



## NGC PRESS BRIEFING ON THE PARTY'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO GOVERNANCE FROM AN OPPOSITION PARTY STANDPOINT

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### THE NATIONAL GRAND COALITION (NGC) COUNTRY FIRST PRINCIPLE

The National Grand Coalition party (NGC) stands as the third largest political party in Sierra Leone by virtue of the number of votes cast with four seats in Parliament, one District Council Chairman and 19 elected councilors in Kambia, Koinadugu and Falaba districts. Since the conclusion of the elections in 2018, the NGC party has been pursuing its unique style of constructive opposition. We have been supporting those policies of Government that we consider as being in the best interest of the country and opposing the negative policies and actions that may adversely affect the people of this country. We will continue to do so as this is in line with our guiding principle of putting our "Country First" in whatever we say or do.

Today's Press Briefing is meant to highlight the great work our party has been doing over the years in defending the interests of the millions of voiceless Sierra Leoneans who continue to suffer in poverty. We serve the people of Sierra Leone in accordance with our responsibility as a political party "to participate in shaping the political will of the people, to disseminate information on political ideas, social and economic programmes of a national character..."

### NGC IN PARLIAMENT

Our members of Parliament have proven to be some of the most critical voices in the house of Parliament. In line with our unique style of constructive opposition our party has been very instrumental in pushing for:

**WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT:** According to an evaluation done by USAID, women in Sierra Leone account for over 52% of the total population in the country yet occupy less than 20% of elected positions. While our women continue to bear the brunt of economic hardship in the country, their voices, participation, visibility and representation are alarmingly kept low. Our party has been advocating vigorously alongside civil society partners for women and we will continue to do so until a



significant degree of gender equity is achieved. Ironically, we note that while Government is congratulating itself for the introduction of a Gender Empowerment Bill, authorities have been deliberately humiliating and persecuting the few women of excellence who occupy very senior positions of authority such as the Mayor of Freetown and the Auditor General; simply for being upright and professional.

**DIASPORA VOTING:** Our party believes that a representative democracy is ensured by the conduct of free, fair and credible elections, one in which all eligible citizens are counted to vote, and whose votes are counted. This fundamental human right is not automatically relinquished by citizens when they emigrate. Sierra Leoneans in the diaspora contribute significantly to the economic development of Sierra Leone. This critical role is recognized by each of the four major political parties in their manifestos for the 2018 elections. Accordingly, all the parties variably promised in their manifestos that enabling diasporas to register and vote at a location in or near their countries of residence (i.e. diaspora voting or out-of-country voting) is one way to facilitate such contributions. The NGC party has been the most vociferous on this issue, lobbying with the Government and using every available platform including the House of Parliament. There is no law against Sierra Leoneans registering and voting in locations outside the country. In support of this the NGC actually prepared a project that we presented to the Government through the office of the Chief Minister and which shows that it is so easy to put in place the administrative and technical facilities and procedures that there is no reason why diaspora cannot register and vote in the 2023 elections at centres abroad.

**DUAL CITIZENSHIP.** Our party believes that natural born Sierra Leonean whose original citizenship is Sierra Leonean being of direct Sierra Leonean lineage should not be disenfranchised just because they have acquired an additional citizenship making them dual citizens. A landmark ruling by the Supreme Courts of Sierra Leone last year reaffirmed the NGC party's position that dual citizenship status should not deprive Sierra Leoneans born or of Sierra Leonean lineage of the right to vote or be voted for.

**CYBER CRIME BILL:** On the 23rd of June 2021 the Parliament of Sierra Leone passed into law the Bill entitled **"The Cyber Security and Crime Act 2021"** but not without days of scrutiny and intensive debates championed by NGC members of Parliament



and a few others. This resulted in some critical amendments to the original bill to ensure that the fundamental freedom of speech, freedom of expression and the right to privacy of Sierra Leoneans are not infringed upon.

**ETHNIC AUDIT:** Leading a nation that is united, free and just are core values of the NGC party. Unfortunately, in recent times, administrations have been insensitive to the need for maintaining tribal and regional balance in appointments to critical positions in public service. Sadly, it has now become common practice for people to be sacked, sometimes unceremoniously, disgraced and deprived of daily bread whenever a new Government is formed purely because they belong to a certain tribe or are perceived to come from a particular region. This, in our opinion, has contributed greatly not only to tribal division but also to the deep anger, bitterness and hate that now defines every aspect of life in Sierra Leone. To begin addressing this concern, our members of parliament led by Hon. Dr. Alhaji Kandeh Kolleh Yumkella, have been calling for a bill that requires ethnic inclusion and by which in addition to the usual requirements such as qualifications, competency and experience, not more than 30% of a single ethnic group will be allowed to occupy positions in specific public institutions.

