

DR. RICHARD KONTEH'S  
**INDEPENDENCE**  
MESSAGE: A CTA **P10**



# KUSH

A MENACE TO OUR  
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## THE UNIFIER MAGAZINE

PEOPLE • ISSUES • IDEAS

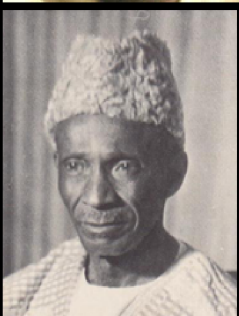
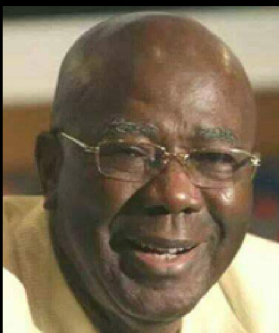


# SIERRA LEONE AT 63

SIX DECADES OF  
LEADERSHIP SAGA

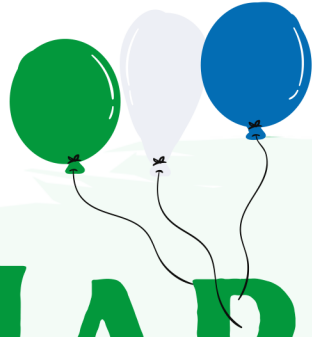
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LETTERS & MORE



# **HAPPY** **INDEPENDENCE** *Day* **SIERRA LEONE**

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**APRIL 27TH**



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## **PEOPLE: SIX DECADES OF LEADERSHIP SAGA**

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WELCOME TO THE

**THE UNIFIER MAGAZINE**



# ISSUE 5

Inspire Inclusion

Dear Valued Readers,

As the crisp air of April carries the joyous anticipation of our 63rd Independence Anniversary, this edition of The Unifier Magazine takes a reflective turn. We approach this 63rd anniversary of independence with a spirit of reflection and anticipation.

This April edition of The Unifier Magazine takes a multifaceted look at our beloved nation. We delve into the stories of past and present leaders, individuals who have shaped the course of Sierra Leone's history. We examine the economic struggles that continue to challenge our progress, acknowledging the realities that many face. Yet, we also turn our gaze towards the future. We explore the potential that lies within the nation and the unwavering dreams of its people.

Once a nation brimming with promise, Sierra Leone's path has been challenging. We must acknowledge these challenges – the economic disparity, resource mismanagement, and the ongoing need for infrastructure development. However, within these challenges lie opportunities. This edition explores innovative solutions, the rise of entrepreneurs, and the unwavering determination of Sierra Leoneans at home and abroad.

As we celebrate 63 years of independence, let us remember the unity that binds us. Let us honour the sacrifices made by those who came before us, and let us collectively chart a course towards a brighter future for Sierra Leone.

The Unifier Magazine is a platform for dialogue, for sharing stories, and for inspiring action. We encourage you, our valued readers, to engage with the stories within these pages. Let us learn from the past, face the present with courage, and dream boldly for Sierra Leone's future.

Thank you for being part of The Unifier Magazine's journey. Together, let's inspire new thinking, a new Sierra Leone dream. Let's inspire our young generation to dream big. Together, we can weave a tapestry of hope and prosperity for generations to come.

Onwards, Sierra Leone!

Editor

*Albert Mackoty*



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# INBOX



Hello Unifier, I recently had the opportunity to read Dr. Richard Konteh's perspectives on women empowerment featured in your March edition of The Unifier Magazine. While I appreciate Dr. Konteh's dedication to advocating for gender equality and his efforts in supporting women's empowerment initiatives. I feel compelled to offer some constructive critique on his views. seemed to focus more on broad statements of support rather than delving into specific strategies or actions needed to address the systemic barriers that women face in Sierra Leone. It would have been beneficial for Dr. Konteh to provide concrete examples of how he plans to advocate for policy changes or implement programs that directly empower women in various spheres of society. Thank you for considering my feedback.

*David Yambasu*

While I appreciate the magazine's efforts to provide coverage and analysis of political developments in Sierra Leone, I couldn't help but notice some concerns regarding the content of the Elections Special Section. It seems that there is a tendency to speculate and put words in the mouths of various stakeholders, particularly regarding their positions on electoral matters. As we await the recommendations of the tripartite committee on electoral reforms, it is essential for The Unifier Magazine to exercise caution in its reporting and analysis of political events. Speculative commentary can sometimes lead to misunderstandings and misrepresentations of stakeholders' views, which may not accurately reflect the political landscape. Just my two cents! Thanks.

