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HUNGER LINGERS ON IN SIERRA LEONE

Press statement by the National Grand Coalition

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“Considering its small population size (8.3 million), (Sierra Leone) had West Africa’s highest national prevalence of people in Crisis or worse”. This statement is found in the UN sponsored 2021 Global Report on Food Crises. People in crises or Phase 3 means those who are struggling to have the minimum food they need to survive, are malnourished, deprived and therefore need urgent help. In other words, Sierra Leoneans are currently the hungriest and most food insecure in the whole of West Africa. This observation was made before the COVID restrictions were imposed, so one can imagine what the common man in Sierra Leone has been going through.

“The numbers of people in Crisis or worse (Phase 3 or above) escalated dramatically between late 2019 and mid-2020 in Sierra Leone. During the June–August 2020 lean season, more than 1.3 million people were in Crisis or worse (Phase 3 or above), mainly in the coastal districts of Bonthe and Moyamba, and the eastern district of Kenema, which were all classified in Crisis.” (GRFC 2021)

Interestingly, since October 2019 the National Grand Coalition party (NGC) has been urging the Government of Sierra Leone to address as a matter of urgency the problem of extreme hardship that people were experiencing in their daily lives due to the worsening economic situation in the country. On 6th October 2019, the NGC published the first of four surveys showing how the prices of basic foodstuffs had escalated since the current Government took over in 2018, a situation that had come to be described as “di gron dry.”

An Afrobarometer survey confirmed what the NGC market surveys were showing:

“Dissatisfaction with the country’s economy and personal living conditions is reflective of citizens’ increasing levels of deprivation in their everyday lives, as large majorities experience shortages of food, clean water, and other basic necessities.” (Afrobarometer, 19 August 2020)

Now it is the World Food Program, a UN agency, that is predicting worsening “High levels of acute food insecurity” in 2021 “with almost 1.8 million people

forecast to be in Crisis or worse (CH Phase 3 or above) in June–August 2021.” Within this category of sufferers, 90,000 will be reaching Emergency Phase 4, meaning near-starvation point and possible death.

This is no situation to be proud of. This Government may not be the originator of all the problems in the country but they have a responsibility to fix them; and in the hierarchy of problems they have to fix, which one (apart from maybe health) which one is more important than food? The people are hungry! And some are dying already of hunger-related conditions.

When one listens to official speeches it becomes clear that these people are having fun ignoring or trivializing the real problems of the people. Speaking of Agriculture and Food security, the President’s last speech in Parliament was full of promises that they “will” be doing things and more things; meanwhile the people are hungry and dying. They have been distributing cash around as the smell of elections rises, but whether the cash will permanently bring down hunger, time will tell.

For now, the NGC team returns from the market where they have been finding out whether prices of foodstuffs have dropped or are still rising since 2018. Again, this is not beef steak and chips, chicken nuggets, shrimp cocktail, barracuda steak, lobsters or great Californian wine that successful people swallow every day in beach restaurants and hangouts. This is garri, rice, bonga, palm oil, plassas, maggi, items that Mammy Fatu needs to put a small pot of soup together so that her children and grandchildren may not starve:

ITEM	PRICES IN MARCH 2018	PRICES AS AT AUGUST 2019	PRICES AS AT AUGUST 2020	PRICES AS AT MARCH 2021	PERCENTAGE % INCREASE
RICE PER BAG	Le 235,000	Le 280,000	Le 330,000	Le 330,000	40%
OIL PER GALLON	LE 170,000	LE 210,000	LE 210,000	LE 300,000	76%
PINT OIL	LE 3,500	LE 4,000	LE 4,500	LE 6,000	71%
COAL PER BAG	LE 30,000	LE 35,000	LE 37,000	LE 40,000	33%
RICE PER CUP	Le 1,200	Le 1,700	Le 2,500	Le 2,000	67%

GARRI PER CUP	Le 500	Le 1,000	1,250	Le 1000	100%
FISH (FOR ONE SMALL BONGA)	LE 500	LE 1,000	LE 1,000	Le 2000	300%
PALM OIL (PER GALLON)	Le 120,000	Le 170,000	Le 180,000	Le 270,000	125%
PALM OIL (PER PINT)	Le 2,500	Le 3,500	Le 4,000	Le 4,000	60%
PLASAS (SMALL TIE)	Le 500	Le 1,000	Le 1,000	Le 3,000	500%
ONIONS PER BAG	Le 120,000	Le 350,000	Le 250,000	Le 210,000	75%
ONIONS (UNIT PRICE)	Le 500	Le 2,500	Le 1,000	Le 2,000	300%
BULGUR (PER CUP)	Le 2,500	Le 4,000	Le5,000	Le 5,000	100%
CHICKEN FEET PER CARTOON	Le 125,000	Le 170,000	Le 170,000	Le 190,000	52%
MAGGI (UNIT)	Le 250	Le 700	Le 500	Le 500	100%
BEEF (PER POUND)	Le 18,000	Le 22,000	Le 25,000	Le 40,000	122%
COOKERY -WITH NO FISH & NO BEEF (PLATE)	Le 3,000	Le 4,000	Le 5,000	Le 5,000	67%

PEPPER (PER CUP)	Le 700	Le 1,000	Le 7,000	Le 4,000	471 %
USA DOLLAR (SELLING RATE)	Le 750,000 \$100	Le 980,000 \$ 100	Le 1,090,000 \$ 100	Le 1,040,000 \$100	39 % increase in dollar vs drop in Leones
USA DOLLAR (BUYING RATE)	Le 765,000 \$ 100	Le 995,000 \$ 100	Le 1,080,000 \$100	Le 1,030,000 \$ 100	35 % increase in dollar value vs Leones

DR. DENNIS BRIGHT



CHAIRMAN AND LEADER