



Report on Civic engagement with Ex-service men

*On Patriotism and National Unity at
Waterloo Western Rural District*

on the 9th of December, 2023.

Background:

There are thousands ex-service men in the Western rural communities of Waterloo and its environs who are disillusioned and easy targets for recruitments by rouge politicians. They are mostly used to cause mayhem and to intimidate their political opponents. Most of these people did not benefit from civic Education since it was removed from the school curriculum in the 1990s which left a negative impact on the culture of good citizenship, patriotism and nationalism.



The lack of patriotism, polarization, regional divide, hate speech, the use of social media to promote fake news, disinformation by political leaders have all worsen the political tensions in the country. The past two years have witnessed unprecedented levels of violent attacks, cyber-attacks by political leaders and Sierra Leoneans living abroad. Most of these incidences occurred in opposition areas which has become a danger to the peace and security of the state.

To address this problem, the National Council for Civic Education and Democracy continues to engage communities and institutions with peace and

national cohesion messages as well as tolerance and love messages for country.



Objectives

1. To mobilize and sensitize ex-service men and vulnerable communities on the need for peaceful coexistence and the need to be patriotic.
2. To increase knowledge of ex-service men and vulnerable communities on critical national challenges and efforts of government to address them.



Activities implemented

1. Radio discussions with executive members of Ex- service men in reaching out to their membership not to be involved in any form of

violence behavior but to use appropriate means in channeling their grievances.

2. Dialogue session with over hundred ex-service men at the Waterloo council Hall. Statements were delivered by representatives of the police, ONS, Chairman of the Waterloo council, Director of programs NaCCED, the ARMY and the National Coordinator of ex-service men. Each speaker stressed on the need to foster national cohesion and maintain peace and security which will lead to national development. Representatives of ex-service men advocated for more support towards the organization and their wellbeing.

Key Achievements

Bringing different groups of ex-service men together: SLA, RUF and Civil Defense Unit was according to the Director of Programme Mr. Johnny a deliberate effort just after the November “coup attempt” to nurture understanding of citizens’ rights and responsibility. Also the importance of peace and unity to National development.



Addressing the ex-servicemen, Police Superintendent Samuel Conteh

advised that it is not only for the benefit of the ex-service men but also for their families, communities, society and the entire sub region that they should move away from any form of violence, believe in peace and respect peace. He also cautioned that ex-service men have to be conscious and mindful of their actions because the law is there to hold them accountable if they default. That they should not allow anyone, be it politicians or friends convince them to engage in any unlawful act because they will be held accountable.

Mr. Kasho Holland-Cole, the Western Rural District Chairman noted that although he is a member of the APC, he does not condone violence and totally condemn it. He intimated that anyone who wants to become President should do so through the ballot box and that the days of military coups are over. He further cautioned that as ex-service men they should support the government of the day and they should alert the appropriate authorities when they see any strange persons or unusual happenings in their communities.

The deputy Director Strategic Communication for office of National Security said that Sierra Leone is a country that has gone through a lot and much has been done to foster national cohesion and development. He emphasized the importance of peace to national security and thanked NaCCED for the engagement.

Mr. Aziz Yokie, the National Coordinator of the ex-service men thanked NaCCED for the event. He advocated for more support for his constituents and emphasized their importance to peace and national development. He reminded all present that the elections were peaceful as a result of the hard work of the ex-service men. He admonished them against division and urged them to always stay united.

The Inter-Religious Council representative Mr. Kamara stressed on the Religious tolerance the country is known and admired for should not be destroyed if there is unrest or conflict. He admonished that ex-service should lead the way for peace as some of them bear the scars of the last Rebel war and say "Never Again" to any form of unrest. He also reminded them of the intermarriages amongst all ethnic groups which they should leverage on to maintain peace and stop the polarization.

Mr. Dumbuya a member of the ex-service men applauded NaCCED for giving them the opportunity to be listened to and made them feel valued. Speaking on behalf of his colleagues, he promised that they will remain peaceful and foster tolerance in their communities and country at large. He also appealed to the authorities to assist them with their especially war wounded ex-service men.



Lessons Learnt

- Key engagements requires the presence the stakeholders/ Heads of institutions like the police, Army and Office of National Security.
- Specific people like ex-service men should not be neglected as they may be easily prevailed upon when there is unrest.
- The need for one central command as ex-service men.

Challenges

- Funding issues in reaching out to more ex-service men
- Sustaining engagement

Conclusion

The session was well attended with over a hundred ex-service men in attendance including the Army, RUF and Civil defense Unit. They were given the opportunity to express their views and talked about their concerns.

Recommendations

- More engagements with these interest groups at all times
- Key stakeholders to attend such sessions so they can have first-hand information from the ex-service men themselves.
- More coordination amongst ex-service men, not to regard each other as rival groups.