*A. Bah*

Dear Unifier Editor,

I wanted to take a moment to express my appreciation for The Unifier Magazine's recent efforts to feature women and highlight their contributions to various aspects of society. It is heartening to see the magazine shine a spotlight on the achievements and stories of women in Sierra Leone.

However, while I applaud the inclusion of women in the magazine, I couldn't help but notice a significant oversight in the representation of certain influential women who are actively shaping the trajectory of our nation. The magazine seems to have missed the opportunity to feature power-brokers and influencers who are making substantial contributions to nation-building and governance.

In today's landscape, where women are increasingly assuming leadership roles and driving positive change across sectors, it is essential for The Unifier Magazine to provide a platform for showcasing their voices and perspectives. By amplifying the stories of these influential women, the magazine can inspire others and contribute to a more inclusive and representative narrative of Sierra Leone's progress.

I urge the editorial team to consider diversifying the range of women featured in future editions, ensuring that the magazine reflects the full spectrum of women's leadership and influence in our society. By doing so, The Unifier Magazine can continue to be a catalyst for promoting gender equality and empowerment in Sierra Leone.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and I look forward to seeing more diverse and inclusive representation in the magazine's future editions.

*Mohamed Sheriff*

Greetings,

Just sending my appreciation to Madam I. Z. Konteh for her insightful contribution titled "Why Women's Leadership Matters in Sierra Leone" in the recent edition of The Unifier Magazine.

Madam Konteh's article provided a compelling exploration of the importance of women's leadership in our nation, shedding light on the invaluable contributions that women make to various spheres of society. Her perspectives were enlightening and thought-provoking, highlighting the urgent need for gender equality and empowerment in Sierra Leone.

I believe that featuring voices like Madam Konteh's is crucial in fostering dialogue and raising awareness about the significance of women's leadership in driving positive change and advancing our nation's development agenda. I commend The Unifier Magazine for providing a platform for such important discussions and for amplifying the voices of women leaders in our community.

*Augusta Banya*

***Thank You for your  
emails and feedback.***

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# COMMENTARY

## KUSH: A Menace Unraveling Sierra Leone's Growing Drug Crisis

*The Unifier Magazine*

In recent years, Sierra Leone has faced a new and devastating challenge: the proliferation of Kush, an illegal drug wreaking havoc on communities and threatening the future of our entire generation.

Kush, a potent synthetic opioid, has rapidly gained popularity among youths, leading to a surge in addiction, crime, and social disintegration across the country.

Originating from clandestine laboratories owned by very bad actors, Kush is a highly addictive substance that induces feelings of euphoria and numbness, making it alluring to vulnerable individuals seeking an escape from life's pressures.

However, the short-lived highs of Kush come at a steep price as users quickly spiral into addiction, experiencing severe withdrawal symptoms and psychological distress.

The dangers of Kush extend beyond individual health, permeating societal structures

and exacerbating existing challenges in Sierra Leone. Communities ravaged by Kush addiction are witnessing increased rates of crime, violence, and family breakdowns as users resort to desperate measures to sustain their habits. Moreover, the economic burden of Kush addiction strains the dilapidated healthcare system, handicapped law enforcement agencies, and social services, diverting the meagre resources away from essential priorities and impeding national development efforts.

The impact of Kush on Sierra Leone's youth is particularly alarming, as the drug preys on aspirations and potential, derailing dreams and aspirations. Many young people, lured by the false promises of Kush, find themselves trapped in a cycle of dependency, unable to break free from its grip and pursue meaningful opportunities for personal and professional growth.

Addressing the Kush epidemic

requires a comprehensive and multi-faceted approach, encompassing prevention, treatment, and law enforcement strategies. Firstly, robust public awareness campaigns must be launched by the government to educate communities about the dangers of Kush and promote drug-free lifestyles. Additionally, investment in rehabilitation and support services is crucial to assist individuals struggling with addiction and empower them to reclaim their lives.

Furthermore, law enforcement agencies must intensify efforts to dismantle Kush trafficking networks and hold perpetrators accountable for their crimes.

Above all, addressing the Kush epidemic demands collective action and collaboration across government agencies, civil society organizations, and international partners. By mobilizing resources and expertise, Sierra Leone can confront this growing threat head-on and safeguard the well-being and future of its citizens.



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# DR. RICHARD KONTEH'S INDEPENDENCE MESSAGE



## **A Call To Action Toward a Brighter Tomorrow: Reflections and Hope**

**Dear Fellow Sierra Leoneans,**

As we commemorate our beloved nation, Sierra Leone's 63rd Independence Anniversary, on April 27th, it is a time of celebration and reflection. It is an opportunity to honour our nation's past, acknowledge our present challenges, and envision a hopeful future toward national unity, transformation, and prosperity.

