



**ALL PEOPLES CONGRESS (APC)**  
**MOTTO: ACTION PROGRESS COMMITMENT**

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<b>Our Ref:</b>	<b>Your Ref:</b>			<b>29<sup>th</sup> July 2020</b>

His Excellency the President-Through  
The Secretary to the President  
State House  
Tower Hill  
Freetown.

Dear Sir,

**CONCERNS OVER THE CONDUCT OF A 'MID-TERM' CENSUS IN SIERRA  
LEONE IN DECEMBER 2020**

We as a party wish to acknowledge the proclamation of the President, His Excellency Dr. Julius Maada Bio for the conduct of a Mid-Term Census in Sierra Leone from 4th -19th December, 2020. This proclamation was made on Wednesday, the 22nd of July, 2020. We further note that undertaking a Census exercise in the country is a laudable effort given the benefits which are derived thereof, including estimating the population quota for the delineation of constituency boundaries across the country; the distribution of resources for local council development; socio-economic assessment; and for research purposes.

While we are not averse to the conduct of a Census throughout the country (and in fact we as a Party are prepared to support any legitimate process), we wish to draw the attention of Your Excellency the President, the government, and the International Community to key concerns we have as a Party bordering on the legality, timing, preparedness, and credibility of the proposed Mid-term Census process.

**1. Legality of the proposed mid-term Census**

The APC Party holds the view that although the President has the authority to proclaim the conduct of a Census in Sierra Leone as enshrined in Chapter IV, Section 38, Subsection 7 of the 1991 Constitution and the Census Act, 2002, the use of the term 'Mid-term' to describe the proposed census (Mid-term Census) is illegal and cannot therefore be used to describe the conduct

of a Population Census in Sierra Leone. This is because a 'Census' is always a 'Census'.

A Census is a total count of all the people within the geographical area of Sierra Leone, citizens and non-citizens alike, within a given period of time. Therefore, we believe that the term 'Mid-term' was used in error to describe the proposed census in order to cover-up or by-pass critical processes that must be followed to ensure the credibility of the Census process.

Therefore, we believe that there is no known legal instrument either from the 2002 Census Act or from the Constitution that mandates government and Statistics Sierra Leone (Stats-SL) to conduct a 'Mid-term Census' in Sierra Leone. The conduct of this proposed Mid-term Census is therefore flawed and illegal, and hence will not contribute to the development and progress of the country.

## **2. The Timing of the Census**

Permit me to please draw your attention to the fact that all censuses in Sierra Leone and in most countries around the world including the UK, Ghana and Nigeria are decennial. This means that censuses are conducted within a ten year interval in these countries. In the case of Sierra Leone, the first modern Census was conducted in 1963. Except where circumstances necessitated a delay as was the case in the 1990s due to rebel war, all censuses in Sierra Leone were conducted in roughly 10 years apart. Since the last Census was conducted in 2015, barely five years ago, the question is why the rush to do any other Census in 2020? This question is even more pertinent given the current Covid-19 outbreak, the state of emergency, and the weak financial position of the state, which has been so popularized by your government. We believe that the resources to be allocated to the 'Mid-term' Census could better be reprogrammed to meet the bread and butter issues facing this country.

## **3. Absence of Statutory Subcommittees**

Let me remind you sir, that although the Census Act of 2002 gives the mandate to HE the President to proclaim the conduct of a Census taking exercise of all the population of Sierra Leone, it is Statistics Sierra Leone that is charged with the responsibility of planning and implementing the Census activities as the Statistician General is the Chief Census Officer. However, it is sad to note that Stats SL has lost its national character at all levels of its current staff structure as well as the Statistics Council. The current management structure of Stats SL is such that more than 90 percent of the management and senior staff are from the South Eastern part of the country, most of whom have little or no statistical background or experience. How can such an organization, which has lost credibility in the eyes of many Sierra Leoneans, be able to conduct a credible Census in this country? The illegal sacking of more than 200 professional staff of that institution has left Stats SL administratively vulnerable and professionally weak; and hence cannot conduct such highly technical statistical activity to meet set standards with the current crop of new and inexperienced staff.



In addition, we are aware that the Census is the largest statistical undertaking in any country. It therefore requires thorough planning, consultation, and advocacy if it is to achieve its purpose of producing credible data for development planning. In this regard, the Census Act of 2002 provides that before a Census is undertaken, two subcommittees must be formed to guide the process. These committees are: the Census Technical Committee (CTC) and Census Advisory Committee (CAC). The composition of the CTC in particular will draw from technical expertise of stakeholders including Universities, relevant Public and Professional Institutions, Civil Societies, the UN agencies (UNFPA), Political Parties, etc.

Both the Census Technical and Advisory Committees will assist Statistics Sierra Leone to prepare the road map for the implementation of all Census activities which starts with recruitment of staff for cartographic mapping (process of demarcating the country into small geographical areas called enumeration areas); preparation of census data collection instruments; publicity; hiring and training of enumeration staff; field data collection; data entry; analysis; report writing and dissemination. Based on the information available, these two committees, which are supposed to provide such technical guidance to the Census processes are yet to be constituted; and this implies that the pre-census enumeration activities which Statistics Sierra Leone is currently undertaking are not in line with the laws of the land and international best practice for census taking. Given the fact that December is just 4 months away, the absence of such committees therefore undermines the credibility of the whole census process and hence its outcome.

