LEONE**

Madam Chairperson, Last August, the University viewed the Consultative Conference as the beginning of a long healing process aimed at the promotion of peace, tolerance and stability in our dear nation.

Since August, a lot has happened in the pursuance of these aims, these include: the announcement of the date for elections, as was agreed upon at the Bintumani Conference and the registration of political parties to participate in the elections.

The event of January 16 further raised the hopes of the majority of Sierra Leoneans that the February 26 elections would go on as planned. Now that another Conference has been convened to further deliberate on whether or not elections must be conducted, the University is rather confused and the only way out of this confusion is to maintain its previous position that elections must go on as planned, since peace is an on going process and no date can be fixed for it.

Finally, we wish to take this opportunity to commend the Revolutionary United Front for the one-week break in hostilities during which period, food and medical supplies were taken to our people who are badly in need of them and also for the opening of a direct link of communication between the Chairman and Head of State, Brigadier Julius Maada Bio and Corporal Foday Sankoh. This is all part of the healing process that the University is advocating. Peace and elections can be pursued simultaneously.

Long live the Republic of Sierra Leone and may everlasting peace reign supreme in this land through God's infinite mercies. I thank you all for your attention.

 **STATEMENT BY BO DISTRICT**

Madam Chairperson, Fellow delegates, we left here with one accord last year that we needed elections to be held not later than end of February 1996.

We have come to reaffirm that date and to state clearly that we in the Bo District are committed to it. We also support the peace process to go side by side.

However, we want INEC to seriously note that majority of the people both in the township of Bo and the chiefdoms comprising the Bo District have not registered. We want also to inform INEC that the voter education exercise has not been very effective.

As a result, we are appealing that some positive steps be taken so as to include our people in the electoral process.

We thank you.

 **STATEMENT BY THE FREETOWN CITY COUNCIL**

Madam Chairperson Fellow Delegates, Observers, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:

At the conclusion of the first National Consultative Conference held here in August, 1995 we the delegates assembled apparently supported by the entire nation, gave a clear mandate to the Interim National Electoral Commission to conduct free and fair presidential and parliamentary elections, using the Proportional Representation Listing system, before the end of February 1996.

It will be recalled that given the circumstances which had prevailed at the conference, the mandate given to INEC was considered the best compromise solution acceptable to the Government, all the political parties, and the rest of us who are deeply committed to the contemplated democratisation process. Subsequently, the 26th February, 1996 was agreed by all concerned as the date on which the elections should be held.

Even as we were deliberating here during the conference, the rebel incursions were rafting in the country and I recall that the need to pursue a peace option with the RUF, was generally acknowledged. Since then, it must be recognised that various steps have been taken by the NPRC Government, religious bodies, many local and international groups, and individuals to broker peace. We are therefore thankful to God and we congratulate those whose efforts seem to have urged the RUF to have finally accepted this peace option, and we now hear that they want to talk peace.

We want peace in the land of our birth: we demand justice in this land that we love or Sierra Leone. We want sustainable peace that will facilitate rehabilitation of our devastated country - sustainable peace that will enable us realise true development and growth.

We believe that sustainable peace can be attained if the brokers of such a peace mission represent the entire nation and maintain one voice in this pursuit.

We finally believe that to enable the current process to establish a solid foundation on which stable governance can be assured for the peoples of our beloved country, the process must be allowed to move to its next logical stage, which is the holding of free and fair elections, at the earliest possible time. Failing to do so, we would have erected a second "Tower of Babel" in Sierra Leone.

At this point in time this conference and indeed the whole nation, require from INEC a feedback and the assurance that it has done everything necessary to facilitate without hinderance the conduct of free and fair elections on 26th February, 1996.

In response to INEC's letter of invitation to the City Council of Freetown dated 7th February, 1996, to attend this second Consultative Conference, Council met and considered the purpose for the meeting as stated in the letter of invitation.

After a full deliberation of the matter, Council had directed me to convey its decision to this Conference:

That is, upon the assurance given by INEC that it has carried out the mandate of the August, 1995 Consultative Conference, and that all steps have been completed by INEC accordingly, the Presidential and Parliamentary elections should be held on 26th February, 1996, Deo Volente!

Salus Civis Suprema Lex Est - The Welfare of the People is the Supreme Law. Thank You.

 **STATEMENT BY THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT FOR PEACE**

We, the members of the Women's Movement for Peace having held consultations and discussions with Sierra Leonean women of all shades of opinions and from all walks of life declared our united and considered position to be as follows

1. No one is more committed to the Peace Process than we are.

We therefore affirm our whole hearted commitment and support for every genuine effort being made to bring a just and sustainable peace to our beloved Sierra Leone.

2. Mindful however that the journey to peace in Sierra Leone is going to be a long and torturous one, and that peace is an on going process and election is one means of achieving peace;

We therefore call for the elections and the peace process to be pursued simultaneously i.e. peace negotiations and elections must go hand in hand.

3. We therefore demand that the elections be held on the 26th February 1996 as agreed at the first National Consultative Conference (August 1995) and approved by the NPRC Government (and promised by NPRC Chairman Brigadier General Bio), the Political parties, civil society and the INEC (Interim National Electoral Commission)

4. We condemn all forms of violence and tribalism which will only undermine the Peace process and Nation building.

5. We urge all parties to this deliberating civil strife to seize the opportunity to end the conflict in order to enhance the prospects for Peace and successful democratisation.

6. We call on the NPRC Government and the RUF, and all others to rededicate themselves to ensuring peaceful elections on 26th February 1996.

7. We emphasise that security is of primary and paramount importance and call on the Government to provide the security required through out the whole electoral process and put in place a process that will ensure smooth handing over to the elected government as soon as the elections are over.

8. This Nation is at the end of its tether. Please give us a break. Give Peace and Democracy a chance - Elections on the 26th February is the right answer - Have the courage and wisdom to take this decision for your country and your people.

 **STATEMENT BY THE REPRESENTATIVE FOR DISPLACED CAMP (SOUTH)**

My fellow participants observers, members of the High Table, Ladies and Gentlemen, as a delegate for displaced camps, South, I express my profound gratitude to the N.P.R.C. Government and INEC for their concern to look back and closely examine work set for general election, 26th February, 1996 for valuation.

Having gone round all the main camps in and around Bo Township, which is now representing the whole south namely (seven) Durbar, Old Railway Station, S.L.P.M.B. Semabu, Lebanese camps, Kendigama now representing Taiama and Gondama for Pujehun District, I came out with the following resolutions or conclusions:

1. That the date fixed for General Elections 26 February, 1996 is agreed upon with the following considerations: re-registration in full - the eligible members registered for voting are in the minority. They want to be represented fully.

2. The need to be educated on how voting should be done - voters education - this should not be done in a day, especially where dealing with adults in the majority illiteracy group. Much tactics and encouragement must be given them.

3. To get them motivated as displaced, their adequate and regular food supplies must be given them or else you shall never get them round for they shall be in the bush fetching wood or vegetable e.g. cassava leaves which is their daily source of earning to live with their families.

b) What the average African call food is Rice. They have gone out of rice supplies for months and months now and even the so called blended cornmeal or bulgur is very inadequate and irregular in supply.

The people want to go back to their villages after rehabilitation. Camps are only temporary places manageable for the dries. I thank the Government and INEC once more for looking into these areas immediately before 26 February 1996, for general election to which they are prepared.

I thank you all.

  **STATEMENT BY THE REPRESENTATIVE OF REFUGEE CAMPS IN GUINEA**

We bring you greetings from the several hundreds of thousands of our kinds in Guinea. We thank both the Government and INEC for inviting us to this conference once again to be consulted on the affairs of the running of our country of which we form a significant part.

We remember when we had to bring message from our camps in Guinea in 1995 (numbering over 100 camps with a recorded population well over 600,000 not including those that are still waiting to be registered by UNHCR). We informed you all about our plight and suffering. Today also we want to inform you that our situation is more than deteriorated. We are now supposed to feed on cornmeal, which is not forthcoming either. For the past eight months we have received only half rations of cornmeal.

We are dying of hunger, we want to return home. If we have to make any contribution in this conference, we want to start by saying that we have been greatly disappointed by the Chairman, Dr Jonah who informed us in August that we will be a constituency and will vote in our camps in Guinea. But it now seems that we are forgotten. We have not been registered to vote. We therefore want peace so that we can return to our houses and be registered to vote. We are not afraid of voting. In the present circumstance when we hear that Government is talking peace with the RUF we will ask that we get peace first and be able to return home to register and then election. That is our stand.

Our message Madam Chairperson, is a simple one: press the government for peace for us to return. We want peace before elections in the prevailing circumstance, like we said before, we want to take part in the electoral process of our beloved Sierra Leone. We did not chose to run away. Give peace a chance and register us to come and vote to elect our leaders. We don't want to talk politics in our suffering. We are suffering. Let us have peace first before election.

Long live peace.

Long live Sierra Leone.

  **STATEMENT BY THE PEOPLE'S NATIONAL CONVENTION PARTY (PNC)**

Madam Chairperson, All Protocols Observed,

We have again been assembled here today, (this time not at the instance of INEC but that of the NPRC) to either make history by bravely and solemnly re-affirming our earlier conviction expressed in this Conference hall in August 1995 or to betray our conscience and the wishes of the people on whose behalf we have been summoned to this Consultative Conference.

Madam Chairperson, barely five to six months ago (in August 1995) our delegation joined other delegations in declaring the urgent need to hold multi-party democratic elections in February 1996. If for any hidden motives some people think the PNC was not of age to have taken the right decision at that time, I am authorised by the Leadership of our party to unequivocally re-affirm the mandate our partly jointly gave INEC to conduct elections in February 1996. While appreciating the urgent need for peace to once more prevail in this nation, our party also recognises the absolute need to end military rule come February 26. Where in the world have military conflicts been resolved without civilian participation? Which civilian government would not strive for peace? Are civilian governments incapable to negotiate peace?

The PNC appreciates the role and sacrifices the military have and continues to demonstrate in the defence of our sovereignty. We realise that the Armed Forces cannot be marginalised in state governing. Indeed this is the time for civilian/military cooperation, both promoting democracy and the enhancement of state security.

Madam Chairperson, fellow delegates, for four years innocent people have suffered death, displacement and loss of properties, as a result of the rebel war; for four years they suffered indignities, harassment and molestations under military rule; and for four years their standard of living dropped abysmally in an unprioritised economy. Enough is enough! For us in the PNC whatever anguish of spirit, soul or body it may cost us, we are determined to speak the truth and help convey the wishes of the people and guide them on the part of democracy, civil liberties and dignity. We discountenance fear or the urge for public posts or favours which tends to stand in the way of our better judgement of the prevailing situation of the country. If in the cause of pursuing the truth and protecting the people any harm should befall us, the credit for having helped this nation to know the truth and defend itself from its tormentors will be due to the Almighty, because all good ideas and pursuits emanate from God. Only the mistakes we might make in the process will be ours.

Madam Chairperson, the PNC has never lost hope in the forth coming democratic elections not because of the countless people that have been killed or maimed but because of the courage of the ordinary Sierra Leonean to forge ahead for democracy and freedom. We believe that brave men are not those who do not feel afraid but those who triumph over fear. It is therefore the fervent hope of the PNC that all delegations gathered here today will triumph over intimidation, threats and fear by opting for the democratic process to continue as scheduled.

Madam Chairperson, Sierra Leone is not for those who are greedy for money and power but for the people who honestly labour so that the future may flower. Finally let me leave with you this prayer:-

"Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;

Where knowledge is free;

Where words come out from the depth of truth;

Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;

Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into

The dreary desert sand of dead habits;

Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening

Thought and action:

Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let our country awake:"

I thank you all.

 **STATEMENT BY THE PETTY TRADERS' ASSOCIATION**

Madam Chairperson, Distinguished Personalities,

I want first to register deepest sympathy to Doctor James Jonah and Alhaji Tejan Kabba on behalf of the petty traders and market women of this country for the dastardly attacks on their premises and the offices of the Electoral Commission in the early hours of Saturday the 10th of February, 1996. I also implore the NPRC Government and the security to hastily apprehend the culprits and bring the law to take seriously its course - if they have to escape blame.

Sierra Leoneans are weary, frustrated, downcast and again deceived. But let me hasten to state straight away here and now that the lot of the peoples of Sierra Leone is not borne with saddles on their backs for a favoured few booted and spurred ready to ride them legitimately all of the time by the Grace of God.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the Democratisation Process has a time-table which is still on course. The peace process has no definition, nor schedule or programme. A peace negotiation even when started could reach a dead-lock and an indefinite breakdown. Are we going to prefer to throw away a final course simply to chance taking? My people wish to pledge their unflinching support to the Democratisation Process whose achievement can be realised in about two weeks from today. Peace initiatives and negotiations can be pursued simultaneously and thereafter.

We left these corridors of the Bintumani Complex some six months ago with great hopes and wishful thoughts that Sierra Leone was at last going to be salvaged from its past and present decadence. Many ugly events have occurred since, leaving us with the greatest of anxieties, the sum total of which have return us to this same complex today with shattered hopes and regrets that the August 1995 Consultative Conference was after all not a necessity. Our presence here today is no longer to decide on a date for ushering in a Democratic System in Sierra Leone or to give the nation's mandate to the ideals of the Interim National Electoral Commission (INEC). These were taken care of at the last Conference. We are here today, as we the Petty Traders Association see it, to ask ourselves whether our country (Sierra Leone) is not already a lost cause.