Sixty-three years ago, our nation embarked on a journey towards self-determination and sovereignty, breaking free from the chains of colonialism and forging our own path as an independent nation. We celebrate the courage and resilience of our forefathers who fought tirelessly for our freedom, laying the foundation for the vibrant and diverse society we are proud to call our own today.

However, as we celebrate our achievements, we must also confront the harsh realities of our present circumstances. Our country, Sierra Leone, is currently grappling with political struggles that threaten to divide our nation. The polarization of our society along political lines has hindered progress and undermined our collective efforts toward unity and development. We must set aside our differences and work together to find common ground for the betterment of our country.

Additionally, we cannot ignore the scourge of the Kush drug crisis that is wreaking havoc on our youth. This illegal drug is destroying lives, tearing families apart, and robbing our young people of their future. We must come together as a nation to address this crisis, providing support and resources for rehabilitation, education, and prevention efforts to combat the spread of drug abuse in our communities.

Furthermore, the current economic hardships facing Sierra Leoneans are undeniable. Rising inflation, high unemployment rates, and limited access to basic services have created immense challenges for our citizens, particularly those living in poverty. It is incumbent upon us as

citizens and leaders alike to work tirelessly to revitalize our economy, create opportunities for sustainable growth, and ensure that every Sierra Leonean has the chance to thrive.

Despite these challenges, I am filled with hope for the future of our country. We Sierra Leoneans are resilient people with a spirit of perseverance and determination that has carried us through even the darkest of times. As we celebrate our Independence Anniversary, let us recommit ourselves to the values of unity, peace, and justice that define our national identity.

Let us stand together in solidarity, bridging the divides that separate us and embracing our shared humanity. Let us work tirelessly to build a future where every Sierra Leonean can live in dignity, prosperity, and peace.

Together, let us forge a path towards a brighter tomorrow for Sierra Leone.

**Happy Independence Anniversary, Sierra Leone!**

*Every Saturday night, Dr. Konteh shares his views and insights on the Unifier Radio and TV's "The Unifier Hour" Show. The show airs across various social media channels include YouTube, Facebook, X and LinkedIn. The online radio can also be accessed on The Unifier website [www.dunifier.com](http://www.dunifier.com).*







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DR. RICHARD KONTEH

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# SIX DECADES OF LEADERSHIP SAGA

## APRIL 1960: THE SHAKY FOUNDATION



**The Constitutional and Independence Conferences at Lancaster House in London**

1960 was a momentous year for Sierra Leone, a nation poised on the precipice of independence. It was a year marked by a tumultuous blend of anticipation, struggle, and the promise of a new dawn.

On April 20, 1960, Sir Milton Margai led the Sierra Leonean delegation in the negotiations for independence at the constitutional conferences held with Queen Elizabeth II and British Colonial Secretary Iain Macleod, at Lancaster House in London. The twenty-four members of the Sierra Leonean delegation were prominent and well-respected politicians,

including Sir Milton Margai, Sir Albert Margai, trade unionist Siaka Stevens, SLPP-strongman Lamina Sankoh, activist Isaac Wallace-Johnson, Paramount chief Ella Koblo Gulama, educationist Mohamed Sanusi Mustapha, Dr. John Karefa-Smart, Professor Kande Bureh, lawyer Sir Banja Tejan-Sie, former Freetown Mayor Eustace Henry Taylor Cummings, educationist Amadu Wurie, and diplomat Hector Reginald Sylvanus Boltman.

After the talks in London, Britain agreed to grant Sierra Leone Independence on April 27, 1961.

Siaka Stevens was the only delegate who refused to sign Sierra Leone's Declaration of Independence on the grounds that there had been a secret (non-disclosed) defence pact between Sierra Leone and Britain; another point Siaka Stevens contented was the Sierra Leonean government's position that there would be no elections held before independence which would effectively shut him out of Sierra Leone's political process.

Upon their return to Freetown on May 4, 1960, Siaka Stevens was promptly expelled from the People's National Party (PNP).



# SIX DECADES OF LEADERSHIP SAGA

## THE LEADERS: IMPACT AND LEGACIES



**Sir Milton Margai**  
**Prime Minister: 1961 - 1964**

Sir Milton Augustus Strieby Margai played a crucial role in the formation of Sierra Leone's political landscape. He was instrumental in the negotiations leading to Sierra Leone's independence from British colonial rule on April 27, 1961. As the leader of the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP), he advocated for self-governance and worked tirelessly to establish a stable democratic system.

