

Letters from David Ngombu to Myf Hodkin: June, August and December 1998

Letter from David Ngombu to Myf Hodkin dated 16 June 1998

....I'm sure you must have been informed about the total collapse of law and order as was perpetuated by the "junta boys" and their RUF allies. As from May 25th 1998 (Sunday) when the military took over from the democratically elected Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) government of Dr. Alhaji Ahmed Tejan Kabba, there was mayhem across the length and breadth of Sierra Leone. Democratic rule came to a complete halt as the junta boys caused a lot of atrocities to people - killing, maiming, raping, burning down of houses and vandalising properties. It seemed as if these fellows came from a different planet.

Bo Town was attacked on Tuesday 14th February '98 at about 8:05 a.m. with sporadic shooting in the west end of the town which lasted the whole day. As a result, there was an exodus of people from the town to the nearby villages or bushes and this was the first time the whole population of the township had to "pull out". Many people lost their lives by stray bullets while others got lost. Also, many houses were set on fire and properties looted. And those the fellows could not take along were set on fire. I was in the bush with my family for eighteen (18) days and returned only when the town was rescued by the ECOMOG intervention force. My family lost most of the things it had acquired for the past strainous [sic] years - furniture, clothes, household materials like blankets, tents, tables, chairs, buckets and the rest you can imagine. It's terrible. We are starting life all over again. However, we are thankful to God we are alive to tell the story....

Letter from David Ngombu to Myf Hodkin dated 1st August 1998

[Issues discussed at most recent committee meeting included the idea of constructing a multi -purpose building. Uses for such a building were enumerated.]

Also, members thought it necessary to undertake a Scholarship Scheme as most families in the Committee have been devastated as a result of the atrocities perpetuated by the AFRC "junta boys" and their RUF allies. As you may have been informed, most families were dislocated. Some of the children are unaccompanied and are still looking out for their families. A project called Unaccompanied Children (UAC) organised by the Christian Brothers (a Catholic Orientated Organisation) is responsible for these children who are still looking out for their families. Most of these children have been resettled with their families. However, Bo Town is facing a problem of Street Children who have no relatives and place to sleep. Such children sleep in market places, Court Barries, Churches and Mosques and other public places that are not occupied at night. To help these children, other organisations that are UNICEF assisted are responsible for them.

One World Link (OWL) Bo Committee has been much concerned about these children.

In addition to the above problems, most educational institutions were vandalised by the retreating "junta boys". School buildings were burnt down, furniture like chairs, tables, desks and even blackboards were used as firewood. Other school materials like books, slates, pencils were looted and a lot scattered and burnt. It is going to be a whole starting point for such systems to operate. Most unfortunate is the fact that most of these school children are from disadvantaged families in the various communities. The present situation has seen most children leaving school as their parents cannot afford the school charges at the same time buy uniforms, exercise and textbooks and other school materials (bags, raincoats, rain boots, Mathematical sets, rulers, etc.) One World Link (OWL) Bo Committee has decided to help some of these students through the proposed Scholarship Scheme

The current SLPP government in power has also been trying to help its poor citizens, The past three (3) months schooling was taken as a remedial period with no school charges levied and no uniforms used. However, government has informed that when schools reopen in September, school charges will be paid and uniforms will be necessary. Most parents are now much worried as how and where to get funds to meet their demands.

Another way the present government is trying to educate the masses (boys, girls, men and women) is by introducing informal education. Technical and vocational schools have been established in provincial headquarter towns like Makeni (North) , Bo (South), Kenema (East) and Freetown (West). Such institutions are created to cater for the middle level manpower. In the technical schools areas like Blacksmithery, Construction, Masonry, Carpentry, Transportation (wheelbarrows) Plastic Casting are taught and in the vocational schools areas like Tailoring, Garment Dyeing, Soap Making, Typing, Arts and Craft, Weaving, Leather Works, Music and Dance, Food Processing and Preservation are taught and in institutions for Special Education, areas/ departments like Nursery Education, Special Primary School (non- formal) Education, Adult and Continuing Education and Syndicate/ Out of School Classes. In Bo, such an institution has already been established.

Situations are getting better although pockets of retreating AFRC/ RUF rebels are still creating mayhem in the north- eastern part of the country, mainly Kailahun, Kono and Koinadugu Districts. A lot of people have again gone back to their villages and towns. We only hope they will not be attacked any longer.

Letter from David Ngombu to Myf Hodkin dated 8th August 1998

[Refers to the Multi-Purpose Building Project, which was discussed at a recent OWL Bo Committee meeting and of possible fund-raising activities

to finance the Project. The Committee also spoke of the development of more personal friendships within the link and the continuation of shipments of school supplies, etc. from Leamington.]

The situation in the North-Eastern part of Sierra Leone is still under the AFRC junta and their RUF allies. A lot of atrocities continue in the Koinadugu (Kabala), Kono (Sefadu) and Kailahun (Kailahun) Districts with amputations, burning down of towns / villages very prevalent. ECOMOG is trying to rid the areas of AFRC junta menace....

Letter from David Ngombu to Myf Hodkin dated 17 December 1998

....Since the beginning of this year, the peace and tranquility that was experienced when the "junta boys" were kicked out of power has been again disrupted. There had been attacks in the Northern Region on civilians, mainly women and children. There has been a lot of destruction on life and property. Also, a good number of people, mostly men, have been amputated. A good number of those amputated have been admitted at the Connaught Hospital in Freetown and at Government hospitals in Bo and Kenema.

At the moment there are sporadic attacks on the Bo-Freetown Highway. A few days ago (Saturday 12 December) rebels attacked a town on the highway killing a lot of people and burning down the whole town. We have been informed that rebels have promised to spend the Christmas in Freetown. This news has created a lot of concern on the inhabitants of the city. With regards the Southern region (Bo District inclusive) situations are much quiet. Schools and other departments have started operation though most of the materials were destroyed by the fleeing rebels. Moussah Conteh must have told you people on his return. It has been a lot of challenges but thank God for his wonderful care throughout the period....