I want us to be reminded here and now that the war still rages on with no clues as when it will end. Many of our provincial people have been and are still displaced and their towns and villages continually destroyed by SOBELS AND REBELS. Most if not all of them are still in Refugee/Displaced Camps within and outside this country. The International Donor Agencies and the United Nations in particular have opined that they can only render assistance in the process of rehabilitation through a Democratically elected Civilian Regime. Shall we, as a suffering people brush aside these offers simply because we want a peace process whose achievement is still to be determined.

Let us also ask ourselves, Ladies and Gentlemen, Donor Agencies and Countries have spent much in money and materials only to have the elections held as scheduled. Should the elections date be shifted or cancelled indefinitely, will donors and their agencies be willing to finance any future Democratic Elections to be held in this country? We were informed by no less a person than Dr. James Jonah himself that should the pending elections not take place now, Donor agencies will for sure pull-out of this country. These are sacrifices, this re-convened conference is requesting us to forego for the simple reason that some over ambitious men in our midst and their henchmen want to entrench themselves in power perpetually at the peril of this nation.

The Petty Traders Association as a great pressure group, inclusive of petty traders, market women, small and medium scale business people is willing and ready to cooperate with any Organisation (be it Political or otherwise) to resist any form of Tyranny and the destabilisation of the Democratisation Process. We need Elections on the 26th of February, 1996 as Scheduled.

My Sierra Leone it's of Thee

Sweet Land of Liberty

Of thee I sing

Land where my Fathers Died

Land of a Pilgrim Pride

From every mountain summit

From the Depth of every Ocean

From the Stretch of Every Beach

Let Freedom Reign.

  **STATEMENT BY BONTHE DISTRICT**

In August 1995, there was nothing said about peace but security on the election day, so if peace has come as a new phenomenon, then they should match together.

We, the people of the Bonthe District appreciate the efforts of the National Provisional Ruling Council Government and the Interim National Electoral Commission in the pursuance of democracy in this country.

We, the people of Bonthe District, are therefore suggesting a third alternative, that Peace and Elections can go on simultaneously for the following reasons:-

1) Supporters for peace before Elections have given us no time frame (the case of Liberia)

2) Supporters for Elections before peace cannot give the country any assurance that peace will automatically come after Elections (the case of Angola)

In the light of the above, and since there is no guarantee for us to say that each of these supporters are serious, we, the people of the Bonthe District would like to have peace and Elections simultaneously especially when the two opposing factors operate openly and in the proven national interest.

May God bless this nation in her simultaneous pursuance of both peace and the democratic process.

Thank you all.

 **STATEMENT BY THE WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS WESTERN AREA**

We are not confused by issues.

1. We congratulate the NPRC for ousting Captain Valentine Strasser because, according to the press, he wanted to derail the democratisation process.

2. We acknowledge the fact that peace is a priority but we also emphasise that elections is a must, and no amount of cajoling or persuasion can make us change our minds.

3. We did emphasise that the electoral process can only be postponed or delayed if INEC is so mandated by the last Consultative Conference which shall be reconvened only by INEC to decide the issue.

4. We support that peace negotiations and elections must go hand in hand as previously agreed.

5. We thank the RUF for the cease fire as it helped the registration of more voters, this clearly indicates that the RUF is in favour of the elections.

6. We had declared in August 1995 at the last Bintumani Conference that the women want elections to go on as planned.

We re-affirm our previous statement made at the last conference here in Bintumani. We therefore demand that the elections (an essential and fundamental part of the peace process) go ahead on the 26th February as agreed at the National Consultative Conference and approved by the NPRC Government, the political parties, Paramount Chiefs, civil society, religious bodies and INEC. We do believe we have a date with history and INEC.

Finally, we demand that the appointment we have with history and INEC be kept when we vote on February 26, 1996 as we portray true democracy.

 **STATEMENT BY THE DISPLACED CAMPS (NORTH)**

Madam Chairperson, Members of INEC, the NGO's, Your Excellencies of the Diplomatic Corps, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:

On behalf of fellow displaced in the North, I thank you for considering us to give our views as to whether we need peace before elections or elections before peace. As displaced camps in the North, we have the following points at the back of our minds:-

1. As displaced, we want peace so that we can return to our homes and vote for any candidate of our choice - because we still have a lot of people in the bushes behind.

2. We also want the NPRC government and the RUF rebels to come out with a deadline for peace negotiations as soon as possible.

3. That without peace and mobility within Sierra Leone there will be no free and fair elections.

4. That civilians should be given a chance by the present government to express their views and the present government should have respect for life and property before elections.

Therefore, we emphasise that for every Sierra Leonean to come and vote, let there be peace, respect for human rights and lives and access to all towns and villages before elections.

Thank you.

 **STATEMENT BY MOYAMBA DISTRICT**

Madam Chairperson,

My name is Las Lamin, Chiefdom Speaker of Kaiyamba Chiefdom and a delegate representing Moyamba District.

First of all I wish to thank His Excellency the Chairman and Head of State, Brigadier General Julius Maada Bio, members of the N.P.R.C. and the Chairman and officials of the Interim National Electoral Commission for organising this second Consultative Conference and thus giving the people of this country a chance to discuss the all important issue of the date for the forthcoming elections.

Let me state here that Moyamba District is one of the most democratically minded districts and that the people of Moyamba District want to exercise their right to vote. As far as we are concerned, we want elections today and not tomorrow.

But we have to face the fact that the majority of our people will not be able to vote, because the majority of our people have not been registered to take part in the elections. Due to their security situation, the registration teams were only able to visit six out of the fourteen chiefdoms in Moyamba District. The total population of eight chiefdoms has not been registered at all. Even where registration took place it has been far from complete. When the registration teams are threatened and have to fear for their lives, how can they do their work?

In view of the above mentioned, we the people of Moyamba District are of the opinion that elections and peace talk go side by side. We also request that a new registration drive is started in our district so that our people will be able to vote when the elections are held. We understand a registration drive is planned for five days only. This is far too short a time. We request that time is allocated so that all people can be registered.

We also recommend that all efforts be made by Government for our people living in Liberia and Guinea as refugees, and those beyond rebel lines to return and participate in the election process.

We further propose that INEC considers increasing the number of polling stations for the Presidential, Paramount Chiefs and Members of Parliament elections. The rationale behind this is to enable electors an easy access to polling stations on polling day.

We are greatly heartened by the news that preliminary talks have been held between our Head of State, His Excellency, Brigadier General Julius Maada Bio and the leader of the R.U.F. Corporal Foday Sankoh. We want to congratulate His Excellency the Chairman of the N.P.R.C. and Head of State and his Government on this bold step and wish them God's guidance.

May God guide us in our deliberations.

I thank you.

 **STATEMENT BY THE ALL PEOPLES CONGRESS (APC)**

Madam Chairperson, All Protocols Observed,

Members of the Armed Forces I greet you well.

Our position is clear. It is short, sharp, firm and unequivocal. Election and peace to go side by side. May I remind the NPRC of the saying, "what is good for the goose, is good for the gander". Do you recall the 29th of April, 1992, when the people were dancing for you? The same people are saying today, they want elections. If they dance for you and you were happy, you listened to them, today is the day for you to listen to the people. The people say, they want election. The reason is this, we believe that a democratically elected civilian government would have the legal capacity to negotiate on behalf of the people of this country. Whoever it is going to negotiate with, whether the RUF and even the NPRC, please we shall negotiate with that person, but election to go side by side with peace is the will of the people. Do not deny that will.

I thank you.

 **STATEMENT BY THE ARMED FORCES OF THE**

 **REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE**

The Officers, Men and Women of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Sierra Leone are cognizant of the fact that they have a sacred duty under oath to defend the Sovereignty of the Republic of Sierra Leone, its Governments and People from internal and external aggression. There is no compromise on this issue, thus the fact that every member of the Armed Forces should at all times be willing to lay down his or her life in the defence of the country and its people.

2. Since the beginning of the rebel war, the Armed Forces of the Republic of Sierra Leone has lost considerable number of Officers, Men and Women who paid and are still paying the Supreme Sacrifice with their lives which must be appreciated. They were human beings like us and breadwinners for their families leaving behind widows and children.

3. The Armed Forces is conscious and aware of the fact that their primary function in the present circumstances should by all means be to contain the rebel war in order that peace and security may return to our country.

4. It will be recalled that a recommendation at the Bintumani 1 Conference was that the Armed Forces must completely hands off the election procedures right up to the close of polling day. In that regard no soldier is to be seen around any polling booth on polling day.

5. The Armed Forces also wants it to be known that in view of the ongoing war and avowed determination of the RUF to disrupt the elections, which they have made openly and quite explicit, it cannot within its present resources provide the necessary security during the elections and at the same time fight the rebel war.

6. History has taught us that no rebel war has ever been conclusively won on the battle field, but at the negotiating table. The Armed Forces has done and is still doing every thing humanly possible to defend and protect Sierra Leone and its people. However, it cannot continue to be bogged down with this war, sacrificing human and material resources, when it has seen a light in the tunnel towards peace on the negotiating table. There is no doubt that some people for selfish reasons are only interested in coming into power fully realising that they cannot offer any guarantee that they can bring the war to an end.

7. If it is the view of this Conference that elections must be held before peace, then the Armed Forces will request that a Decree be speedily Promulgated to give powers to the Chief of Defence Staff to conscript able bodied male and female Sierra Leoneans to complement the present strength of the Armed Forces to defend our country. This is of necessity because since the commencement of the war, the Armed Forces has been deployed in Liberia and also nationwide. For that matter there is a dire need for relief troops for these officers and men who have been deployed in the various theatres of war for well over four years.

8. Finally, it must be pointed out that the necessity of concluding a rebel war by negotiations before the General Elections must not be overlooked. Even a developed country which is a very strong supporter of democracy in Sierra Leone is now in a dilemma as to peace before elections when it was recently faced with a serious bomb attack in its capital, presumably by a fighting force against its policy, demand peace negotiations before elections. Can we not learn a lesson from this?

 **STATEMENT BY THE SIERRA LEONE LABOUR CONGRESS**

Madam Chairperson, Fellow Sierra Leoneans, Distinguished Personalities, Members of the Diplomatic Corps

The Sierra Leone Labour Congress (SLLC) being the recognised parent organisation of the working masses of this nation is committed to upholding the principles of democracy founded on the firm commitments of the people in electing the Government of their choice in a free and fair Election. A Government that is accountable to the masses and therefore strongly believes, that any government not elected by the people is an illegitimate government and cannot be accountable to them.

The Sierra Leone Labour Congress is very much disturbed with the present developments and more particularly so, with the RUF wanting to talk peace with the Reformed National Provisional Ruling Council but without any pre-conditions but at the same time asking to have the Elections slated for 26th February, 1996 postponed. This to us is a pre-condition and cannot be accepted. The same RUF has rejected any peace talks with the NPRC on the grounds that the RUF leader claimed the NPRC was an illegal government, we now wonder what makes the Reformed NPRC legal. The Sierra Leone Labour Congress is not convinced that the RUF is sincere and committed to this Peace Talk.

The Sierra Leone Labour Congress, Ladies and Gentlemen, Fellow Sierra Leoneans, is mandated to re-affirm its position as it was in August 1995 that the date for the Presidential and Parliamentary Elections MUST NOT be changed. February 26, 1996 should be the day when all patriotic Sierra Leoneans should come out in full force to participate in a Free and Fair Elections. Peace talks can be pursued and the process go side-by-side with the Elections process. A legitimate Government will be in a better position to bring peace to Sierra Leone and sustain such peace for the benefit of all Sierra Leoneans.

Thank you.

 **STATEMENT BY THE PUJEHUN DISTRICT**

Madam Chairperson, all Protocols Observed,

I am deputising the Chairman of the Pujehun District Development Association (PADDA), Dr A.D.F. Massaquoi. I am the Secretary General of that Association. As I stand here ladies and gentlemen, I am honoured by my conscience before God and man to speak the views of the people of Pujehun District.

Madam Chairlady, honestly and sincerely, our people do not object to the February 26th General Elections at all, but they want me to deliver this message to Dr James Jonah, that in this democratisation process, it seems they are already marginalised. I say so because, there are some big settlement in the Pujehun District and with some improved security situation, vehicles going to Pujehun are coming back every day. INEC's Registration Team never went to register people from those areas; at the same time Dr Jonah, the team that went to Pujehun Town itself and the neighbouring villages took only 5 days and hastily left the place. So as of today, the registration figure we know for Pujehun District including those at the Gondama Camp, stand at 16,000 only.

Dr Jonah, if truly we want to give the people of Pujehun a chance to say something in the new democratisation process, and you are sure you can register and adequately educate our people before February 26th, we have no reason to object to elections at all. We want a change, but if truly and honestly for no cause of theirs you cannot do so before February 26th, we ask you to set a time frame for yourself to register our people so that they can take part in this elections. It is not their fault at all that they are not at home and they may not have a chance to vote.

I thank you very much.

 **STATEMENT OF THE NATIONAL CO-ORDINATING**

 **COMMITTEE FOR PEACE (NCCP)**

Madam Chairperson, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, Patriotic Compatriots, All Protocols Observed

As we assemble here today in this epoch making second National Consultative Conference which is as a result of the so-called controversy on the overwhelming decision reached at the first National Consultative Conference of August 15 - 17, 1995, we would firstly draw the attention of all here present that the National Co-ordinating Committee for Peace (NCCP), being a peace constituency is committed not only to the resolution of the current bloody civil war but also to prevent any further blood bath which may occur due to our apparent lack of commitment to our decision, our people and our nation.

The NCCP welcomes the peace overtures of the Reformed National Provisional Ruling Council and the RUF but note that the RUF has put forward a pre-condition that elections be postponed so that peace can be realised. We wish to categorically state that while we hope that this sad chapter of almost five years of armed conflict come to a close, we equally do not want to see another recipe for conflict instituted by our wrong judgement here today.