Following independence, Sir Milton Margai became the first Prime Minister of Sierra Leone,

serving from 1961 until his untimely death in 1964. His leadership was committed to democracy, good governance, and national unity. Under his tenure, Sierra Leone experienced relative political stability and economic growth.

Sir Milton Margai's legacy extends beyond his political achievements. Today, he is remembered as a statesman of integrity, humility, and dedication to public service. His leadership style was characterized by pragmatism, consensus-building, and a deep commitment to the welfare of the Sierra Leonean people. His example continues to inspire present and future generations of leaders in Sierra Leone and beyond.

Sir Milton Margai's leadership faced criticism for his failure to promote political pluralism, to address ethnic-regional biases, and to prioritize comprehensive social reforms to address issues such as gender inequality, human rights abuses, and access to basic services for marginalized populations.



**Sir Milton Margai**  
**Prime Minister: 1964 - 1967**

Sir Albert Michael Margai, the younger brother of Sir Milton Margai, and a lawyer. He served as the second Prime Minister of Sierra Leone from 1964 to 1967. His political career, contributions and legacy in Sierra Leone are complex and multifaceted.

Sir Albert Margai's government prioritized economic development initiatives to foster growth and improve Sierra Leoneans' living standards. His administration implemented infrastructure projects, including road construction and rural

electrification, to enhance connectivity and facilitate economic activities.

Sir Albert Margai's government made efforts to improve educational standards and increase healthcare coverage, particularly in rural areas. Recognizing the importance of agriculture to Sierra Leone's economy, Sir Albert Margai's government implemented policies to support the agricultural sector.

Unlike his late brother, Sir Milton, Sir Albert Margai proved unpopular and resorted to increasingly authoritarian actions in response to protests, including the enactment of several laws against the opposition All People's Congress (APC) and an unsuccessful attempt to establish a one-party state.

Sir Albert Margai's tenure was marred by allegations of electoral irregularities and controversies, particularly surrounding the 1967 general elections. The conduct of the elections, including accusations of voter fraud and manipulation, cast doubt on the credibility of the democratic process under his leadership.

The latter part of Sir Albert Margai's tenure was characterized by political instability, culminating in the military coup d'état of 1967. The

coup ended his government's rule and ushered in a period of military governance in Sierra Leone.



**Brigadier David Lansana**  
**First coup d'état Leader**  
**March 21 - 23, 1967**

Brigadier Lansana was one of the most distinguished officers in the history of the Sierra Leone Armed Forces. Lansana was appointed army commander in 1964 by Sir Albert Margai. Lansana was a close ally of Sir Albert Margai.

In a closely contested general election on March 17, 1967, Sir Albert Michael Margai's SLPP was defeated by Siaka Stevens' APC. The All People's Congress narrowly won 32 parliamentary seats, while Margai's SLPP held on to just 28 seats. Siaka Stevens was sworn in as Prime Minister on March 21, 1967.

On March 21, 1967, Brigadier David Lansana staged Sierra Leone's first coup d'état.

Within hours of taking office, Siaka Stevens was ousted in a bloodless military coup led by Lansana. He placed Siaka Stevens under house arrest in Freetown and insisted the prime minister's office's determination should await the election of the tribal representatives to the house.

Lansana was later charged with treason, tried and found guilty. He was executed on July 19, 1975.



**Brigadier Andrew Juxon-Smith**  
**NRC: March 27, 1967 - April 1968**

On March 23, 1967, a group of senior military officers in the Sierra Leone Army, including Major Charles Blake and Brigadier Andrew Juxon-Smith, seized control of the government, arrested Brigadier Lansana, and suspended the constitution. The group constituted itself as the National Reformation Council (NRC), with Juxon-Smith as its chairman and Governor-General.



Brigadier Andrew Juxon-Smith's brief tenure as the head of state in Sierra Leone from 1967 to 1968 was marked by controversial contributions, which shaped his legacy in the country.

His coup promised a new era of governance free from the previous administration's perceived flaws. In the immediate aftermath of assuming power, Brigadier Juxon-Smith initiated anti-corruption measures, signalling his commitment to addressing the rampant corruption that plagued Sierra Leone's political landscape.

However, his regime quickly descended into authoritarianism, characterized by suppression of political opposition, censorship of the press, and human rights abuses. His administration curtailed civil liberties and imposed restrictions on freedom of speech and assembly, undermining democratic principles. The regime failed to implement meaningful changes or address the underlying issues plaguing Sierra Leone. His lack of a coherent vision for governance and development contributed to the country's stagnation and decline during his tenure.

On April 18, 1968, Brigadier Juxon-Smith's NRC junta was ousted by another junta, the Anti-Corruption Revolutionary Movement (ACRM).