**AUDIT REPORT & PERVASIVE CORRUPTION:** The NGC party is deeply concerned with the current administration's poor record of compliance with established laws, rules and procedures; and we are even more concerned with the emerging picture of lack of accountability and transparency and the wasteful spending of taxpayers' money by the current administration as revealed in Audit Reports published since they assumed office. Even though the current Government has gone to great lengths, using their Transition Reports and three Commissions of Inquiry, to show the nation and the world that the previous Government was corrupt, the Audit reports and the serial disclosures of the Africanist Press are indicating that there is massive real-time corruption happening now. The extravagant lifestyles of senior public officials today are visible signs of stealing going on, and the thieves know themselves. Interestingly, there has been no serious attempt to disprove the documented allegations made by Africanist Press of massive looting of public funds by senior Government officials. In February 2021, the NGC, attempted to find out the truth about Africanist Press allegations of huge sums of Government money being paid into an account opened for or by the First Lady. We had the right to do so as guaranteed to every citizen by the Right To Access



Information Act, 2013. We never received any information and the Bank Governor for instance spoke about confidentiality commitments to their clients even though we were asking about public money. While the Government and ACC is boasting that it is fighting corruption, the ACC can still not tell us what happened to the 49,000 bags of Chinese donated rice that disappeared in the hands of Government. The NGC will continue to remind them that the Chinese rice remains a monumental signpost of ACC's impotence to address corruption happening now. The current saga over the most recent Audit Report is most revealing and in our view is the most daring display by this Government of disregard for procedure and refusal of transparency and accountability. Just days before she was to release her Audit Report, the Auditor General was suspended and a tribunal announced to investigate her for some yet unknown "unprofessional" action or activities. Meanwhile, in her absence, an Audit Report has been taken to Parliament which, investigative reports claim, is different from the original one, in that chunks of the original that contain very damning information about corruption have been removed. The NGC has been very vocal in condemning the treatment of the Auditor General as an assault on integrity and professionalism.

## **HARDSHIP FOR THE ORDINARY CITIZEN**

Whenever a disaster occurs such as flooding in a slum area or the fire disaster at Waterloo the papers always carry pictures of Government officials visiting the scenes looking sad and sorry. But there is a bigger disaster happening everyday that no one seems to be visiting; that is hardship.

NGC, in a simple but eloquent way has been capturing this disaster since October 2019 by going down to the market at intervals and recording the rapidly increasing prices of foodstuff that the very poor people need to survive. Some individuals close to Government have even mocked us for this approach. But we at the NGC maintain that every responsible Government has a duty to go close to the people to find out how they manage to live from day to day, so that they can get their priorities right by catering for the needs of the people they govern.

Since 2018 when the New Direction government descended on us, the prices of basic items such as rice, oil and garri have risen to very high levels whereas the people's



household income have remained the same, except for those who earn the minimum wage that had a raise of 20%, But what can one do with a 20% increase when for instance in relation to August 2018 prices, the price of rice per cup is up by 67%, garri by 100%, bonga by 500%, small tie plassas by 500%, cookery (with no beef or fish) 67% and peppeh by 1,329% as at August last year. This is the real disaster, not mudslide this time, but “human slide”. We at the NGC have done all we can to draw the attention of Government to this terrible human slide into hunger and deprivation that has already started taking lives. Their best response has been to refer us to the Free education that has put the tuition money back into the parents’ pockets. The NGC has welcomed the Free Quality Education project for bringing some relief to parents (although we have serious reservations about the quality aspect) but we have discovered that the rising cost of living has significantly reduced any positive impact that FQE could have had on the wellbeing of the people. This is why our party investigated the business sector and subsequently called for Government to declare a State of economic emergency and to listen to business people whose businesses are being crushed under the weight of galloping taxation and unfriendly regulations. At the end of the day it is the ordinary people who bear the burden of struggling businesses.