Therefore, the National Co-ordinating Committee for Peace (NCCP) wishes to reiterate and reaffirm its absolute commitment to the elections slated from February 26, 1996.

To comply with the postponement theory would be tantamount to:

1. fuelling conflict between NPRC and the political parties and their supporters;

2. an end to the international community's support for any future democratic process, rehabilitation and resettlement in Sierra Leone;

3. the further collapse of the socio-economic fabric of our society leading to the perpetual abject poverty of the Sierra Leonean people.

It goes without saying that if the RUF is willing to talk to the NPRC that is slated to serve in office for six weeks from January 16, to February 26, 1996 they should at least continue with the cease fire and guarantee the conduct of a free from fear elections on February 26. After the democratically elected government would have assumed office, the RUF will then continue to talk with the former. There is no doubt that such a democratically elected government will stand on a firmer moral ground with the RUF having been given the legal mandate of the people of this country through a democratic process.

It is also important to observe that the RUF initially stressed that the problems of Sierra Leone must be solved by the people of Sierra Leone to the extent that they called upon select civic organisations to open dialogue with them. Therefore, the February 26, elections will give them the opportunity to talk to the entire population through their elected representatives thereafter.

Having been elected by the people, the people would therefore use all democratic process to bear pressure on their representatives to accelerate the peace process to accommodate the RUF, the army and all other disgruntled groups into the running of the affairs of the state through reconciliatory strategies for a lasting peace in Sierra Leone.

**BRIEF HISTORICAL CATALOGUE OF NCCP'S EFFORT FOR PEACE**

On April 25, 1995, a twelve-man delegation from the NCCP requested the former NPRC Chairman Strasser not to lift the ban on political activities so that our peace initiative will not dissipate. However, two days later on April 27, 1995 the ban on political activities was lifted. In July of 1995, we put forward a proposal in one of our press-conferences for a Broad Based Interim Government of National Unity which could have included among others the NPRC and the RUF. The NPRC categorically rejected this call with the excuse that they will not submit to any government that is not elected by universal suffrage. Eventually our people, left with the single choice of democratic elections supported the holding of elections on February 26, 1996 at the INEC Consultative Conference in August of last year. Thus our position remains the same with absolute and unflinching commitment to February 26 elections for lasting and genuine peace, progress and prosperity in Sierra Leone. The NCCP in collaboration with other peace groups will continue to explore all avenues for a peaceful resolution of the current armed conflict.

May God Bless Us All.

 **STATEMENT BY THE SIERRA LEONE POLICE**

Madam Chairperson, All Protocols Observed,

I have taken this forum not only to meet all of you gathered here but also to seize the opportunity to express the appreciation of the Police to the Sierra Leone Community for the cooperation and support we are receiving in our day to day activities.

In this regard, ladies and gentlemen, I wish to reaffirm what I said earlier in this Hall in August last year. That our sacred responsibility is to preserve the Constitution of the Republic of Sierra Leone. And being the watch-dog of the peoples' rights and liberty will not hesitate to call to order anybody, institution or groups of people, however influential, that threaten to destroy, disfigure or otherwise undermine the corporate existence of this great nation, which we have all sworn to serve, preserve, defend and protect.

To achieve these objectives, demands that all hands must be on deck, because progress, stability and economic development in our country will be illusory in the absence of effective security. This is where the Police Force requires not only your fullest cooperation but more importantly, ladies and gentlemen, your absolute and transparent loyalty and respect for law and order. On our part, I can give you the assurance that we shall try our utmost to accord adequate priority to save life and property and also make it possible for the ordinary citizen to go about his lawful business without fear or molestation by lawless individuals. And also ensure that there is a peaceful atmosphere which enables government to plan and execute development projects for the benefit of all citizens.

Law and order are our concern and must also necessarily be yours in the interest of our beloved country Sierra Leone.

Thank you.

 **STATEMENT BY PDP (SORBEH)**

1. We reaffirm our support for the mandate given to INEC in August 1995, by the Peoples Representatives, to conduct Elections before the end of February 1996 (i.e. February 1996).

2 There is no reason why Elections should be postponed.

3. As for the Peace Overtures being made by the Phantom, Foday Sankoh, who together with his cohorts have destroyed over 70% of this country, these could go side by side with Elections.

4. The people of this country want to elect a government of their choice. They are fed up with military rule. The temporary occupants of the State House must realise that they cannot subvert the will of the people.

5. The antics of some people today begin to make Valentine Strasser look like the foremost Military Democrat, if there ever was one.

6. The Institution of Chieftaincy has been described as a primordial atavism and an abberation. We want to remind Chiefs that their respect and authority has been fatally eroded in the recent past and because they have acted against the interest of their subjects, and succeeded in alienating them in the process.

7. Now they are meddling in a very dangerous matter. They must beware!

8. If you change February 26, the war will drag on and on; the carnage, killing, deprivation and suffering will continue; the displaced and refugees will not return to their homes. There will be no Elections for 5 - 10 years. Sierra Leone will be blacklisted by the International Committee.

9. Say no to this nonsense.

10. Support February 26, the future is in your hands.

 **STATEMENT BY THE SIERRA LEONE TEACHERS UNION**

Madam Chairperson, Members of the NPRC and Secretaries of State, Distinguished Guests, Members of the Diplomatic Corps, Ladies and Gentlemen

I want to make a brief historical profile of the democratisation process in Sierra Leone in the 90s as reference material for the discussion: Elections or No Elections on February 26, 1996.

By 1992 it was clear that democracy was to once more return to this country after about one decade of one party dictatorship. Nothing would have stopped that. Not even the RUF but for the 1992 NPRC military take over.

The NPRC promised and did their best to end the war and bring peace to our beloved country but circumstances beyond their control could not permit them to do so. Wisely enough, in 1995 the NPRC honourably agreed to return democratic rule to Sierra Leone and presented a transition timetable with elections to be held in December 1995.

By August 1995, it was reported that elections could not be held in December 1995 to return Sierra Leone to civilian rule. Hence the Consultative Conference of August 1995 which after heated discussions agreed though with much pain to postpone elections to February 26, 1996.

The shift on the date was conceded due to financial constraints only. Government approved of the decision and endorsed the 26th February, 1996 as the date for the Parliamentary and Presidential elections. Then there was the general feeling of happiness all over the country for the conclusion of such a crucial issue in the history of our nation.

Everybody then worked relentlessly for the exercise to be successful:

- The NPRC approved and contributed much needed funds to the process.

- The international donor community responded favourably and contributed generously to the process. I want to thank them here.

- The Political Parties with much difficulty built a democratic culture of endurance, tolerance and commitment to the process. Even with so many unfavourable rules and guidelines none has been found wanting.

- INEC worked relentlessly though with much constraint and have achieved the set goals and deadlines.

- The teachers sacrificed a lot by even entering into rebel control areas to cover the whole country to register voters. And indeed the numbers realised are a sure sign of the approval of the people.

On January 16, 1996 Brig. General Maada Bio in his takeover message informed the nation that Capt. V.E.M. Strasser has been removed from office because he wanted to frustrate the democratisation process and yet confirmed that the February 26, Elections date will never be changed. What a bold step.

 Up to this moment the Head of State Brig. General Maada Bio and his government have not come out to change February 26, elections date. INEC has got all the necessary funds and logistics to conduct elections on February 26, 1996. The Political Parties have not complained.

Remember, Madam Chairperson, distinguished delegates, the RUF factor is not a new one. It was fully discussed here before the date was accepted. In fact the war situation was worse than it is today. Why this sudden turn around my people to divide this nation? Why now? Can a whole nation stop the march to her destiny just to wait for uncertainty?

Therefore, we the members of the Sierra Leone Teachers Union (SLTU) would like to re-affirm our position of last August to this august gathering, that we solidly support the popular call of the people of Sierra Leone for the conduct of elections on 26th February, 1996. Peace and democracy are inseparable. We support democracy for peace.

We would like to call on the RUF to cease hostilities and extend the cease fire for the holding of elections for a democratic civilian government with whom the RUF has shown much desire to negotiate. With a cease fire, a civilian government, the politics of inclusion can favourably be discussed for a lasting peace in Sierra Leone.

We also believe that Brig. General Maada Bio and the army would still play a major role in the peace process. As the topmost military officer, a peace advocate and the Statesman of this generation, Sierra Leone can achieve peace. We have strong confidence that the army have the military might to protect the people during the elections and would strongly appeal to them for that.

We therefore want to appeal to His Excellency Brig. General Maada Bio to continue to respect the will of the people and give the people their democratic right to elect their government in free and fair elections for once in two decades. We want to have you in our history books as the only gentleman that saved this country from evil destruction. Hence we will recommend to this august body that February 26, be called Election and Maada Bio day.

Finally, Madam Chairperson, I want to warn all evil forces against the people that no manipulation can change a society. Let them learn lessons from people like them in our recent history and not continue to misdirect the affairs of this nation to bring down shamelessly any leadership that emerges. At least let them fail with the Bio regime. We want to be proud of living heroes to be good examples to our young generation, and not exiled leaders and the unholy dead. We know you, we will watch you and we are asking you to change, so that when all of this come to pass we will live as a happy family in our beloved country - Sierra Leone.

DOWN WITH SYCOPHANCY

DOWN WITH TRIBALISM

DOWN WITH NEPOTISM

LONG LIVE SLTU

LONG LIVE SIERRA LEONE

 **STATEMENT BY THE DISPLACED CAMPS (EAST)**

Chairperson of the occasion, H.E. the Chairman of NPRC and Head of State, Members of the Supreme Council of State, Secretaries and Under-Secretaries of State, Diplomats, Paramount Chiefs, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:

On behalf of my displaced camps' population (East), I wish to express my sincere thanks and appreciation to the organisers of this all-important Conference, which accords me the opportunity to let you know the position of my people on the subject "Peace before election or election before Peace", since our meeting sometime in August 1995.

You would agree with me that when we last met, the questions requiring answers, then may not be the same today because of changes in some variables. The prevailing circumstances then, compelled almost every participating delegate to opt for election before peace, without much delay. You would agree with me that - we shared the view then as a nation that there was little or no concrete demonstration of commitment on the part of government to end the war, or bring the much yearned peace closer to us. But now that a leadership has, less than a month old in office, demonstrated such a commitment the questions that now readily come to mind are:

a) If we should hold election now what will be the fate of my people who are behind the rebel lines? Are they condemned because they are behind the rebel lines?

b) Are the rebels themselves not Sierra Leoneans who should take part in the democratisation process, or have we divided the country into two?

c. Instead of "Democracy brings Peace" why not "Peace brings Democracy"?

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, in our search, for answers to the above questions even as displaced members of the society, we have learnt that the least expensive election is that conducted in an atmosphere of peace.

We the displaced in Kenema hoping that you hear us clearly and pay heed to our opinion, notwithstanding our social status, in the communities, but by virtue of our qualification as the hardest hit victims of this war, hereby resolve as follows:

a) That elections be postponed so as to give government ample time to go into dialogue with RUF for the speedy conclusion of the war;

b) Appeal to RUF and Government to respect cease fire while peace initiatives are in the pipeline.

 **STATEMENT BY KAILAHUN DISTRICT**

Your Excellency the Head of State, Mr Chairman INEC, Distinguished Persons, Ladies and Gentlemen. We the people of Kailahun District are particularly gratified to have been invited to join other Sierra Leoneans to revisit Bintumani in order to examine whether, we should have peace before election.

Madam Chairperson, our situation as a district is very peculiar in the on-going election process. Times over we have reminded government and other Agencies to help salvage our district so that we can taste peace in the Kailahun district. Our people are brutally and savagely killed and maimed for no cause of theirs.

In August 1995, we were here and again spelt out our ills and sufferings. We asked INEC that provision be made for government so that we return and resettle ourselves in our villages in peace for election. We have been in perpetual suffering.

Mr Chairperson if we are asked to make any input to this second meeting, we will only refer to the present happenings in the country where for the first time we have heard the RUF make bold peace overtures, coupled with the efforts of the new leadership of the NPRC. We in the Kailahun District now hope that peace is about to prevail and therefore in sight.

Madam Chairperson, ladies and gentlemen even like before, we are resolved for peace before election.

Let our people for once be able to taste peace after five and more years of bitterness and agony.

Long live peace.

Long live Sierra Leone.

Thank you all.

 **STATEMENT BY THE WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS, NORTH**

M We support that peace negotiations and elections must go hand in hand as previously agreed.

M We therefore demand that the elections (an essential and fundamental part of the peace process) go ahead on the 26th February, 1996 as agreed at the National Consultative Conference and approved by the NPRC Government, the Political Parties, Civil Society and the Interim National Electoral Commission.

 **STATEMENT BY THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FARMERS (NAFSL)**

1. We endorse the government of Sierra Leone's continued search for peace.

Farmers welcome peace before 26th February, 1996.

2. Farmers will want the democratisation process to continue as scheduled for 26th February, 1996 in support of His Excellency's promulgation and announcements.

3. Government of Sierra Leone/Military to provide the adequate security required to ensure peaceful electoral process and transition.

 **STATEMENT BY KENEMA DISTRICT**

Madam Chairlady, Chairman of the Interim National Electoral Commission, Chairman and Members of the NPRC Government, Distinguished Observers, Paramount Chiefs, Fellow Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen.

The people of Kenema District are more eager than before for peace and elections as scheduled by INEC.

We believe that peace and elections should go on simultaneously.

As we stressed in our policy statement delivered on the 16th August 1995, we still believe that the elections can and should be held in accordance with the current electoral timetable - 26th February, 1996. We are still convinced that any adjustment of the current electoral timetable that has the effect of postponing the elections will bring more added atrocities to our surviving population in the war zones.