**Brigadier John Amadu Bangura**  
**ACRM: April 18-22, 1968**

On April 18 1968, another group of senior military officers called themselves the Anti-Corruption Revolutionary Movement (ACRM), led by Brigadier General John Amadu Bangura, overthrew the Juxon-Smith's NRC junta. The ACRM junta arrested many senior NRC members.

A few days later, on April 22, 1968, Brigadier Bangura restored the democratic constitution and handed power back to Siaka Stevens, who assumed the prime minister's office.

Brigadier Bangura's decision to relinquish power and facilitate the return to civilian rule after a few days demonstrated a commitment to democratic principles and the rule of law. This move paved the way for the restoration of democratic governance in Sierra Leone.

In 1970, Prime Minister Siaka Stevens arrested Brigadier

John Bangura and charged him with conspiracy. Brigadier Bangura was sentenced to death by execution for treason against the state.



**Christopher Okoro Cole**  
**President: April 19-21, 1971**

In 1970, Christopher Elnathan Okoro Cole became the Chief Justice of Sierra Leone. At this time, Sierra Leone embarked on a path towards becoming a republic. The decision to transition to a republic was formalized through a series of constitutional amendments and legislative processes.

On March 31 1971, Cole, was appointed interim Governor-General. In April 19, 1971, the Sierra Leone Parliament passed the Republican Constitution of Sierra Leone Act, officially declaring Sierra Leone a republic. The then interim Governor-General Christopher Cole had to serve as the acting president for two days. Cole swore in Prime Minister Siaka Stevens as the republic's first president.

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## **Siaka Probyn Stevens**

**Prime Minister: 1968 - 1971**

In the early 1950s, Siaka Stevens co-founded the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP). After disagreements with the SLPP leadership, Stevens broke ties with the party and co-founded the People's National Party (PNP). In 1959 and 1960, Siaka Stevens represented the PNP and participated in the independence conferences in London. However, he was the only delegate who refused to sign the independence agreement on the grounds that there had been a secret defence pact between Sierra Leone and the United Kingdom. Another point of his contention was on the Sierra Leonean government's position that no elections would be held before independence, which would effectively shut him out of the political process. The PNP expelled Stevens upon his return from the conferences. Stevens later joined the All People's Congress (APC).

In elections held on March 17, 1967, the APC won by a narrow margin, and Siaka Stevens was appointed Prime Minister. However, Brigadier David Lansana's military coup d'état overthrew and arrested Prime Minister Stevens a few minutes after taking office.

Siaka Stevens' tenure as Prime Minister from 1968-1971 was interrupted by several military coup d'états. During his tenure, Stevens initiated various infrastructure projects aimed at modernizing Sierra Leone. These projects included road construction, building schools and hospitals, and expanding access to basic services, contributing to the country's development.

Stevens implemented social welfare initiatives including healthcare reforms, education programs, and efforts to alleviate poverty, aiming to uplift the standard of living for the populace.

Stevens was a vocal advocate for African unity and solidarity. He supported pan-African movements, and promoted cooperation among African nations.

However, the interruptions by military coups set the stage for his later, lengthy and more authoritarian rule as President from 1971 to 1985.



## **Siaka Probyn Stevens**

**President: 1971 - 1985**

In 1973, the first elections under the new constitution were held. It was reported that the polls were marred by violence and were boycotted by the SLPP, which gave the APC all 85 seats in the House of Representatives. In March 1976, Stevens was re-elected as President, unopposed by the House.

President Stevens continued consolidating his power, culminating in a 1978 referendum on a new constitution that would create a one-party state with the APC as the only legally permitted party. Siaka Stevens billed the proposed one-party system as more African than Western-style democracy. However, Sierra Leone had been a de facto one-party state since it became a republic.

On becoming the Republic's first president, Siaka Stevens initially

fostered a sense of national unity. He appointed a cabinet that reflected Sierra Leone's diverse ethnicities, addressing longstanding regional grievances.

His authoritarian rule led to growing discontent, culminating in several attempted coups and a decline in national security.

Siaka Probyn Stevens' presidency of Sierra Leone from 1971 to 1985 is a story of contradictions and a mixed-bag legacy. His legacy is a cautionary tale for Sierra Leone and other nations navigating the path towards a more just and prosperous future.



## Joseph Saidu Momoh

**President: 1985 - 1992**

In 1970, Siaka Stevens named Joseph Saidu Momoh, a junior officer at the time, as the head of the Sierra Leone Military after Brigadier John Amadu Bangura was arrested and charged with conspiracy and plotting to

commit a coup against the Stevens government. Major General Momoh was a close ally and a loyal Siaka Stevens friend.