## **HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES:**

The NGC party continues to be concerned about the insensitiveness of authorities to the sufferings of survivors of massacre and victims of a number of human rights abuses that have occurred during this administration. There are some questions that you journalists should be asking. For instance, has any punitive action been taken against the trigger happy police or security that killed the young demonstrators in Makeni? Who has taken responsibility for the killing of 30 inmates and one prison warden in the Pademba Road Correctional Centre and where is the report of the investigation they promised to conduct on the massacre?

It is no secret that conditions in the correctional facilities are so grossly inadequate that thousands of incarcerated citizens continue to languish in inhuman conditions, such as overcrowded cells. The prisoner population at Pademba Road for instance has more than doubled the capacity of this facility. The situation of people in detention is appalling and it is unacceptable that people continue to be held for long periods in detention without trial.





Government needs to hasten the process of restitution of lands that have been illegally confiscated from land owners in the Western Area. Land is a very sensitive issue and Government in a democratic dispensation cannot be seen to be grabbing property from citizens, an action that can easily be given tribal interpretations.

## THE FORTHCOMING ELECTIONS

The NGC has been at the forefront of political party action to advocate for the implementation of electoral reforms recommended by various election observer groups after the 2018 elections. Through our participation in activities such as conferences and seminars hosted by NEC, PPRC, Development Partners and Civil Society, and also our engagements with the media, the NGC is proud of the substantial contribution we have been making since 2018 as per our mandate to shape the political will of the people, disseminate information on political ideas, social and economic programmes and prepare our people for the great elections of 2022 and 2023. In these elections the NGC will demonstrate that the policy we have followed since 2018 of staying close to the ordinary people to understand their suffering and speaking fearlessly on their behalf, of fighting to protect democracy and the soul of the nation, is the best policy. And it will be the turn of the Sierra Leoneans to tell the world that they are not fools and are ready for real change by voting for the NGC.

The NGC recognizes that the time is now ripe for all Sierra Leoneans to come together and unite for the common purpose of developing the country and improving the quality of life of the citizens. We are therefore proud of our membership of the Consortium of Progressive Political Parties (COPPP) and what that platform of opposition parties has achieved within a very short time. To this end, as we approach the next elections, we shall be open to all options including and especially joining a progressive coalition that will form an inclusive Government and deliver programs that are rooted in the real needs of the people.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the NGC would like to make the following declarations:

1. The NGC supports all efforts being made to promote increased women's participation and inclusion and will continue to advocate with our political partners and civil society in favour of radical changes to improve the condition of women in this country.
2. At the same time, we demand that authorities that have been persecuting women in authority such as the Mayor Yvonne Aki Sawyerr and Auditor Lara



Taylor Pearce cease forthwith realizing how much shame and disgrace they are bringing to the country as a result of their actions

3. We demand that Government through NEC, NCRA and other relevant Ministries and Departments immediately start putting in place measures to enable our brothers and sisters in the diaspora to register and vote at centres in our diplomatic missions abroad.
4. Likewise, we urge Government to implement with effect from the 2022/2023 elections, the Supreme Court decision that aligns with Government's recent law according dual citizens the right to vote and be voted for.
5. We stand by our position that the Auditor General was illegally removed from office because she was not made to undergo examination by the tribunal before she was suspended. Government cannot continue to embarrass itself by openly ignoring the laws and procedures while the people are watching because as the saying goes, *if gold rust what shall iron do?*
6. We also reiterate our demand for the ACC to do its job and reveal to the nation who took 49,000 bags of rice that were intended for the children of this country
7. The NGC continues to demand clarification about what investigations have been conducted and what actions taken in regards to human rights issues such as the Pademba Road massacre, the Makeni killings, the Tombo killing, the Tonko Limba killing etc.
8. With regard to the forthcoming elections, we urge that NEC displays integrity and fairness to all parties and that the police and security forces exercise professionalism and impartiality so that there are no more police killings of civilians.

Let me use this opportunity to thank particularly our members in the diaspora who have sponsored this press briefing and our indefatigable and highly talented organizing Secretary, Mr Jesmed Foday Mamie Suma, who raised the necessary funds and used his holidays here from the USA to coordinate this event.

On behalf of the entire membership of the NGC party at home and abroad I want to thank you for coming and hope you will do your best to disseminate our message. I pray that this year will be good for all of us and that peace will reign in our country.

Thank You