We highly appreciate the efforts the international communities have made so far towards the fulfilment of the mandate, the people of Sierra Leone gave to the Interim National Electoral Commission to hold elections.

We are strongly opposed to any move by any individual or group of people rather than Dr. Jonah and his team, to postpone elections now, as this will encourage more rebel reactions or those pretending as rebels to reduce our population.

We vehemently condemn any diabolical move by selfish individuals to reduce the Head of State to a laughing stock, by reverting his pledge to continue the Democratic process in this our beloved country. We support him for taking that stand. We suggest:

1) that the personnel involved in the current peace move should include delegates from;

a) APPA

b) Two Paramount Chiefs

c) a number of representatives from NGOs and Trade Unions.

Sierra Leone has bled and is still bleeding. It is the task of all Sierra Leoneans to stop this bleeding now, HEAL OUR WOUNDS and EMBRACE ourselves as one family, to make Sierra Leone a better place to live.

Thank you all.

 **STATEMENT BY THE NATIONAL PEOPLE'S PARTY (NPP)**

It is not enough just to say that we want elections. We need a fall back position. It is very obvious and is a fact that Foday Sankoh exists.. He has the capability to strike anywhere, anytime in this country. He has promised that to all of us that he can strike anywhere. Our armed forces have not been able to defend us against Foday Sankoh. So we must think of a fall back position. Is the international community ready to assist us at the dying moment? If they are not, if they cannot assure us of security, then I will not lead my people to the polls on 26 February. We therefore do not support elections if we can not be assured of security.

Thank you.

 **STATEMENT BY THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH**

There seems to be a polarity that characterizes the political face of Sierra Leone. While one view expressed is peace before elections, the other maintains that elections (Presidential and Parliamentary) should go on as scheduled. It is to be borne in mind that peace which is desperately needed in Sierra Leone does not become a reality overnight. Things take time, and peace will take a gradual process if it is to be real and genuine and lasting.

The Roman Catholic Church would like to resound her position vis-a-vis the current political climate in Sierra Leone by re-echoing and substantiating a "message of hope" of the 7th Plenary Regional Assembly of the Catholic Bishops of Anglophone West Africa (AECAWA) in Enugu, Nigeria under the title "Human Rights in a Just and Good Government."

The maintenance, promotion and defence of human rights concern the whole community. Individuals and groups, including the Church, have their role to play. But by far the greatest responsibility rests with government, whose main duty is to maintain public law and order and to guarantee individual rights within the law. Even those and especially they who by force usurp control of government under whatever pretence, and often against the wishes of the people must accept the responsibility for ruling well, which is what they have presumably "volunteered" to do. If they cannot do this, they have no moral right to continue to inflict and impose themselves on the people.

Human rights are both the basis and the result of good government. There can be no good government without respect for human rights and human rights thrive best in the context of a good government.

The **P**ope in his Encyclical "Ecclesia in Africa" - "The Church in Africa" confirms the convictions of the African Bishops when He says, "The greatest challenge for bringing about justice and peace in Africa (and today in Sierra Leone) consists in good administration of public affairs in the two interrelated areas of politics and the economy. Many of the continent's problems are the result of a manner of governing often stained by corruption". (Ecclesia in Africa 110).

The **P**ope further goes on to say, "The foundation of good government must be established on the sound basis of laws which protect the rights and defines the obligation of the citizens (Ecclesia in Africa 112). It is a pity and a shameful embarrassment, that over 30 years of political independence, most of the countries in our sub-region including Sierra Leone are still fumbling around in an apparently aimless search for a way to run our public affairs decently in stability. Thirst for power, pride and greed have made good government impossible in many countries. Our sub-region has now acquired a notoriety for dictatorships and human rights violations.

This is a great cause for concern. The only way out is to move away from the logic of domination to that of service in our concept of public office.

Time was when military governments were hailed and welcomed as corrective regimes. Now, with the benefit of hindsight, it has become quite clear to most people that there is no more valid excuse for Military Rule. The true alternative to bad democratic government is a good Democratic Government, not a Military Dictatorship, However benevolent. Democracy must prevail effective 26th February, 1996.

The Roman Catholic Church maintains and reiterates its policy on the political scene in Sierra Leone given in a five minute policy statement presented at the last Consultative Conference.

 **STATEMENT BY THE ACADEMIC STAFF ASSOCIATION**

Chairperson, All Protocols Observed,

Firstly, we abhor the attacks on the premises of Dr Jonah and Mr Kabba and strongly object to such acts of vandalism. Considering the history of elections in this country, this particular election is a landmark in helping forge brotherliness between political parties (culminating in the setting up of APPA) It has not been marred by any incidence of animosity, violence or carnage during the campaign process. With peaceful citizens not allowed to carry guns let alone have grenade bombs, then, except we are told that rebels are here in Freetown, we need not look far for the perpetrators of such acts. It appears we are revisiting our age old politics of intimidation and this time, my association will not sit idly by to let it happen. Let the voice of the people be heard and heeded to.

Having said that, I want to restate that my membership was divided in August 1995 on the issue of holding an early election at the envisaged date. But notwithstanding, and as a prelude to peace, we summarised then that as warring factions were less likely to see eye to eye at a conference table, we sanctioned the scheduled February 26 date for elections. I am pleased to inform this august body that the membership, through a consensus of over 80%, has not changed that previous stance and they are very much unimpressed by the rigmarole for postponement. Aspects considered while arriving at such conclusions include:

1) that peace is both highly elusive and too ephemeral. Peace, as we know it in pre-rebel years, will never be a culture in Sierra Leone, and with the level of destruction and an uncertain future facing this country, only depraved minds will choose such a mirage of peace before elections.

2) expenditure - who will foot the bill for another election process. Or compensate parties for current expenses?

3) idea of chiefs requesting for postponement does not hold water. Chieftaincy is an institution, inherited not bought, and charged with the responsibilities of directing their subjects. How this institution will emerge in post-war Sierra Leone is a matter of conjecture. However, it appears the evil head of corruption has again resurfaced and men have lost their sense of direction and reasoning. The chiefs, in a meeting here with the NPRC, requested troop withdrawals and their return to the barracks. If they have not reneged on this decision, then what better option will be more forthcoming that holding elections NOW? Besides, these troops will be more accountable to the populace with an elected government.

4) the sincerity of the NPRC as genuinely wanting to handover power is circumspect. After spending millions, if not billions of leones, nearly all of their previous undertakings have suffered from abandonment, setbacks or non-implementation, namely: Constitutional Advisory Committee recommendations, Consultative Conference with Chiefs commitment for a quick end to the Rebel War, Kwame recommendations on the University etc. What guarantee do we have that this is not a ploy to delay the handover process?

Also, the Le60 million refurbishment of State House against the backdrop that we have never had any commitment to feed our starving refugees or pay adequate salaries to workers - is not a John the Baptist paving-the-way style exercise for relinquishment of power.

Finally, I want to end on a warning and advisory note. The country is on the threshold of "a make or break" situation. This government has been told, severely, that the only good thing left for it to do for this nation is to handover power. Why not leave while the going is still good. The writings are on the wall. Don't allow greed to have the better valour over wisdom. Deviation from the wishes of the people could lead to civil disobedience and degenerate into a Uganda type situation under Idi Amin. No one is bigger than the state. Brigadier General Maada Bio either heed his inner sanctum of the nation deciding its fate come February 26 or follow the "bank of desperate men" wanting to derail the process. The choice is purely yours, as everyone does rendez-vous with his destiny.

Thank you all.

 **STATEMENT BY THE SIERRA LEONE UNION ON DISABILITY ISSUES (SLUDI)**

Madam Chairperson, all Protocols Observered,

My organisation, the Sierra Leone Union On Disability Issues (S.L.U.D.I.), recognizes, with much appreciation and great hope and expectations, the fact that the recent overtures made by Mr Foday Sankoh on behalf of the Revolutionary United Front (R.U.F.) are a step in the right direction. However, S.L.U.D.I. is firmly convinced that this by no means constitutes a sufficient guarantee to warrant the postponement of the Presidential and Parliamentary Elections scheduled for 26th of this month - exactly two weeks from today. S.L.U.D.I. holds this view for the following reasons:

1) Even though this is the very first time Mr. Sankoh has talked directly to any Head of State of this country since he (Sankoh) unleashed mayhem on the nation five years ago, it is rather difficult to believe that he is sincere enough, even at this point in time, and ready to put an end to this extremely ugly and unsavoury episode of our history. This is clearly borne out by the fact that he has consistently maintained a very uncompromising stance towards holding peace negotiations.

2) S.L.U.D.I. believes that the peace efforts and the democratization process can run quite concurrently and that they are not mutually exclusive.

3) S.L.U.D.I. further believes that peace may be as elusive to attain as Mr. Sankoh himself has been to contact over the years. As such, the nation may have to wait for decades to achieve peace.

4) The R.U.F. has had enough opportunities to negotiate peace with government over the past couple of years but has, instead, offered only false hope now and again. Besides, apart from the initial declaration that it wanted to oust the A.P.C. Regime which had become very unpopular, the R.U.F. has not, in all the five years of fighting, clearly spelt out why it has continued to waged such an extremely destructive and devastating war on innocent and defenceless people even after the A.P.C. Regime has been ousted. As such, until and unless there are more positive, more substantial and more concrete offers and reasons from the R.U.F., S.L.U.D.I. will continue to maintain the view that the attainment of peace under such circumstances may be like the efforts of a young child who tries to catch the moon in a pool of water.

In view of the foregoing, Madam Chairperson, S.L.U.D.I. is of the opinion that elections should be held as scheduled- i.e., on Monday 26th February, 1996. However, in the event that it become absolutely necessary that the elections should be postponed, S.L.U.D.I. very strongly recommends that the Interim period should not be made to exceed three months from today, and that INEC should be given maximum support to achieve this.

Finally, Madam Chairperson, S.L.U.D.I. wishes to totally condemn and deplore the most dastardly, cowardly and abhorrent assassination attempts on Dr. Jonah and others, and to implore the perpetrators of such heinous acts to desist forthwith, so that this once peaceful and peace loving nation may not be turned into another Somalia, or Bosnia or Afghanistan or Rwanda. Let us all bear in mind the words of our National Pledge and try to live by those words. Let us all remember that when selfish personal ambition supersedes or prevails over national interest, the nation's development, progress and general well-being becomes an enigma (as is now evident here), and the law of the jungle becomes the order of the day. May God or Allah save us from such doom. Thank you.

 **STATEMENT BY THE SIERRA LEONE MEDICAL AND DENTAL ASSOCIATION**

Madam Chairperson, Members of the Diplomatic Corps, INEC Commissioners, Fellow Delegates Ladies & Gentlemen,

The Sierra Leone Medical & Dental Association wishes to thank INEC for inviting us to participate once more in this crucial and important Conference. I am sure this Conference will finally, decide the destiny of all Sierra Leoneans irrespective of our shades of opinion.

We congratulate both the NPRC and RUF for taking bold and courageous steps towards the recent peace moves. The people of this country want peace and NOW, for that matter.

We believe that neither the NPRC nor the RUF can give us that peace without the collective effort of us the electorates.

The Medical & Dental Association believes that peace and elections are not mutually exclusive, rather, the two could be pursued side by side without derailing the on going democratisation process. We firmly believe that Chairman Julius Maada Bio's commitment to this process as announced to the nation in his maiden broadcast as Head of State should be respected and backed with positive action on the part of Government.

Madam Chairperson, the Association believes that if elections are held as scheduled, the new Civilian Government will be in a position to compliment the current peace efforts. We therefore reaffirm our whole hearted commitment and support for elections to be held on the 26th February 1996.

Finally, we are appealing once more to the International Community and the NPRC to make every genuine effort to provide adequate security so that the people of this country will once more, exercise their God-given right to vote for the party of their choice.

 **STATEMENT BY KONO DISTRICT**

Madam Chairperson, Fellow Delegates, Ladies & Gentlemen,

The question of whether the General Elections scheduled to be held on the 26th February, 1996 should be postponed or not, is a thorny issue, which if not properly addressed, is likely to give rise to misgivings, apprehensions and possible chaos and civil strife. The country is at the crossroads, a situation which demands critical and objective examination, sincere and honest judgement and putting the interests of this long-suffering nation above that of individuals or a few persons.

The People of Kono District, after careful consideration of this very important issue, have mandated the District's Delegation to this Conference to make the following observations and submissions:-

1) The decision by an earlier National Consultative Conference held at this same venue in August last year to the effect that General Elections should be held not later than the end of February this year, regardless of the security situation, was consistent with Government's electoral timetable for a return to a democratically elected civilian government.

2) The Revolutionary United Front (RUF) headed by Foday Sankoh was given enough opportunity to participate in the democratisation process to no avail.

3) The insistence of the RUF therefore at this eleventh hour to have peace talks before elections is a calculated attempt to disrupt and unduly delay the democratisation process.

4) Foday Sankoh had in a BBC Programme "Focus on Africa" declared at the inception of his incursion into this country that he was opposed to the OLD APC GOVERNMENT because of its undemocratic practices. This government no longer exists.

5) In another BBC interview Foday Sankoh declared that he was not interested in any elections. Are we therefore not being taken for a ride?

6) The history of conflicts past and present shows that there has never been a success story of a Military Government ending a war. The fact that it has taken us four years to locate Foday Sankoh and talk to him makes us wonder whether our case will be any different.

7) The democratisation process has very strong and compelling international implications which should not be lost sight of. The international community, whose members, either as countries, organisations or individuals, who have been giving us much-needed assistance in this time of need, have also contributed immensely towards the return of this country to a democratically elected civilian government. Were the elections to be postponed in preference to peace talks which are unlikely to bring the war to an end soonest, the international community will certainly review its assistance and support to this country which will have far-reaching repercussions on the country.

