



**NATIONAL GRAND COALITION PARTY**

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## **PRESS STATEMENT ON THE INCIDENTS SURROUNDING THE RELOCATION OF AN EGTC GENERATOR FROM MAKENI RESULTING IN FATALITIES**

**22<sup>nd</sup> July 2020**

The National Grand Coalition (NGC) is very concerned that the planned relocation of a 1.6 MW EGTC generator from Makeni to Lungi has resulted in so much mayhem and fatalities.

Having carefully considered various comments made by the Minister of Energy, the Mayor of Makeni City, eyewitness reports and held discussions with various affected and interested parties to this issue, the NGC comments on this unfortunate issue as follows:

1. The fact that a normal event like the movement of a generator by a utility from one location to another could result in so much chaos is indicative of the deep political divisions that exist in this country between the two major political parties, the SLPP and APC, which only consider issues through a political lens.
2. Whatever may be the merits of moving the generator, it is apparent that there were both communication and cooperation problems between the government, Makeni City Council and other local stakeholders. In such instances, the dissemination of fake news to poor unsuspecting and gullible youths for political gain is not surprising.
3. The urge by the Ministry of Energy to transfer the generator at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour for use at the airport is indicative of poor planning on the part of the Ministry.
4. The riotous conduct of youths resulting in damage to property was not justified. However, the recent protest of youths in this manner in several locations for various reasons is indicative of the underlying problems our poor, unemployed and restive youths are currently facing.
5. The firing of live rounds by security forces, resulting in the death of five unarmed youths and injuries to several more is totally unjustified and unnecessary.
6. The killing of unarmed people by our security forces has made international headlines more recently. This is concerning and dents the country's image.

The NGC supports the right of citizens to peaceful protests but acknowledges that the state has a responsibility to fight lawlessness and riotous conduct when protests degenerate to such a state. Notwithstanding this, we unequivocally condemn this use of live ammunition and disproportionate force on unarmed youths and innocent bystanders resulting in deaths.

While the killings of unarmed people, including youths, by security forces has been going on for many years, it has become much too frequent recently as can be seen from the events at Lunsar, Makeni and the prison riots. No independent investigations have taken place of these events despite appeals made by several organizations, including the NGC, for independent enquiry. We are particularly concerned that rules of engagement for security forces in the use of firearms on unarmed civilians have not been

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taken seriously and, more importantly, that the force for good and other armed State security of which we were once proud in Sierra Leone are now being perceived as trigger-happy commandos of death. We repeat that the NGC does not support or condone violence and unlawful conduct on the part of civilians, however legitimate their demands may be. However, it is also time for Government to make it easy for those who so desire to protest or demonstrate, whether in favour of Government or not, so that citizens and security forces alike will get used to this channel as a peaceful and orderly means of democratic expression rather than as an invitation to mayhem or extra-judicial killings.

The NGC also notes that the Operational Support Division (OSD) of the Sierra Leone Police is a paramilitary force originally established and trained as such. As a result, it does not seem to be equipped to deal with civilian riots. It is therefore our view that the OSD needs to be completely retrained and equipped with the correct gear to enable them deal with civilian riots. Tear gas, pepper spray, taser guns, water cannons, rubber bullets, helmets, batons and shields should be the equipment the majority of them should be trained to use, rather than assault weapons and live ammunition.

The NGC therefore calls on the government to take the following steps in order to prevent a recurrence of the incident in Makeni:

1. Speed up planned measures to engender national reconciliation and heal the big divide between the SLPP and APC in particular.
2. Invite State and non-State actors to examine the underlying economic and social factors responsible for the involvement of youth in political violence, so that better solutions will be found that do not involve the shedding of blood.
3. Establish an independent and credible inquiry to investigate these deaths, and to look at the increasing use of firearms by our security forces to break up protests.
4. Carry out retraining and reequipping of the Operational Support Division of the Sierra Leone Police and repurpose the division to deal with civilian riots.

To the parents, relatives and friends of those who died in the recent Makeni protests, the NGC extends our heartfelt sympathy for the loss of their loved ones. We do sincerely hope and pray that by working together in unity and for the love of our country, politics shall soon be free of hate and violence.

The NGC wishes to remind all Sierra Leoneans that our main concern at this time should be what we as individuals can do to protect ourselves and others against the spread of the dangerous corona virus. God save our country, Sierra Leone.

Dr. Dennis Bright



Chairman and Leader

NGC.