In 1985, Momoh became secretary-general and head of the All People's Congress (APC). The same year, he succeeded President Siaka Stevens by becoming the only candidate in a one-party election in the form of a referendum on October 8, 1985. President Momoh became the second President of the Republic of Sierra Leone.

Joseph Saidu Momoh inherited a troubled legacy when he assumed the presidency of Sierra Leone in 1985.

President Momoh initially attempted to maintain stability by continuing some of Stevens' programs and promoting national unity.

He declared a state of economic emergency, aiming to address the mismanagement that had plagued the previous regime. In the face of growing discontent, Momoh ushered in a new constitution in 1991 that dismantled the one-party state and paved the way for multiparty democracy. This was seen as a positive step by the international community.

Momoh's economic reforms failed to reverse the downward trend.

In 1991, the Revolutionary

United Front (RUF) rebel group launched a brutal civil war. Momoh's government proved unable to quell the rebellion, leading to widespread suffering and instability.

It's important to remember that the outbreak of this brutal civil war by the RUF coinciding with Momoh's presidency, was a challenge that would have tested even the most capable leader.

Whatever your take on Joseph Saidu Momoh's presidential legacy, whether seen as a failure or a success, the underlying highlight is the fragility of peace and the importance of tackling underlying issues like poverty and corruption to prevent conflict. His time in office serves as a reminder of the devastating consequences of civil war and the need for strong leadership to navigate a nation through turbulent times.

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**Captain Valentine Strasser**

### **NPRC Junta: 1992 – 1996**

In April 1992, Captain Strasser led a group of junior military officers in a coup d'état that overthrew President Joseph Momoh's government. They called their regime the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC). The coup was fueled by dissatisfaction with Momoh's administration, which they perceived as corrupt and ineffective.

Captain Strasser's junta regime embarked on an anti-corruption campaign to root out corruption and restore government transparency. Several high-profile officials were arrested and tried for corruption, signalling a commitment to accountability and good governance.

Under Strasser's leadership, NPRC initiated a transition process towards civilian rule. This included the establishment of a Constitutional Review

Committee to draft a new constitution and the scheduling of multi-party elections to return the country to democratic governance.

Despite initial promises of democratic reform, Captain Strasser's regime was characterized by authoritarianism and human rights abuses. The junta government cracked down harshly on dissent, censored the media, and suppressed political opposition, leading to a climate of fear and intimidation.

Strasser's government struggled to address the country's economic challenges, leading to worsening poverty and socio-economic hardship for the populace. The regime's policies failed to stimulate economic growth or improve living standards, exacerbating the country's already dire situation.

In 1994, Strasser exiled his deputy NPRC leader Solomon Musa to Guinea. Musa was a close ally and childhood friend of Strasser. Strasser promoted Captain Julius Maada Bio as deputy NPRC chairman and immediately promoted him to brigadier.

Captain Strasser's tenure ended abruptly in January 1996 when he was ousted in a coup led by his own deputy, Brigadier Julius Maada Bio.



**Brigadier Julius Maada Bio**

### **NPRC Junta: 1996**

In January 1996, Bio led a coup d'état that ousted and exiled his boss, Captain Valentine Strasser, from power. They purported that the coup was motivated by dissatisfaction with Strasser's leadership and a desire for change within the military establishment.

Bio pledged to oversee a swift transition to civilian rule after the coup. Multi-party elections were scheduled later that year.

Despite Bio's efforts to facilitate a transition to civilian rule, Sierra Leone experienced further instability in the years following his departure as junta leader. The country endured a prolonged civil war and subsequent military coups, highlighting the missed opportunity the NPRC had, and the fragility of the nation's democratic institutions.





## **Ahmad Tejan Kabbah**

### **President: 1996 – 2007**

In early 1996, Alhaji Ahmad Tejan Kabbah was elected leader of the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) and was the party's presidential candidate in the country's presidential election later that year.

Tejan Kabbah was elected the third President of the Republic of Sierra Leone.

President Kabbah took power with a great promise of ending the civil war. He opened dialogues with the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and invited the RUF leader, Foday Sankoh, for peace negotiations and signing the Abidjan Peace Accord on November 30, 1996.

In early 1997, under international pressure, President Kabbah's government ended its contract with Executive Outcomes, the private mercenaries firm the NPRC had

hired to help fight the RUF rebels. The RUF regrouped and renewed its military attacks. Meanwhile, RUF leader Sankoh was arrested in Nigeria, and by the end of March 1997, the peace accord had collapsed.