8) There is nothing wrong if elections and peace are jointly pursued. Nor will it be wrong for the contemplated peace talks to be conducted by an elected civilian administration. On the contrary, an elected government will be better placed to negotiate with the RUF to end the present conflict.

Madam Chairperson, Fellow Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen, having regard to the above observations, the people of Kono District have mandated its Delegation to submit that elections and peace be pursued simultaneously and that elections be held as scheduled and agreed upon by the National Consultative Conference held in August of last year.

 **STATEMENT BY THE WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS (SOUTH)**

Madam Chairperson, All Protocols Observed,

After much deliberations and critical examinations of all the attendant consequences of a postponement of elections and the seeking of peace as an alternative, we the Women's Organisations of the South sate as follows:

1) We abide by and re-affirm our mandate in the statement made at the August 15 - 17 1995 National Consultative Conference.

2) We support that peace negotiations and elections must go hand in hand as previously agreed.

3) Since we already have a timetable for elections, we therefore demand that the elections (an essential and fundamental part of the peace process) go ahead on 26th February, 1996 as agreed at the National Consultative Conference and approved by the NPRC Government, the political parties, civil society and the Interim National Electoral Commission.

4) We believe that a postponement of the elections will derail the Democratisation process now on course.

5) We also believe that electing a democratic civilian government on 26th February, 1996 is the ultimate way to Unity, Peace, Reconciliation and Stability in Sierra Leone.

6) We therefore call on our Chairman of the National Provisional Ruling Council and our loyal forces to join us in this Democratisation process by providing the necessary security during the period of campaigning and at election so that the elections can be held in a peaceful atmosphere free from fear and intimidation.

6b) But since our armed forces have categorically declared their inability to protect the citizens of Sierra Leone on Election Day, we are calling on the United Nations (International Community) to provide us with a peace keeping force during this time.

7) Finally, we sympathise with Dr Jonah, INEC and Alhaji Tejan Kabba for the attacks made on their premises. We the Women's Organisation of the South condemn this cowardly Act.

May God bless us all.

 **STATEMENT BY THE SIERRA LEONE MOTOR DRIVERS**

 **AND GENERAL WORKERS UNION**

Madam Chairperson,

I have again been mandated by the executive and members of the Sierra Leone Motor Drivers and General Workers Union to give our views on the now much debated issue as to whether the mandate given to INEC to hold Presidential and Parliamentary elections before the end of February 1996 stands.

My Union is of the view that though peace is an essential ingredient for a smooth democratic process, yet we cannot divorce one from another. Peace and elections must go paripassu.

The Sierra Leone Motor Drivers and General Workers Union accordingly endorse once more that the date for Presidential and Parliamentary Elections should be on the 26th February 1996, as formerly scheduled.

May good reasoning prevail.

I thank you all.

 **STATEMENT BY THE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE**

 **INDUSTRY & AGRICULTURE**

Madam Chairperson, Fellow Delegates, Distinguished Ladies & Gentlemen,

The Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture is a representative body of 280 economic and commercial entities of various dimensions. The organisation constitutes the backbone of private sector development in this country. Following consultations on the issue under review, I am mandated to state before this august body that the Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture sees no convincible reason to depart from the earlier agreement so strenuously reached i.e. that the elections be held on the 26th of February 1996.

The Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture thus reaffirms its position that the elections be held on the 26th February 1996 as scheduled.

God bless.

 **STATEMENT BY THE BOMBALI DISTRICT**

My name is Mohamed Mansaray, delegate from Bombali district. I have been mandated to read the following policy statement.

On the historic day of August 15 1995, when I delivered our policy statement, I recall stating among other things that Bombali district categorically and wholeheartedly support elections in the shortest possible time for the following reasons:

1 that the people of Bombali district want to effectively participate in their own governance

2 that they would like to see the heavy burden of politics and state governance taken away from the shoulders of our gallant soldiers so that they can better concentrate their energies and expertise in the art they know best which is state security, and effectively contribute to the ending of this stubborn rebel war.

Today, I find myself here again to say whether we in the Bombali District want peace before elections or elections of February 26, 1996 as scheduled, at the expense of peace. In as much as we want peace always, within ourselves, in our homes, in the street, in our working places and indeed every where for that matter, we cannot trade in elections for peace. We must not forget that the attainment and sustenance of peace is a perpetual process, never ending whilst the process of elections is periodical. Indeed few and far between. It is therefore our conviction that the very elections themselves are part of the peace process. Elections and peace must go side by side.

Thank you.

 **STATEMENT BY THE SIERRA LEONE WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT MOVEMENT**

 **(SILWODMO)**

Madam Chairperson, Delegates & Observers All,

I am Cecilia Agatha Kemah Samuels representing the Sierra Leone Women's Movement (SILWODMO)

The women of my organisation welcome and are grateful for the kind invitation to this reconvened National Consultative Conference.

We the women delegates to the National Consultative Conference reconvened today 12th February 1996, by the Interim National Electoral Commission (INEC) having held consultations and discussions with the Women's Forum reaffirm publicly that we are committed to the holding of free and fair elections throughout Sierra Leone and call on the NPRC Government and INEC to respect the electoral date already published.

We firmly believe that the pursuit of peace is important, but we openly state that elections and peace go hand in hand.

I stand here and mandated by the women to pledge our support for elections on the 26th of February 1996 as was agreed by all present in the last Consultative Conference last August 1995.

In closing we the women call upon Government to ensure that our effort is not wasted by ensuring we have a free and fair elections on the 26th February 1996 and a smooth handover to the elected Democratic Government.

I thank you very much and may God bless us all.

 **STATEMENT BY THE DEMOCRATIC CENTRE PARTY (DCP)**

Madam Chairperson, all Protocols Observed,

Let us pose the question: if elections were not held on 26 February 1996, what will be some of the implications for our society? In the first place, we already have an overburdened, fatigued, donor community at our hands. We have our displaced brothers and sisters in camps. They watch to find out whether we can live up to our commitment - that resolve that we took here on August 17, 1995.

The posters and 'T' shirts that we have all seen in this hall today, the sample ballot papers, all cost money. Do you have time and money to reproduce these materials? There is a mounting sense of insecurity in our country, and no one now feels secured, whether you are rich or not. There are actually no convincing reasons, technical or otherwise to prevent the elections from being conducted on 26 February. The DCP, headed by Mr Abu Aiah Koroma from Kono affected by war, the Assistant Dr Augustine K Stevens from Bonthe and Moyamba affected by the war say the elections must go on as scheduled.

 **STATEMENT BY THE NATIONAL UNITY PARTY (NUP)**

That the National Unity Party (NUP) affirms its commitment to the on-going Democratic Process with particular reference to February 26, 1996 as the date agreed upon for both the Presidential and Parliamentary Elections as proposed by the National Consultative Conference in August of 1995 and sanctioned by the Proclamation contained in Public Notice No. 2 of 1996, entitled "The Presidential and Parliamentary Elections (Appointment of Election Day) Proclamation 1996".

  **STATEMENT BY THE DISPLACED CAMPS IN THE WESTERN AREA**

Madam Chairperson, Chairman INEC, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We the displaced in camps in the Western area have a very simple message on the issue of peace before election.

We say we are miserable and our sufferings are multiplying daily. We are now beggars in the streets of Freetown, like our brothers and sisters elsewhere.

We run from place to place in search of food as a daily activity.

Madam Chairlady, we don't like that. Our living conditions are deplorable. We have lost our loved ones, properties and so on, all as the result of the rebel war which we know nothing about.

In the last one month or so we hear that government is desperately trying to broker peace with the RUF. Madam Chairlady, we, who come from numerous places in the provinces are also affected.. We have followed closely what is happening between the government and the RUF, we have hopes that it will not be long for peace to return.

On that background, ladies and gentlemen, we have resolved that we give peace a chance. There is no politicking that can take us back home in the absence of peace. Only peace can let us go back to our villages and take decisions on the kind of leadership we desire. Today we are only manipulated by politicians for few leones. We want our homes to be freed so that we can return and resettle. That can only happen in the time of peace. We can hold elections anytime and can vote any time once there is peace.

We have therefore resolved that we want peace before election.

Long live peace!

Long live Sierra Leone!!

 **STATEMENT BY THE WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS (EAST)**

We the Women of the Kenema District, eager for peace at this point in time, but at the same time confident that peace and the democratisation process (Multiparty Elections) must go together have resolved that:

a) Elections be conducted as per schedule since we have a set timetable for it, i.e. 26th February, 1996;

b) We do not at all subscribe to the postponement of elections as it will embarrass us and annoy the outside world who have spent too much resources on the on going democratisation process.

c) We are opposed to the least delay in the Democratisation process since it will mean keeping the military junta over us indefinitely, thus straining our relationship with the outside world.

d) We are anxious to be ruled by a constitutional Government to enhance our credibility.

e) We are surprised at the Chairman of the N.P.R.C. Maada Bio for bringing us here today to talk again about timetable for elections when it had already being set and he too told this nation that he over threw Strasser because he wanted to manipulate the timetable. That postponement to whatever date be discarded forthwith as coming back on the Chairman's words will make us look at him with contempt and disgust.

f) The Chairman, who now says he has the opportunity of talking to Foday Sankoh should tell him we have gone too far with the process and so cannot afford to postpone it.

  **STATEMENT BY THE SIERRA LEONE BAR ASSOCIATION**

1) The Bar Association is of the view that Peace is a priority for Sierra Leone as any prolongation of the rebel war, after the RUF's cease fire can mean only further loss of life and more injuries to Sierra Leoneans, civilians and military alike.

2) The Bar Association's idea of peace is a peace that is sustainable, and conducive to the rehabilitation and reconstruction of this country, the resettlement of refugees and displaced persons and the return by the citizens of Sierra Leone to the ordinary pursuits of their lives before the rebel war.

3) That the best guarantee of a sustainable peace is a genuine dialogue between the RUF and a freely elected Government of the country, which has the mandate of as broad a spectrum of the peoples of Sierra Leone as possible to negotiate an end to the war.

4) That a Government chosen in elections that are as free and fair as our present circumstances permit is the most appropriate and legitimate instrument for discussing and guaranteeing the implementation of the agreed peace terms.

5) That a material deferment of the present elections date would entail the following:-

a) lack of donor funds for elections to be held on any date other than 26th February 1996.

b) Undesirable prolongation of NPRC rule or the rule of the NPRC AND THE RUF combined for some transitional period.

c) Continued total economic stagnation of Sierra Leone.

d) Withdrawal of vital aid funds from the International Community all of whom have sent the clearest signal that elections must go on in February 1996.

e) Nullifying the express wishes of the people of Sierra Leone to have an elective Government in February 1996.

f) Greater misery and continued starvation for our displaced and refugees as a result of the foregoing.

The SLBA therefore declares its support for adhering to the proposed elections date, that is, 26th February, 1996 without prejudice to peace talks being initiated and continuing concurrently with the elections.

 **STATEMENT BY THE NATIONAL ALLIANCE DEMOCRATIC PARTY (NADP)**

In my capacity as Chairman and Presidential Candidate of the National Alliance Democratic Party, NADP, I wish to state here that in the name of God, the position of National Alliance Democratic Party NADP is clear: we want elections on February 26, 1996, while the peace process continues.

I wish to take this moment, Madam Chairperson, to call on all our people including our honourable men and women to develop the vision to listen to the voice of the majority of the people in our country, because the voice of the people is the voice of God. And where there is no vision, the people perish.

Long live Democracy, Long live our commitment to peace and Long live the people of Sierra Leone.

 **STATEMENT BY KAMBIA DISTRICT**

Madam Chairperson, Distinguished Delegates and Observers, Ladies and Gentlemen, the Kambia District delegation once again brings you warm and fraternal greetings from our people.

Madam Chairperson, the people of Kambia District have requested me to reaffirm their strong desire for Sierra Leone to be governed by a democratically elected civilian government. It is in view of that strong desire that they were extremely happy when, soon after the recent change in its leadership, the new NPRC, promptly removed all the remaining legal obstacles to our proposed elections and pronounced February 26, 1996 as the date for Presidential and Parliamentary elections thereby demonstrating the kind of statesmanship which is rare in the politics of Africa and which qualifies the members of the new NPRC for a special place of honour in our history.

The fair leader that he is, the people of Kambia District fully appreciate the felt need by our Head of State to once and for all clear the air concerning the appropriateness of that date.

In that regard, considering the open-ended nature of peace negotiations in terms of time frame, considering the possible negative implications which a postponement of the elections might have for Sierra Leone in terms of economic and humanitarian assistance and finally, considering the deep yearning of our people to be governed by a government which is chosen by the people themselves, the people of Kambia District have requested me to state that they whole-heartedly support the holding of elections on the date which has already been gazetted by the new NPRC leadership itself; that is to say, on the 26th February, 1996.

Madam Chairperson, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, let me hasten to state that our support for this date is certainly without prejudice to the on-going peace initiatives by both sides since we strongly believe that peace and the democratisation process can indeed be pursued simultaneously.

Long Live Sierra Leone.!

May we always put her interest before all else.

I thank you.

  **STATEMENT BY THE SIERRA LEONE PEOPLE'S PARTY (SLPP)**

Madam Chairperson,

The SLPP has not changed its position on the question of the date for the forthcoming elections. We stand by the 26th of February, 1996.

Our reaction to the various positions that have been taken on the question of peace or elections is that the SLPP wants peace now for Sierra Leone. We however believe that peace and elections are complimentary to each other. They could go on simultaneously.

The NPRC upon taking control of this country assigned the highest priority to peace. In four years their efforts have resulted in several catastrophes among which are that the war which was at the time of the NPRC seizing power was only confined to the Kailahun district, is now at our doorstep even in Juba Hill.

