

Fourah Bay College Campus
Mount Aureol
29th May 2021

The Deputy Vice Chancellor
Fourah Bay College
University of Sierra Leone
Mount Aureol

Dear Sir,

Letter of Concern regarding the Conduct of the 2021 Students' Union (SU) Election

We write concerning the above subject and wish to bring to your attention several issues surrounding the conduct of the 2021 SU election at Fourah Bay College which is slated for Wednesday 2nd June 2021. Sir, we are of the strong opinion that if these issues are not adequately addressed to ensure fairness, transparency, and inclusive participation of all, it has the proclivity to undermine the entire gains we have collectively made to ensure the 2021 SU election is peaceful.

Irregularities on the Registered Voters' List

On Friday 28th May 2021 at about 5:00 p.m., the Administration published the list of eligible voters for the SU elections. We have reviewed the list and have discovered the following:

- That Fatmata Binta Jalloh, Final Honours 1 student of the Law Department and a leading aspirant in this SU election did not see her name on the voter register, despite concluding her online registration way back on April 10th, 2021. She completed the said process when the Administrative Assistant of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Law verified and stamped her Sierra Leone Government Grant-in-Aid (SLG) documents. Attached in this letter is proof of her registration form. The shocking side to this is the fact that Fatmata Binta Jalloh went through a successful nomination process and was duly confirmed as a registered student eligible to contest in the SU election. Sir, we are surprised at this anomaly and have reason to conclude that there is a methodical ploy to prejudice the electioneering process.
- Adama Sillah, another aspirant in the race, only completed her online registration on the 22nd May 2021, after the expiration of the deadline date of the 19th May 2021 set by the University Administration for the submission of applications for the SU presidential election. Frustratingly and most surprisingly, she had her name included in a registered voters' list that was supposed to comprise of students who had completed their registrations as against the 20th May 2021, according to the Administration.

It is difficult to understand that the Administration is seen to be accommodating the conduct of a candidate who has evidently not conformed to the rules governing the rules of the election. By all indications, Adama Sillah, having completed her registration after the 19th May deadline, is not qualified and eligible to contest in this election.

- The voters' list published by the Administration included the names of students who had registered against the 20th May 2021 deadline, those who registered after the deadline, and also those who have not registered at all. Sir, we wish to underscore that a significant proportion of the students who have already completed their registration process have been maliciously and mysteriously omitted from the published voters' list. This situation does not only blemish the electoral process, but it is also a recipe for disorder.
- Moreover, we have discovered that a majority of continuing students who have paid their fees and are beneficiaries of SLG, could not complete their registration because the University Administration failed to provide sessional transcripts in time for these students. For instance, despite assurances from the authorities to make the transcripts available, LLB II students were only notified of the availability of these documents on the 28th of May 2021.

Based on the foregoing, we are requesting that the Administration addresses these issues and corrects the above-highlighted irregularities as we head into the election on Wednesday 2nd June 2021. In addition, we hereby recommend the following:

- That the Administration provides a genuine and comprehensive voters' list of all paid up and registered students from the university portal. Thereafter, a window should be granted by the Administration and a process instituted to resolve all issues surrounding registration to ensure that the process is fair, transparent, and inclusive.
- That, since the unavailability of sessional transcripts prevented hundreds of continuing students from completing registration even though they had completed the online aspect of registration, we hereby request an extension of time for registration to capture the names of these students on the voters' list who are about to be completely disenfranchised.
- That the candidacy of Adama Sillah is not procedural, did not meet the advertised deadline set by the university administration, unacceptable, and is not qualified to vote or be voted for. We, therefore, request that her name be removed from the final list of qualified candidates to contest this election since she failed to complete her registration in accordance with the deadline set by the administration.
- That the composition of the Elections Committee is published, vetted, and accepted by the candidates. This Committee should consist of members of the Administration who are independent, fair, and have no history of inappropriate involvement in SU politics.

Conduct of Elections

According to a notice titled "The Way Forward for the FBC Students' Union Elections" issued by the University Media Director that elections will be conducted on the 2nd June 2021, we wish to make the following observations on the issues presented in the notice:

- **“No gathering is permitted on campus”:** As students, we believe that it is impracticable to hold SU elections on campus without open campaigns. Besides, this is the first time that aspirants have not been given specific days as per good electoral practice to campaign to voters. In addition, we consider the “no gathering on campus” rule as an infringement on the fundamental constitutional rights of students to freely assemble and associate according to Section 26 of Act No. 6 of the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone.

We suggest that the Administration gives all candidates a fair opportunity to campaign openly on campus consistent with the practice governing the conduct of elections.