On May 25, 1997, President Kabbah's presidency was interrupted by the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) military coup that sent President Kabbah into exile in Guinea.

After ten months in exile, President Kabbah's administration was reinstated in March 1998 by the ECOWAS Nigerian-led military intervention force, ECOMOG.

On his return, President Kabbah disbanded the Sierra Leone military and proposed a new military. On October 12, 1998, twenty-five soldiers were executed by firing squad after they were convicted by court-martial for orchestrating the 1997 coup.

A Lomé Peace Accord was signed on July 7, 1999, to end the civil war, granting amnesty for all combatants and controversially granting RUF leader Foday Sankoh the position of vice president and chairman of the commission that oversaw the diamond mines.

The Lomé Accord also called for establishing a Truth and Reconciliation Commission,

which provided a forum for both victims and perpetrators of human rights violations during the conflict to tell their stories and facilitate genuine reconciliation.

In October 1999, the United Nations established the UNAMSIL peacekeeping force to help restore order and disarm the RUF rebels.

President Kabbah was re-elected for a second five-year term in the May 2002 general elections.

President Kabbah's presidency was instrumental in restoring peace and stability to Sierra Leone after years of civil conflict. He played a key role in negotiating and implementing the Lomé Peace Accord in 1999, which brought an end to the brutal civil war that ravaged the country for nearly a decade.

Under his leadership, the country held free and fair elections, and efforts were made to improve transparency, accountability, and the rule of law.

Despite efforts to rebuild the economy, Kabbah faced challenges in addressing poverty, unemployment, and inequality in Sierra Leone. Structural constraints, including limited resources, weak infrastructure, and dependence on external aid, hindered the country's economic recovery.

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**Major Johnny Paul Koroma**

### **AFRC Junta: 1997 - 1998**

On May 25, 1997, a group of seventeen soldiers in the Sierra Leone army led by Corporal Tamba Gborie freed and armed about 600 prisoners from the Pademba Road Prison in Freetown. One of those freed prisoners was Major Johnny Paul Koroma. Koroma had been arrested and sent to prison in August 1996 for alleged involvement in a coup plot against the southern civilian officials who were in control of the country.

Major Johnny Paul Koroma was named head of state and chairman of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC). The junta sent President Kabbah into exile in Guinea. Koroma suspended the constitution, banned demonstrations, closed all private radio stations, and granted soldiers unlimited powers.

Johnny Paul Koroma invited the RUF rebels to join his coup. Koroma also appealed to Nigeria for the release of Foday Sankoh, the RUF rebel leader, and appointed him in absentia as deputy chairman of the AFRC. The joint AFRC/RUF coalition government then proclaimed the war was over and gave the soldiers and rebels unlimited powers in a great wave of looting and reprisals against civilians in Freetown (dubbed "Operation Pay Yourself" by some of its participants).

The international community did not recognize the AFRC Junta government. In contrast, President Kabbah's government in exile in Conakry, Guinea, was recognized by the United Nations, the African Union, the United States, the United Kingdom and ECOWAS as the legitimate government of Sierra Leone.

After 10 months in office, Johnny Paul Koroma's AFRC junta government was ousted by the Nigeria-led ECOMOG military intervention forces. The democratically elected government of President Kabbah was reinstated in March 1998. Koroma fled to the rebel strongholds in the east of the country.

## **THE SAD REALITY OF MILITARY JUNTAS IN SIERRA LEONE**

The sad reality of military juntas in Sierra Leone is a harrowing tale marked by instability, violence, and widespread human rights abuses. Throughout the country's history, military coups have repeatedly disrupted democratic governance, plunging the nation into chaos and suffering.

Military juntas have often seized power through force, overthrowing democratically elected governments and imposing authoritarian rule. Basic civil liberties are curtailed, dissent is brutally suppressed, and the rule of law is undermined. Their grip on power is characterized by corruption, nepotism, and a disregard for the welfare of the populace.

In the aftermath of these juntas, Sierra Leone has faced immense challenges in rebuilding democratic institutions, promoting reconciliation, and fostering sustainable peace. The scars of past military juntas continue to linger, reminding us of the dangers of authoritarianism and the importance of upholding democratic values and principles.







## **Ernest Bai Koroma**

**President: 2007 - 2018**

Ernest Bai Koroma was elected Leader and presidential candidate of the All People's Congress (APC) in early 2002 at the party's national convention ahead of the 2002 Sierra Leone Presidential and Parliamentary Elections. Ernest Koroma contested the 2002 general and presidential elections against incumbent President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah of the SLPP party, who ran for a second presidential term. President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah emerged as the winner of that contest.