The RUF from the very beginning stated consistently that they were not prepared to negotiate peace with the NPRC because they regard the NPRC as a rebel as well as an illegitimate organisation. This position was repeated last December. Why the sudden change?

The recent TV and Radio programme on the peace efforts of the NPRC is difficult to characterize. If it was intended as entertainment, some of us did not find it funny enough to be amusing; others found it to be insulting to the intelligence of the average Sierra Leonean. Incidentally, Madam Chairperson, in the African diplomatic practice, African Heads of State refer to each other as Brothers. Can we assume from the reference to Foday Sankoh as our Head of State's brother as an indication that the NPRC has apportioned Sierra Leone into two states and recognised Foday Sankoh as Head of State for the new "Sankoh Land"?

Madam Chairpeson, I should like to use this opportunity to sympathize with Dr. Jonah for the sinister plot which was put into execution at his residence, mine and the INEC building. What the perpetrators did not take into account in their plan was the strength of our resolve for the total liberation of our country from those who wish to destroy it. I am and I believe we all are prepared to die in the pursuance of this noble objective.

This is more so when one considers the fact that since the average life expectancy in Sierra Leone is 41 years and since many of us here are above that age we are living on borrowed time and also concerned that when we pass away the memories we leave behind should be that we did all we could to make our country a better place to live in and so help

us God. We cannot be intimidated. We are sworn not to compromise on any issue involving the best interest of our country. In the present context the best interest of our country will be served by holding an election on the 26th of February 1996.

Finally, the dialogue between Foday Sankoh and the authorities in Freetown has highlighted a new propaganda that the politicians are destroying this country. What has not been defined however, is who a politician is. According to the Webster New International Dictionary, a politician is one actively engaged in conducting the business of a government. Clearly those NPRC members who have been discussing peace and other political matters, including conducting the affairs of state in Sierra Leone will come within this definition.

I thank you for your attention.

  **STATEMENT BY THE FEDERATION**

 **OF MUSLIM WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION (FOMWASAL)**

In the Name of Allah Most Gracious Most Merciful.

I am Joan Miniratu Konneh talking together with my colleague delegate Mrs Fatmata Kanu on behalf of members of FOMWASAL.

Having held consultative meetings with our women compatriots in the Network of Women's NGO's/Groups, we have come out with the following:

1. We believe that elections are an essential and fundamental part of the peace process and obviously a sure way to democracy and peace, because it involves the majority of people.

2. That elections and the peace negotiations must go hand in gloves, if the two negotiating parties actually mean peace.

3. Postponed elections may never come again. Liberia's quest for "peace before elections", has ended up in total unrest instead of peace.

4. We, (I mean all Sierra Leoneans) are now in a total dilemma caught between the RUF and the NPRC. What can we or any body in our position do? But to stay where we are and either get destroyed by the devil or be swallowed by the deep sea.

5. Ladies and gentlemen, we are not a political organisation. We are fighting for the survival of democracy and therefore still hold the view that elections must take place on 26th February 1996; and that we allow no one to force his will on us.

 **STATEMENT BY THE UNITED NATIONAL PEOPLE'S PARTY (UNPP)**

1. PREAMBLE:

(All Protocols Observed). The United National People's Party (UNPP) recalls that, the original Conference, popularly referred to as "The Bintumani Conference", was convened at this same venue from August 15 - 17, last year. The outcome of that historic gathering of momentous national and international significance, of course, was an OVERWHELMING MANDATE by the people of Sierra Leone, of all shades of opinion, given to the Interim National Electoral Commission (INEC), to conduct the country's next Presidential and Parliamentary Elections on February 26, 1996, on the basis of the Agenda advanced by INEC and endorsed by the then NPRC Government.

The UNPP wishes to take the opportunity, at this stage, to express its sincere and deep appreciation to CHAIRMAN DR. JAMES JONAH AND HIS ENTIRE INEC TEAM, for the patriotic, courageous, sustained and unswerving efforts and stance taken to carry out that mandate, in both letter and spirit, despite the tremendous obstacles known to have been placed in their way, to frustrate such efforts. We of the UNPP should also applaud the initiative and moves made by the new Head of State and Chairman of the Restructured National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) in the recent swift peace overtures to the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), which took him to some states in the West African Sub-Region, as well as his repeated assurances not to interfere with the February 26 electoral schedule, except otherwise expressly and democratically directed by the people of Sierra Leone. The UNPP is further encouraged by and grateful for the intense and sustained interest and positive moves by selfless and patriotic elements in both military and civil sectors of this society, to demonstrate their total and unadulterated commitment to the forces of reason and true democracy.

The circumstances of the re-convening of this conference to review the August 1995 mandate, in the considered view of the UNPP, afford the people of Sierra Leone a unique and glorious opportunity to demonstrate their political maturity, re-assert their national integrity, and reassure the international community of the country's unswerving and unmanipulative adherence to the principles and practice of true and healthy democracy.

2. THE UNPP POLICY POSITION ON THE ON-GOING "PEACE BEFORE

ELECTIONS" NATIONAL DEBATE

The essential question before this gathering today is, whether the February 26 elections should be deferred or not.

The position of the UNPP, to begin with, is that at every opportunity to do so, the leaders of the Party have publicly declared that they give very high priority to the achievement of lasting peace. Several months before the NPRC ban on political activity was lifted, many of the Party Leaders were active in peace organisations in this country and abroad. Possible ways were explored to bring to an end a meaningless war that has cost our country the death of thousands of innocent men, women and children, many billion leones worth of looted homes and property, and several hundred thousands of displaced citizens.

In the UNPP, we are convinced, that sustainable improvement in the lives of all Sierra Leoneans cannot be achieved without an end to the rebel war. This war has involved practices of violence never before seen in our country, such as maiming and amputation of limbs, and beheading of victims, which have brought disgrace to our country and have demonstrated the savagery of the perpetrators hitherto covered under a thin veneer of decency and civilisation. The UNPP is therefore prepared to join forces with any individual or group to end this senseless fighting.

In the UNPP, we are also convinced, that the pursuit of peace cannot at this stage be separated from the electoral process of choosing a democratically elected parliament and president on February 26. We believe that it is not a question of either peace or elections. We also believe that not only that each should complement the other, but also that a democratically elected government has overwhelmingly better chances of securing peace, than the present military regime. We believe that elections as scheduled and peace negotiations must proceed simultaneously. The UNPP is convinced, that our country cannot afford the economic and other consequences of postponing or cancelling the elections scheduled for February 26, 1996. To do so would be to break faith with our friends in the international community who have generously contributed, at our request, to the electoral process. They have helped us because of the repeated assurances given by the Chairman of the NPRC and his predecessor to a long list of individuals and political leaders of their commitment to the previously agreed schedule for process of democratisation.

The position of the UNPP therefore is that the elections should proceed as scheduled. We should not expose to ridicule the personal credibility of our Head of State and that of our political leaders who have sought support for the electoral process from sources at home and abroad. Our country cannot afford the disastrous consequences that will follow if we lose our credibility as a nation.

We therefore believe that not only by pressing forward with all possible ways of ending the conflict but also by conducting elections as scheduled on 26th, February will the people of Sierra Leone and or friends in the international community feel that we are serious about our concern to end military rule, restore democracy in our country, and achieve durable peace.

In our opinion, there has been no material change in the political situation in the country that would justify arresting the progress of the democratisation process in this its final stage.

We therefore remain unequivocally and unreservedly committed to the consensus reached by the Conference of August 15 - 17. We urge other delegates to join us in voting YES to the ELECTIONS on FEBRUARY 26.

 **STATEMENT BY THE SIERRA LEONE ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS (SLAJ)**

Madam Chairperson, Delegates and Observers,

At an emergency general meeting held on Saturday 10th February, the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists unanimously agreed to re-affirm its original position i.e. that elections be held in the shortest possible time February 26 1996, and that the process of peace negotiations be pursued simultaneously.

As put forward in our earlier position paper we view the question of Peace or Elections as a False dichotomy. We believe both can and must be achieved.

Our Association also denounces in the strongest terms, the attacks on INEC offices and residence of Dr James Jonah and Mr Tejan Kabba of SLPP.

We call for NPRC to apprehend and punish those responsible. You cannot impose the will of a minority upon a conscious majority by guns, bombs and grenades. This is the lesson 29 years of history has taught us. We hope all Sierra Leoneans realise this now. Those who do realise this must organise to defend and expend their democratic rights - especially their right to vote on 26th February 1996 against the coalition of evil and anti-democratic forces we now begin to see emerging.

If we accept in principle the right of any armed fraction to determine if we vote, when we vote and who we vote for - we are lost. The will of the people is supreme. They will decide. FORWARD TO DEMOCRACY.

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 **STATEMENT BY KOINADUGU DISTRICT**

Madam Chairperson, Fellow Delegates, Observers, Ladies and Gentlemen, I send you fraternal greetings from the people of Koinadugu District. Strictly following recent development in the five year country wide conflict which now give us the hope that the destruction of lives and property is likely to end, I have been mandated by the entire people of Koinadugu District to express to you our preference for immediate and lasting peace before the elections. Amongst the numerous reasons taken into consideration before reaching this decision are:

a) The recent dialogue between the NPRC Government and the RUF leadership which has been elusive since the beginning of the war some five years ago. Colleague delegates will agree with me that this dialogue has paved the way for a possible lasting peace in the country.

b) Postponement of the elections and the eventual ushering in of lasting peace will be the surest way of conducting any free and fair elections in the country which all of us gathered here and those outside this conference hall are yearning for.

c) The war has uprooted people from their cherished environments, and only peace can induce the affected people to go back to those environment.

Finally, and in view of the above, Madam Chairlady, I wish to repeat the wishes of the entire populace of Koinadugu District that each and every Sierra Leonean should endeavour to seize this golden opportunity of promoting peace first before any elections.

I thank you.

  **STATEMENT BY THE TEACHERS' COLLEGES SENIOR STAFF ASSOCIATION**

**INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The Teachers' Colleges Senior Staff Association (T.C.S.S.A.) is non-partisan, non-political and non-sectarian association which aspires towards the promotion of education and enhancement of better conditions of service for its membership in all the six (6) Teacher Training Colleges in Sierra Leone.

**POLICY STATEMENT ON THE CURRENT NATIONAL ISSUE - ELECTION**

**BEFORE PEACE IN SIERRA LEONE OR VICE VERSA**

1. That the T.C.S.S.A. still maintains its views on the current national electoral processes as stated in its policy statement delivered at the last National Consultative Conference held in August, 1995 at the Bintumani Conference Centre:

"Not withstanding the present problems faced by the country, we believe that the electoral processes should be carried on in order to install a democratic government.

We are convinced, based on the (Liberian and Somalian) examples that only a properly constituted civilian government can disarm or enter into any meaningful dialogue with a rebel force in the quest for peace".

2. On the current issue of "Election before peace in Sierra Leone or vice versa", the T.C.S.S.A. having studied the situation would like to maintain its stance on the mandate given to the Interim National Electoral Commission in August, 1995 to install a constitutional democratic government by February, 1996.

The following points may serve as justification for the above stance:

1. While there is a definite time frame, and adequate preparations for general and presidential elections, that for peace is indefinite and the preparations uncertain.

2. The International Communities have invested substantial resources into the on-going electoral processes which if delayed or abandoned could cause mistrust and derailment in further investment. Considering that Sierra Leone may currently be relying on huge international support due to the economic paralysis created by the on-going rebel war, she must strive to maintain a cordial and trustworthy relationship with the international community in the above respect.

3. If the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) at one point in time requested a dialogue for peace only with a legally instituted government and such processes are now on course, there is no need to reverse them.

To conclude, the membership of Teachers' Colleges Senior Staff Association request for ELECTIONS BEFORE PEACE! on the 26th February, 1996 and the continuation of the peace process thereafter. However, to give peace a chance members are of the opinion that peace can only come before elections if the elections will not be unduly prolonged. We therefore feel that a time frame be given for the conclusion of the peace talks and a firm date be now fixed for the elections irrespective of the result of the negotiation.

 **STATEMENT BY THE SIERRA LEONE ASSOCIATION**

 **FOR NON GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS (SLANGO)**

Madam Chairperson, Fellow Delegates, Observers, Ladies & Gentlemen,

Let me start by thanking you for inviting SLANGO to reconvened National Consultative Conference. Right from this point, let me state here that the position I am going to read to you reflects the fresh mandate I received from the SLANGO membership at a meeting held on Friday 9th February, 1996 at the YWCA New Hall. On receipt of the invitation to participate in this meeting, we called for a meeting to discuss our position with reference to the election time table, which is the key agenda item here.

Madam Chairperson, ladies and gentlemen, the process adopted at our meeting was very participatory in which representatives of NGOs were asked to discuss the issue very critically in order to arrive at our stand in this all important matter. What I am going to give you therefore is a summary of the major highlights of our discussion and the recommendation made.

To start with, we recognise the effort of the reformed NPRC in the democratisation process, especially in the change of leadership to allow for the democratic process to continue. Chairman Bio's maiden speech in which he confirmed the government's commitment to the electoral process and time table was very welcome and assuring. We also commend Chairman Bio's recent peace moves which took him to countries in the region which can play a positive role in the peace process, and his trips up-country to meet the people and call on the RUF to cooperate in the peace process.