#### **4. Undertaking Preparatory Activities**

We in the APC believe that any Census exercise requires more than two years of preparatory work from the date of proclamation by HE the President to the actual count due to the series of stages involved in the conduct of a credible Census. One of such key pre-census activities is the cartographic work, which involves the mapping of the country in smaller areas called Enumeration Area (EA). An EA is the area in which one data collector will work during the Census period to count all inhabitants therein. No credible Census will take place without a total and complete cartographic work done in all sections and chiefdoms of this country. The last Census carved 12,856 EAs during the 2013 and 2014 cartographic work. Many of these EAs, especially in the urban areas had overgrown their initial households and population estimated in 2014. This means that, until and unless a thorough cartographic work is done prior to the conduct of the actual Census count in December 2020, the exercise will be waste of taxpayers' monies and donor funds. Judging by the advert put out by Stats SL for various field positions, one can deduce that the cartographic work is yet to commence. A normal cartographic exercise for a Census of this nature would last for a minimum of 12 months. This means the December 4-19 period proclaimed by Your Excellency, the President is not feasible and very much unrealistic.



Also alongside the cartographic field mapping, the development of the census questionnaire is very key, and Statistics Sierra Leone cannot be the sole institution that would finalize such an instrument. All sections of the society, data users and producers including the civil societies, Members of Parliament and political parties must be involved in the development of the questionnaire. However, to date, no such opportunity has been availed to the general public to contribute to the questionnaire; which makes the proposed Census appear to be conducted in secrecy.

Even where the questionnaire has been developed, such instrument has to be programmed into the Computer Aided Personal Interview (CAPI) devices or tablets as proposed by Your Excellency the President. Such an exercise will take some time given the fact that a Pilot Census must be conducted in order to test the questionnaire as well as the entire Census process before the main exercise is conducted in December. To date, such a pilot census has not been conducted, although the December 4th is just around the corner. International best practice recommends that a pilot census is conducted at least 6 months before the actual count; this will give enough time for the analysis of the Pilot Census data and writing the Pilot Census Report. The report will guide the review and updating of the Census instruments before the count.

### **5. The Involvement of International Experts**

International best practice, and especially our history of censuses in Sierra Leone, requires that International Experts recruited by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) be part of the Census process from the beginning to the end of the exercise. The two critical experts that MUST be part of the Census process are the Census Chief Technical Advisor and the Cartographic Expert. These two experts would provide guidance and direction to the entire Census operations to ensure that international standards are met at every stage of the process. To date, no International Expert is in post, although the Census is scheduled to take place in December 2020. Other logistical arrangements include procurement of census materials and equipment, the recruitment and training of field teams, printing and distribution of EA maps required for all levels of training; and the concomitant financial implications; which would require international support and guidance. To date, no such support has been given to the census process.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, we as a Party note with grave concern the following for Your Excellency's kind attention:

i) That the Census processes require at least two years of preparatory work before the actual count. This means that the 4 months planning period is unrealistic and uncalled for. The timing for adequate preparations to be done has an effect on the credibility of the data that would be collected. This process

is thus flawed by manner and procedure adopted to hurriedly conduct a Mid-term Census.

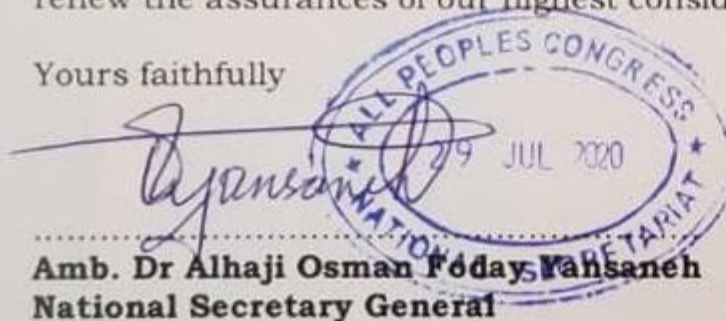
ii) The limited time slated for the Census and the rush around it, as well as the absence of international experts and the subcommittees meant to guide the process means that this government has ulterior motives behind the proposed illegal Mid-term Census. To date, only the government and Stats SL know that there will be a Census in December 2020; other stakeholders have not been involved in the process.

iii) That the so-called Mid-term Census is being used as a conduit by the government to derail the conduct of the Local Council Elections in 2022 and the General Elections in 2023. We believe that such an attempt to illegally prolong the tenure of this SLPP led-government will undermine our democracy and threaten the peace and quiet of our country.

The A.P.C is therefore calling on government to take a critical look at all of these issues and the time available between now and December to reach a reasonable conclusion that we do not have enough time to carry out all pre-census enumeration activities. We therefore advise the government not to go ahead with any type of Census, given the time available to complete all preparatory activities before the actual count. Failing to heed this advice will be a mere waste of state resources.

While we count on your usual cooperation and understanding, we wish to renew the assurances of our highest consideration at all times.

Yours faithfully



**Amb. Dr Alhaji Osman Foday Vansaneh**  
**National Secretary General**

CC:

1. Statistician General, Stats SL
2. UN Resident Coordinator
3. EU Head of Delegation
4. UK Ambassador
5. USA Ambassador
6. Irish Ambassador
7. UNFPA Country Representative
8. All Political Parties
9. Mr. Stefan Schweinfest, Director of the UN Statistics Division
10. DfID Country Representative
11. All Civil Society Organisations
12. The Press