- **“National Electoral Commission (NEC) will assist to conduct elections in terms of providing ballot boxes and supervisors on the Election Day”:** If it is the case that NEC will assist in conducting the elections by providing ballot boxes and supervisors on the election day, we are particularly concerned about the security features of the ballot papers, and how they will be printed and secured. We recommend strongly that the ballot papers to be printed for this election carry basic security features such as an indication of serial numbers on each ballot paper to prevent fraudulent activities. However, the decision about these features must be agreed upon by all the qualified candidates.
- **“All polling stations will be at the Amphitheatre, FBC”:** To ensure a clear and orderly process, the elections team must state the number of polling stations and indicate whether each polling station will be designated to a particular faculty or department. The supposed location for the tally centre must also be expressly clear, and the tally process and counting of votes must be done openly in the presence of polling agents and independent observers only.
- **“Every aspirant will have two agents in every polling station”:** We propose that every polling agent must be a qualified voter and must have an identification card (ID) certified by the organisers of the elections. This ID must include the name of the polling agent, department, level, student registration number, and signature of the lead election officer. We also suggest that in the event of an emergency occurrence impeding the ability of a polling agent to carry out their function, provision should be made for replacement with another agent.
- **“Elections will start at 9 a.m. and end at 3:00 p.m.”:** While it is proposed that the end time for voting should be 3:00 p.m., we recommend that all students standing in their respective queues before 3:00 p.m., but who may not have voted by then, must be allowed to do so without hindrance.
- **“Every voter should have authentic or valid identification (college ID card, passport, voter card, driving license, NASSIT card, library card, e.t.c.)”:** The possibility exists for a registered student not to have the above-mentioned ID cards. We suggest that provision be made for a qualified voter to present transcripts, acceptance letters, registration forms, and their WASSCE results - an official document that has both their names and photos.

- **"The Elections Committee will print 2,500 ballot papers because the expected number of registered students is around 2000":** We believe that the basis for the decision to print 2,500 ballot papers is weak and questionable, and the number has been set arbitrarily. We expect that the ballot papers to be printed must be equivalent to the number of students in the final registered voters' list.

Blatant Disenfranchisement of Diploma and Certificate Students

Sir, we also wish to draw your attention to a notice dated 12th May 2021 issued by the Warden of Students. Bullet 5 of this notice indicated that "diploma and certificate students are not eligible to vote". As students, we are completely appalled by this decision and we consider it as a deliberate ploy to discriminate against legitimate students of Fourah Bay College, who have duly paid their fees including SU subscription, and are equally affected by every decision related to SU activities.

Clearly, this contravenes Section 27(2) Act No.6 of the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone which states that "subject to the provisions of sub-section (6), (7) and (8), no person shall be treated in a discriminatory manner by any person acting by virtue of any law or in the performance of the functions of any public office or any public authority".

Sir, finally, we wish to bring to your attention that the guiding document governing SU activities is the FBC SU Constitution. In section 11(8), it provides that the voters' list shall be the list of registered students prepared by the registry for the academic year for which the election is held. After a thorough examination of section 11 (Elections) of the FBC SU constitution, we wish to mention unequivocally that no provision prohibits diploma and certificate students from voting. We believe that in a higher institution of learning like Fourah Bay College, which is supposed to be the pace-setter in recognising inclusive participation and fairness, an attempt to exclude a significant proportion of students in this manner is not only insufferable but also unconstitutional. To this end, we request that you prudently reconsider your decision to ban diploma and certificate students and grant them their rights to participate in selecting their Students' Union administration.

Conclusively, we would be very grateful if you kindly look into these concerns so that an amicable path will be defined for the conduct of the 2021 SU election. We assure you that we will cooperate fully in this election once we are assured that the process is impartial, transparent, and free from undue influence.

Sincerely,

Fatmata Binta Jalloh
FBC SU Candidate

Hymanson Johnson
FBC SU Candidate

Morison Ngobeh
FBC SU Candidate

Copy to:

The Vice Chancellor, University of Sierra Leone

The Registrar, University of Sierra Leone

The Deputy Registrar, Fourah Bay College

The Warden of Students, Fourah Bay College

The Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Tertiary and Higher Education

Speaker, House of Parliament

Deputy Speaker, House of Parliament

Chairman, Parliamentary Oversight Committee on Education

Secretary to the President, State House

United States Ambassador to the Republic of Sierra Leone

British High Commissioner to the Republic of Sierra Leone

Head of European Delegation to the Republic of Sierra Leone

Diplomatic and Consular Corps

Inspector General, Sierra Leone Police

National Security Coordinator, Office of National Security

Fourth Estate

Civil Society Organisations