As NGOs, Madam Chairperson, we have suffered too much out of the on-going war situation. Many of our members have closed down in Sierra Leone. Our projects, programmes and their beneficiaries have perished up-country and our space for operations continues to narrow down almost by the day. The war has resulted in a complex set of emergencies in which the NGOs have a big role to play but which they find increasingly difficult to play. In our strong desire to work with the people, some of our members have lost staff, vehicles, and other properties up-country. What all of this means Madam Chairperson, is that we now want an atmosphere and an environment that will allow us to operate. While we recognise that the peace effort started almost soon after the war commenced in 1991, and continues on to the point of appointing a special UN envoy here and even beyond all that, we strongly feel there is much to be done. In this strong feeling, however, we believe that peace is not something we can put a date on. Peace as we see it, is a process and so we can't put a time to it, since it is not an event.

We do not believe that it is possible to state with any amount of accuracy that peace will be achieved in one, two, three of even six months. If we could be that accurate, we would not have spent over four years on this war. In the discussion Madam Chairperson, bear in mind that I've said so far, we asked ourselves - what is peace before elections? The question sounds simple but we could not answer it because it tends to divorce elections from peace. To us, the two need not be strange bed fellows, because we believe they compliment each other. Elections are not against peace but in fact, they are an instrument of peace, which is an everlasting process. Accordingly, Madam Chairperson, we in SLANGO recommend that elections be seen as a means for facilitating the peace process, i.e. as a step to peace. Since a date has been fixed for the elections we recommend that, that date be respected and elections go on as scheduled. Let us elect a new government with a mandate to continue negotiating the peace process.

While we want the elections, we call on all concerned to make them as peaceful as possible. We encourage the international community to send their observers. We call on the government to do all in their power to ensure security. We call on the RUF to please give the democratisation process a chance, for if they truly believe in peace for Sierra Leone, we believe this is a major step towards it.

Madam Chairperson a lot of funds have already been spent on the electoral process by our government, the international community, and political parties. Let us justify such expenditure by doing what the funds have been spent for - i.e. elections on the scheduled February 26th date. Failing to do so, Madam Chairperson, we as a nation will be taking a very big risk, and as NGOs, we do not want to take such a risk since we will be at the centre of whatever calamity befalls the nation. May God save us all, and thank you very much.

 **STATEMENT BY THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC ALLIANCE (NDA)**

Madam Chairperson, all protocols observed,

Brevity is the soul of wit. I stand by my party's declaration in August last year that we respect 26 February for the democratic elections.

Thank you very much

 **STATEMENT BY PORT LOKO DISTRICT**

Madam Chairprson, as usual I bring you all fraternal greetings from Port Loko. Today marks yet another day at Bintumani in an attempt to unsettle an already overwhelmingly settled mandate given to INEC to proceed with elections on the 26th February, 1996.

Madam Chairperson, we consider this conference a high algebra for this nation to consider to clarify; as to its motive if any, or any subtle disguises.

We in Port Loko categorically declared in the last conference for the elections to proceed in accordance with the consensus of the spirit of Bintumani i.e. on the 26th February, 1996. We stand by this tenaciously and unshakably.

Member Delegates, this is pre-eminently the time to speak the truth, frankly and boldly. We have no reasons or need to shrink from honestly facing conditions in our country today. It is a notorious view lacking novelty, that revolutions generally conduce to much subsequent misery. Let us all therefore in the circumstances endeavour to subordinate personal desires to the will of the majority.

Any departure from the former Bintumani Spirit would expose this nation to ridicule and scorn in the face of the international world who are watching us in our pursuit of the 26th February elections.

We, in Port Loko District unwaveringly stand by the last Bintumani accord and pray that elections be held on the 26th February 1996, so that our gallant officers and brothers who are apparently over stretched with arduous tasks may concentrate more professionally in the extermination of the rebels.

We honestly and sincerely believe that elections cannot be a stumbling block to peace talks; they can go on side by side more effectively by a democratic government.

I wish to thank the convenors of this conference and I hope we do not come often.

 **STATEMENT BY SIERRA LEONE EX-SERVICEMEN'S ASSOCIATION**

Madam Chairperson, Fellow Delegates, all Other Protocols Observed,

The decision we take at this reconvened Consultative Conference today must be in the best interest of and to the absolute advantage of mother Sierra Leone as a whole. We should put aside all prejudices and consider the sufferings of our fellow Sierra Leonean refugees in the neighbouring sister states. We should also sympathise with the plight of our thousands of internally displaced people whose sufferings have been unremitting over the past four to five years, majority of whom live in deplorable displaced camps and languish behind rebel lines either in captivity or in the wilderness.

I should suggest at this stage that the political parties and the NPRC go back to the drawing board and bring out a suitable formula directed at ending this rebel conflict. Only those of us who have lost mothers, children and entire possessions in this war, know the rigours of rebel war. Most of us have lost all that we have worked for in the last 40-50 years. Let the safety and well being of those people come first over and above politics. Let God Allah help this nation and direct each and everyone of us present here today to arrive at a decision which would be in the primary and secondary interest of this country.

Let me plead with all the political leaders to do all that lies within their possible power to prevail upon our brother Foday Sankoh to lay down arms and talk peace.

The Sierra Leone Ex-servicemen's Association has not shifted from its position at the last Conference in August and in the best interest of this nation we sincerely place a very heavy premium and advocate for peace before election.

I thank you.

 **STATEMENT BY TONKOLILI DISTRICT**

Madam Chairperson,

Thank you for the good work that you did during the last Consultative Conference and we are very happy to risk our lives to attend this Conference.

Madam Chairperson our District is unique in the politics of this nation. We have suffered a lot of atrocities during the past regime as well as during the rebel war. We are looking up to unity to prevail in Sierra Leone as a United Front.

Therefore on account of the recent development, we are appealing to all political parties, the N.P.R.C. government, the people of Sierra Leone to pursue a lasting and durable solution in this country.

The people of Tonkolili District are standing firmly behind the electoral process for this country.

Therefore resolve:-

1) That negotiations should be pursued that will bring peace into this country.

2) That the elections be carried out as mandated by Conference, that Parliamentary and Presidential elections be conducted on the 26th February, 1996.

3) That the political parities and friendly countries be informed fully by the Government in the Negotiation process.

4) And that sincerity, honesty and commitment must be hall mark both the N.P.R.C. and the RUF.

 **STATEMENT BY THE NATIONAL REPUBLICAN PARTY (NRP)**

Madam Chairperson, all Protocols Observed

1. That the National Republican Party (NRP) affirms its commitment to the on-going Democratic process with particular reference to February 26, 1996 as the date agreed upon for both the Presidential and Parliamentary elections as proposed by the Consultative Conference in August of 1995 and sanctioned by the Proclamation contained in Public Notice No. 2 of 1996 entitled "The Presidential and Parliamentary Elections (Appointment of Election Day) Proclamation 1996". We must not allow RUF to dictate the sovereignty of Sierra Leone.

2. Thanks and our greatest appreciation to the Government of the United Kingdom, United States and the European Community for their great assistance to the on-going Democratic process.

3. God bless our Head of State. May the National Republican Party ever be worthy of God, worthy of the people of Sierra Leone, and an honour to this our country Amen.

 **STATEMENT BY THE PARAMOUNT CHIEFS (EAST)**

Madam Chairperson, all Protocols Observed,

Madam, I think when you talk about democracy in this country, people that are really democratically elected are the Paramount Chiefs. Because when you talk about simple majority - you have simple majority, but we talk about 55%. My stance here is this, we feel we are representing our people covering the entire region. According to the statement uttered here by my people, I think I have to go hand in hand with them, that elections should go as scheduled.

 **STATEMENT BY THE MAKENI TOWN COUNCIL**

Madam Chairperson, Observers, all other Protocols Observed

Resolutions of Makeni Town Council on the National Consultative Conference on the Electoral Process at Bintumani Conference Centre, Freetown, 12th February, 1996.

Thank you Madam Chairlady. It is a great pleasure to represent the provincial headquarter town of the Northern Province - Makeni. The war is very close to our township of Makeni. We have seen the sufferings of the poor people of this country. We have seen the terrible destruction of this war and we are not happy about the total security of our country and our people.

Therefore, we are asking all our people to support this country and save it from total destruction. Therefore, we hereby resolve:-

1. That the 28th of February 1996 is an important date that we must pray for in the history of this country;

2. That we must postpone the elections until May of this year to give the RUF and the NPRC a chance to end this terrible war through the negotiating table;

3. That elections must be conducted within three months to give every Sierra Leonean the right to choose his/her representatives in governing them;

4. That there should be a cease fire by both the RUF and the government troops; and

5. That government must be very honest and sincere in dealing with the entire people of Sierra Leone.

Thank you.

 **STATEMENT BY THE WESTERN AREA RURAL COUNCILS**

My name is N.R. Gabbidon, representing the Rural District Western Area. So much has been said that if I attempt to say anything in detail it only means repeating what people have said. But the people of the Rural District Western Area agree to reaffirm their stand which they took in August 1995, namely, that election must go on as already scheduled for the 26th February, 1996.

Thank you.

 **STATEMENT BY PARAMOUNT CHIEFS NORTHERN PROVINCE**

We, the undersigned Paramount Chiefs representing all sub-chiefs, chiefdom councillors, tribal headmen and people of the Northern Province of the Republic of Sierra Leone, having closely followed and observed the most recent political events and developments in our country, and conscious of the indispensable need for peace, and peaceful co-existence in our country;

Realising the devastating effect of the ongoing rebel war on the people of the country leading to loss of life and property;

Cognisance of the effect that peace is not only paramount, but also a pre-requisite to the political, social and economic development of any country;

Conscious of the fact that a large number of our Sierra Leonean compatriots are presently living in refugee and displaced camps in and out of Sierra Leone with no possibility of returning home to exercise their civic rights and obligations by taking part in the democratisation process;

Desirous to ensure that a lasting peace and tranquillity is restored in Sierra Leone through genuine democratic election, hereby unanimously resolve as follows:

1) That government makes every possible effort to end the rebel war and restore peace in Sierra Leone before the presidential and general elections are held, and that government vigorously pursue the policy of lasting peace in Sierra Leone.

2) That all political parties and their leaders be fully involved in the search for peace in Sierra Leone to pave the way for a speedy return to a genuine democratic civilian rule in Sierra Leone and we resolve whole heartedly to congratulate and uphold the courageous and justified decision of government in all matters pertaining to the peace process.

3) We call on Corporal Foday Sankoh's RUF and government forces to lay down arms and come to the negotiating table in the interest of peace in our country.

4) That government consider the repatriation and resettlement of all refugees and displaced Sierra Leoneans to their respective home after peace has been restored, so as to enable them to rebuild their lives and to take part in democratic elections.

5) We call on the international community not to regard our resolutions as a way of derailing the democratisation process but as a means of achieving lasting peace in our Country, as a prelude to a genuine democratic system of government.

6) That government makes all possible effort to ensure that the majority of the people of Sierra Leone are given equal opportunity to take part in a free and fair election without hinderance of any kind.

7) That we the Paramount Chiefs of the Northern Province will not be prepared to go to the polls until peace is restored in all corners of Sierra Leone.

8) That we the Paramount Chiefs assembled at this Conference held from the 7th to the 9th February, 1996 hereby unanimously adopt and approve the above resolutions, and in consequence subscribe our signatures/thumb print hereto.

 **STATEMENT BY THE KENEMA TOWN COUNCIL**

This Conference is reconvened to discuss and take a decision on whether it wishes to change the decision of the first Conference with regards the holding of elections on the 26th February, 1996. We hold that the elections should be held as agreed for the following reasons:-

INEC has successfully conducted the registration of voters even during the rebel hostilities. The population is now concentrated in the main towns thereby making it easier and more economic to conduct elections. Captain Strasser was booted out of office by Brigadier Bio because Strasser was going off course and Brigadier Bio stuck to his guns by reiterating that his government intended to return this country to civilian rule as agreed by this Conference last year. In Kenema, about a week ago, Chairman Bio said that they were tired of the war and wanted to abide by the Bintumani timetable except the people decided otherwise. The political machinery has been set in motion and is advancing at full blast.

The "PEACE BEFORE ELECTION" slogan means different things to different people e.g.

1. cessation of the rebel war before we can hold elections.

 2. As discerned from the speech presented on behalf of the Paramount Chiefs of the Eastern Province during the Chairman's visit to Kenema, it means cessation of the rebel war, rehabilitation of the war affected areas before thinking of elections - what a long process.

3. One irate illiterate man in Kenema understood it to mean to urinate before elections because according to him they were told to say "we want peace before election" as if they were suffering from urinary retention. He continued, What is all the fuss about; peace before elections; we can produce any millions of drums of it that they require before elections." Please excuse the language because he was asked to piss off before he suffered from an incurable incontinence.

Where is this peace that has eluded us for the past five years? The answer is that it is in the hands of the rebel factions. If they want to give it to us tomorrow they can. We therefore don't need a marathon dialogue that is punctuated by kangaroo adjournments. The search for peace should be pursued expeditiously but not at the expense of the democratic process. We believe in the simple equation that PEACE = ELECTION AND ELECTION = PEACE". Peace and election are not only synonymous but are inextricably intertwined at this stage of our political evolution. The peace process can best be pursued by a civilian government since civilians have not been in combat with the RUF or any other rebel faction.

We deprecate the active involvement of our traditional rulers in politics. The institution of chieftaincy is so sacred and respectable that for them to rush into the political arena is a dangerous precedent because politics is no respecter of persons. They were traditionally the proverbial mother of twins who just lay flat on her back to breast-feed her twin babies equitably. But now we see them articulating uncomfortably in the political arena with a voice that is at variance with that of their people. This I submit is a recipe for conflict and disaster and should be nipped in the bud if that institution is to be perpetuated.

Sierra Leoneans do not want a mismatch of expectation and outcome nor a mismatch of words and deeds. We must say what we mean and mean what we say. We must put the interest of Sierra Leone above all else and not just sing it in the most melodious tunes. It must be put above our selfish opportunism, unpatriotic and greedy interests.