Soon after the 2002 elections, internal party disputes and court cases challenged Ernest Koroma's APC leadership. On 22 June 2005, the Supreme Court of Sierra Leone eventually stripped him of his de jure leadership of the APC party.

Ahead of the 2007 presidential and parliamentary elections, Ernest Koroma was

unanimously elected again as Leader and presidential candidate of the APC at the party's National Delegates Convention.

In the August 2007 general election, Ernest Koroma was elected the fourth president of the Republic of Sierra Leone after defeating his main rival, the incumbent Vice President of the SLPP.

President Ernest Bai Koroma's administration focused on promoting economic growth and development. The Agenda for Change and the Agenda for Prosperity initiatives aimed to stimulate investment, diversify the economy, and reduce poverty. His government invested in infrastructure, energy, and agriculture, laying the groundwork for long-term economic progress. He rebuilt the country's infrastructure after the decade-long brutal civil war that crippled the country's road infrastructure. The new road network construction across the country significantly opened up the country for private development.

President Koroma introduced several social welfare programs to improve ordinary Sierra Leoneans' lives. The Free Healthcare Initiative and the Free Quality Education program expanded access to healthcare and education, particularly for marginalized communities. In

April 2010, President Koroma signed into law the country's first free healthcare program for pregnant women, nursing mothers and children under the age of five.

To emphasize his commitment to fighting corruption, on September 4, 2008, President Koroma declared his assets to the Sierra Leone Anti-Corruption Commission and signed into law the country's new Anti-Corruption Bill of 2008. Under the new law, the president and other government officials are required to declare their assets and update them annually.

Despite efforts to spur economic development, Sierra Leone faced significant economic challenges during Koroma's presidency. The country grappled with high levels of poverty, unemployment, and underdevelopment, exacerbated by the global financial crisis and fluctuating commodity prices.

President Koroma's government faced several crises during his tenure, including the Ebola outbreak in 2014-2015 and natural disasters such as flooding and mudslides. While efforts were made to address these emergencies, there were concerns about the effectiveness of the response and the government's capacity to manage such crises.



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## **Julius Maada Bio**

### **President: 2018 - Present**

In 2005, retired Brigadier Julius Maada Bio contested for the leadership of the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) during the party's national convention. He lost that contest to then Vice President Solomon Berewa.

In 2011, in an unprecedented turn of events within the SLPP, some of Bio's loyalists forced their way during the party's convention and declared him leader and presidential candidate for the 2012 presidential elections. He eventually contested the elections against incumbent President Ernest Bai Koroma of the ruling APC. Bio lost to President Ernest Bai Koroma.

Maada Bio will again contest the 2018 presidential election, this time against Dr. Samura Kamara, the leader of the APC party. Following the highly contested election, Bio eventually emerged as the

winner and was sworn in as the fifth President of the Republic of Sierra Leone.

President Julius Maada Bio campaigned on the platform of a New Direction. He promised the people of Sierra Leone a New Direction - a united, peaceful, progressive, dynamic, confident, enterprising and happy nation where the people have unlimited access to jobs, food, education and health services and where there is equal justice and equal opportunity for all. The President promised to transform Sierra Leone into a Middle Income Country of the 21st Century. The flagship of his strategic priorities was to focus on developing the country's human capital through free education.

In his first two months in office, President Bio sacked all of Sierra Leone's ambassadors and permanent representatives abroad appointed by his predecessor, President Ernest Bai Koroma.

In his first year, President Bio's government announced that more than two million primary and secondary school children will be exempt from paying fees. But, on the flip side, subsidies for university students will be scrapped.

President Bio's administration set up a commission of inquiry and indicted all members of the APC administration.

Also in his first year, President Bio cancelled a China-funded US\$400 million loan agreement with the previous government to build a new international airport around Freetown. But he later signed a contract with the Turkish company, Summa, to build a terminal for US\$270 million.

By the end of his first five-year term, there was a rapid shift in the public's opinion about President Bio and his New Direction agenda. Millions of Sierra Leoneans with high hopes for his New Direction now see his agenda as mere pipedreams. If there is any movement in the socio-economic status of Sierra Leoneans, so far, it is backward in the opposite direction. The high cost of living, hunger, poverty, hardship, injustice, nepotism, intimidation, political intolerance, and the inability to attract investors today defines President Bio's presidency.

Corruption remained pervasive in various sectors of government and society. Challenges persist in providing reliable electricity, clean water, and transportation networks. Inadequate infrastructure hampered economic growth, hindered access to essential services, and limited opportunities for socio-economic development.

The aftermath of the controversial June 2023 elections still looms over his legacy.



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