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Sir Dudley Smith MP
House of Commons
Dear Sir Dudley

I hope you are well. It is a long time since I have been in touch with you, but the situation in Sierra Leone has moved me to contact you once more to see if anything can be done by the government to precipitate a peaceful solution to the tragedy taking place in the country.

As you know, Warwick District has an informal link with Bo District in Sierra Leone and our membership still has regular contact and news from friends in Bo. It has been quite distressing receiving their letters describing the hunger and destitution in the Bo area and elsewhere which we never dreamed could happen when we started the link in 1981.

Over the last 4 years we have been watching with dismay and helplessness, the events leading up to and happening in this tragic civil war. We have sent money and supplies to Bo which have reached the people for whom it was destined but this is mere first aid and cannot address the root problems.

We have not known what we could do to try and contribute to ending the war, especially as it has virtually been ignored by the international community and media. To try and find out more, I attended a conference last Saturday which was organised by Sierra Leonians living in the UK. It was an extremely informative meeting with very thoughtful and thorough presentations given by a range of speakers from Sierra Leone and Britain including an ex British High commissioner (1986-91 Derek Partridge).

At the meeting we were told that Lynda Chalker was actually arriving in Freetown that day.

I am therefore writing to you to ask you if you could let me know what the outcome of her meetings in Sierra Leone has been, and what is her view of the current situation? I will then pass on the information to other One World link colleagues and other interested parties.

The conclusion which came out of the Saturday's conference was that with 1½ million people in the country displaced and ¾ million people having fled to neighbouring countries, an election (supported so far by our government) on February 26th would be premature and hardly fair.

On the other hand speakers made it quite clear that in Sierra Leone there is an overwhelming desire to have elections now, as they seem to be the only way to get rid of the NPRC government whose security position has deteriorated. They now only have control over Freetown and a few isolated centres. It cannot discipline its soldiery and is seen to be as corrupt as its predecessors.

I look forward to your reply and to some clarification of the possible way forward .

Yours sincerely,
Jane Knight
International Liaison Consultant (lately of OXFAM).