We therefore want the elections on the 26th February, 1996 i.e. in two weeks time, because it is the nucleus of peace. If there should be any postponement of elections then, to be above suspicion, the NPRC Government should hand over the reigns of government to an interim civilian government which should be mandated to continue the peace process and lead us to democratic elections - that will be in the best interest of Sierra Leone.

We thank the international community for their support. It is said that an organisation or a country is as good as its leader; we therefore thank James Jonah, the boss of INEC for sticking his neck out so high for democracy in Sierra Leone. We assure him of our support, and prayers and sympathy. We thank Chairman Bio and his government and wish them well as they are about to walk in the footsteps of Non Commissioned Officers Saffa Kengenyeh, Patrick Conteh and Emadu Rogers who overthrew the NRC and immediately handed over to a civilian government through Brig. John Bangura. This Brig. Bio and his men will become the Obasanjos of Sierra Leone. ALLAH, please continue to bless Sierra Leone.

Thank you all.

 **STATEMENT BY THE BO TOWN COUNCIL**

Madam Chairperson, Fellow Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Bo Town Council and indeed the people in Bo have always advocated for peace to return to this country. We in Bo have always been the target of the ugly incidence of rebel carnage and destruction. I will be insensitive to the arson, looting, killing and mutilation of the hands of the people I see everyday if I take a decision on the electoral process without first of all mentioning the state of the lot of our suffering people.

Madam Chairperson, it is unfortunate that most of us have never crossed Waterloo to witness the degree and intensity of rebel destruction, rather we are seated comfortably in our cosy offices and can only imagine what it is like to be in rebel affected areas.

Therefore, Madam Chairperson, as much as we want elections on February 26th, we equally want a lasting peace in this country. It is only fair to say that one should not take precedence over the other. We also want more registration done, together with voters education before 26th February. I thank you.

 **STATEMENT BY THE KOIDU NEW SEMBEHUN TOWN COUNCIL**

Madam Chairperson, Fellow Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen, in August last year, we assembled at this same venue to deliberate on the future course and direction of our beloved country, Sierra Leone. We agreed on that occasion, among other things, that elections should be held on the 26th February, 1996 regardless of the security situation posed by the rebel war.

Regarding the postponement or otherwise of the said elections pending peace talks with the RUF, the entire membership of the Koidu Town Council and the People of Kono District in general, are of the view that while we recognise the fact that the paramount and overriding concern of all right - thinking people of this country, is the restoration of Peace, we strongly believe that the election of a democratically elected government will promote rather than frustrate peace.

An elected government which has the mandate of the people of this country is better suited to negotiate peace with the RUF than the present administration.

We therefore stand-by the decision of the August Consultative Meeting for elections to be held as scheduled on 26th February, 1996.

Thank you.

 **STATEMENT BY THE REPRESENTATIVE OF REFUGEE CAMPS IN LIBERIA**

Let Election take place on the 26th February 1996. Let there be no other imaginary measures to deprive us from our aims and objectives.

Aim is ELECTION

Objective is PEACE

The only obstacle is, let NPRC provide security for us so that, this fateful day must not fail.

 **26TH FEBRUARY, 1996**

 **ELECTION! ELECTION! NOW!**

 **STATEMENT BY THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY (SDP)**

Madam Chairperson, Ladies and Gentlemen, all Protocols Observed.

The Social Democratic Party (SDP) condemns unreservedly the attack on Dr Jonah and Alhaji Tejan Kabba and PDP leader.

I go to the point. I am very disappointed with most of the speeches I have heard here this afternoon. I do not know which Sierra Leone you people belong to, but I can tell you which Sierra Leone I belong to. People have come here oblivious of the blind and lame, they are saying even the donor agencies would not protect us, would not support us. Is that the issue we should be addressing? Donor agencies' money instead of life? For goodness sake let us start thinking. You cannot leave Freetown and go to Bo by road. You just mark that. I have been here all this time, and none of you in this hall can go to Bo by road, or even Segbwema. If you want to go up country, you have to go by air. How many of you can afford it? My point is, I expect that in a democracy Madam Chair, every view should be seen to be heard, and I think you should give me my two minutes.

I want elections, but how am I going to conduct my campaign to my people when the only way I can go there is by air. What about my command in Freetown for us to go and campaign. Do you think I have that money? I do not know about other political parties where they get their monies from, but as far as I am concerned as a political leader contesting, I do not have the money to pay to go and campaign in the provinces; the money is not there. And I come back to these poor people. You turn around and see them\*. This is what RUF has done, it has made them blind and lame. People are here with one leg or one arm. Can't we give peace a chance for a change? From this moment, we have got the right to decide when we can go to election, but what we have not got to decide is when and who determines the timetable for peace. RUF, Foday Sankoh and others are pouring our blood, why can't we just wait and think. A lot of you who are shouting now are just here in Freetown. You can't go into Bo, Kenema and other places. I will not be moved by all your sentiments, by any damn thing you are saying. The only answer is, if you are prepared to go hand in hand with the government to make sure that peace comes to this place before elections.

Thank you.

\* The speaker paraded a couple of victims of the war whose arms and legs had been cut off in front of the audience.

 **STATEMENT BY THE COALITION FOR PROGRESS PARTY (CPP)**

Madam Chairperson, All Protocols Observed

I am Jeredine Williams, leader of the Coalition for Progress Party (CPP) - Kombra Party, now in coalition with the NADP.

The consensus on the question before us is already overwhelming - a renewed mandate for elections!

I am, however, here to state that the Kombra Party's commitment to the democratic process is unchangeable, and is our only option to guarantee peaceful co-existence and sustained developmental growth.

The process of elections is inevitable for a just and equitable peace, and I re-affirm my party's position espoused at the Bintumani I, which is elections on February 26, 1996.

On the question of security articulated by the Military representative in this assembly earlier today, this is neither in keeping with democratic principles which the Government now exposes nor the initiating of dialogue with political parties introduced by His Excellency the Head of State. My party takes this opportunity to convey its sentiments of genuine concern to Dr Jonah, Alhaji Tejan Kabba and Mr Thaimu Bangura, for the recent assault on their persons and properties, and call on Government to do everything in its power to thwart these incidents or risk having Sierra Leone being branded worldwide as an unsafe place to visit.

Thank you!

**Give Peace a chance with a democratically elected Government!!**

 **FACTS ABOUT REGISTRATION**

 **BY PROFESSOR H B S KANDEH**

Good evening ladies and Gentlemen. I will give you some facts about the Registration.

FACT The registration design covered the whole country which includes 2,553 Registration Areas

FACT We trained Registrars for the entire country, 5,866 Registrars.

FACT We deployed Registrars in all District Headquarters except Kailahun Town

FACT We completed work in all District and Regional Headquarters and Displaced Camps except Kailahun Town.

FACT We covered 95% of localities in the Northern Province and 25% in the Southern and Eastern Provinces

FACT There are still people to be registered in all regions

FACT The population is displaced into towns like Bo which increased its percentage from 7% to 11%

FACT We planned for registration in Guinea and Liberia and submitted the financial implications to government but were not provided with necessary logistics and the legal mandate to undertake the exercise. We were actually looking forward to the trip.

FACT We all accepted that because of the security situation we would adopt proportional representation for this election.

FACT The list of registered voters will only be displayed in areas where registration was carried out.

Now let me elaborate on some of these facts and point out to you some of the difficulties we have been facing and why the registration coverage is low in some areas.

I will start with Pujehun District. We had completed work in the Gondama Displaced Camp registering about 16,000 voters. Then we received a lot of requests from the chiefs claiming that Pujehun District was now accessible, that vehicles were plying the route and that it was essential that we deployed teams into Pujehun and register their people who were yearning to vote. We quickly marshalled 50 of our registrars who had completed Gondama Camp and sent them to Pujehun District. We met with the Brigade Commander at Koribondo, who assured us that our team would be given safe passage to Pujehun. They proceeded to Bandajuma Sowa, completed registration in Bandajuma Sowa and for some reason were then told that there were now rebels in Pujehun Town. The registrars stayed in Bandajuma Sowa for about two days, I was summoned from Freetown. I went in, provided some additional logistics and morale boosters to the security forces and the team was allowed to move into Pujehun town with a mandate to proceed to Gbondapi and Potoru. They completed Pujehun town. Only about a thousand or two thousand people were registered in that area, contrary to the many thousands we had been informed were waiting for us. The team was now planning to go to Gbondapi and Potoru, when the Officer Commanding said that Potoru was no longer safe. We brought our team back to Bo and concluded that we were probably facing difficulties because we were moving in a large group with vehicles. We therefore decided to send five of our Registrars incognito to Potoru town with instructions to simply get there and register a few people which would then give us the basis to display the list and register additional people during the display period. In the final analysis they could not go to Potoru.

 In the case of Bonthe District, we started on the island. We completed registration and the co-ordinator was given permission by the Navy to move to the mainland. So he took a set of registrars to Mattru. They got there and for two days they could not work because the Officer Commanding said he is in the Infantry and cannot take orders from the Navy and there was no other way of communicating. Later on they got clearance from Bo and they were only able to work for one and a half days. The team wanted to proceed to other areas but were not allowed to and we only work in areas where security is provided. There is no point exposing people to unnecessary risks. We all know about the atrocities now going on in the south in terms of amputations and executions.

 Now take Moyamba district. We started training in Taiama. We had about 345 registrars training in Taiama. Within two days, the attacks on Njala and environs started. And our registrars had to rush to Bo. But inspite of that we continued training, and thereafter we were prepared to send them to work in chiefdoms like Kori, Kamajei and Kowa which are close to Bo. But that was when the war intensified in Moyamba District. And for something like two weeks, after all other areas had started registration, we could still not deploy anybody into Moyamba District. But I insisted that we had to cover Moyamba District. So in the end we airlifted our team by Helicopter into Moyamba town and they covered some towns in Kagboro, Bagruwa, Timdel and of course Kaiyamba chiefdoms. And then we received a visit from some people who said "parts of Bumpe and Ribbi the coastal area had people waiting to be registered" and we prepared another 17 registrars and sent them to these areas. Within a week of their arrival, there was a rebel attack and they had to flee for their lives. We are not denying at INEC that there are masses of people in Pujehun or in Tonkolili or in parts of Port Loko, who are still waiting to be registered but we can only register in areas that are secure. There is no point just asking for an extension of the registration period. It has to be in an environment where there is security for us to do our work. As we have said, our procedures are very fast and that is why we have employed a large number of people. But even if we agree here to extend registration to Moyamba, to parts of Pujehun, I can assure you that except security is provided we cannot move into those areas.

 I will give you the example of also what happened in Tonkolili District. In Yoni Chiefdom about 8 of our registrars were captured by rebels, and held for about one and a half days . The rebels told them that they knew all about their procedures. They took some of their forms and Le10,000 from them and told them to go ahead and continue doing the good work. We have to be very grateful that the entire 5,866 registration personnel who worked for over a month, had no casualties. So if security is provided, the registration can continue and be extended into other areas. It's no problem. But who is going to guarantee that security?

 Let me come back to some of the facts. Another fact is that some people have been using statistics without completing the argument. If you look at what the projected population should have been for each of the regions, You will find out that in none of the regions have we actually achieved what the projected voting population should have been.

 You will be surprised to note that this is the case for districts in the North as well. For example we are projecting for something like 900,000 voters in the North. We have only registered 555,000. This is because people in this region have also moved to Guinea. So it is not as if we carried out a system which had a regional bias by encouraging people in one area to be registered and others in the other area not to be registered. And we always use a uniform procedure in all regions. As you have noticed in the press release, we indicated that for every district we would use two registrars per RA. We have the statistical basis; we have the maps; we have the list of settlements. It is the question of accessibility. The fact that we could go to 95% of the localities in the North and then 25% of the localities in the south, is a reflection of the security situation on the ground and not a deliberate effort by INEC to under-register voters in the South.

Let's forget about figures and look at the percentages.

 You have seen these in the papers already. Roughly about 22% of the population is in the South, 27% in the East, 36% in the North and 15% in the Western Area. This was the pre-war situation according to the 1985 census results. So we expect that now that we are in the war situation the distribution would be different. Now let's look at the distribution of Registered Voters in all regions.

 Where-as the South had 22% of the population in the 1985 census, for this registration only 16% of the total number of registered people were in South.

 In the case of the East they had 27% of the population in 1985. In terms of distribution of Registered Voters it is 22%.

 In the case of the North 36% of the population in 1985 and 42% of the registered voters now.

 For the Western Area 15% in the 1985 census and 20% of the registered voters.

 Now if you try to interpret these results, obviously there are deficits in the South and East. These are war affected areas where there is every possibility that some of these people have moved to other parts of the country. The fundamental point I'm trying to establish is that there are still people to be registered in the North, South and East. The majority of them to be registered are in the South and East. But you cannot register them if the security situation is not improved.

Thank You.

 **PROGRAMME**

08:00 - 08:45 REGISTRATION

09:00 - 09:45 OPENING CEREMONY

(a) Welcome

Prof. H B S Kandeh - Commissioner, Southern Province

 Conference Co-ordinator

(b) Chairman's Remarks - Mrs. Shirley Gbujama, Secretary and Registrar

 University of Sierra Leone

(c) Statement by National Commission for Democracy (NCD).

 Dr. Kadi Sesay - Chairman

(d) Statement by Interim National Electoral Commission (INEC).

 Dr. James Jonah - Chairman

(e) Formal Opening of Conference by the Head of State

 HE Brigadier- General Julius M. Bio

10:00 - 14:00 PLENARY

14:00 - 15:00 LUNCH

15:00 - 18:00 PLENARY