

Letter from Raymond James to Myf Hodkin dated 12th March 1996

It is a long time I have not written to you due to the situation in my country. Conditions are getting worse in my country unabated as a result of the escalating rebel atrocities. Peace moves had been made but proved futile; we have now resorted to democratic elections.

The former N.P.R.C. Military Chairman, Captain Valentine Strasser was ousted by his Vice Chairman Julius Maada Bio for wanting to stay in power longer than expected. Elections were held on the 26th February, 1996 with fifteen political parties contesting. Only five of the parties qualified to enter parliament. These parties are the Sierra Leone Peoples Party (S.L.P.P.) pulled 36.09% ; United National Peoples Party (U.N.P.P.) 21.64; People's Democratic Party(P.D.P.) 15.32 'National Unity Party (N.U.P.) 5.26 and All People's Congress (A.P.C.) 5.68%. None of the Presential candidates was qualified to become president of the country as the required percentage (55) could not be met at the polls. This means running for another election which has been scheduled - 15th March 1996. The two candidates running for this election are Ahmad Tejan Kabba of the S.L.P.P. and John Karefa-Smart of the U.N.P.P.

The second rounds of the election has been of grave concern to all in the country, especially after reflecting on the atmosphere under which the first election was conducted. Efforts undertaken to strike compromise between these two presidential candidates so that second rounds of election could be called off has proved futile..Karefa-Smart has insisted they go into polls as spelt out by the constitution. Civilians are now worried as to whether the atmosphere under which this second rounds of elections will be conducted will not be worse than the first as security is not assured.

On the eve of the election, Bo township was attacked by rebels who were chased out of the town by desperate youths armed with sticks, cutlasses, matchets,[sic] single-barrel guns and other home-made fighting weapons. The military only came in after the situation had been calmed. There were three deaths among civilians that day. In villages of the outskirts of the towns rebel menace was horrifying - they maimed or killed civilians and burnt down their houses.The situation worsen on Election day - 26th February 1996. Whilst electors queued determined to vote, there was firing in all parts of the town. Rebels infiltrated the town that day hanging around polling stations. As were thinking elections were going on freely and fairly that was the moment they opened fire. Some queue dispersed with the electors running to their homes. The town was thrown into utter confusion that day. Young men in their thousands plod the streets of Bo with home-made weapons in their hands to fight the rebels. Many of the uniformed gun-men were caught and were maliciously butchered by the young civilians. This repelled the rebels. There was no casualty among civilians. Elections were conducted that day and counting began in the evening hours and was completed the next day.

For many days after elections myself and my family deserted our premises at Commercial Sec. School with most of our household things

looted. It's only five days ago we have returned to inhabit the house. The uniformed gun-men were on the school field where they pumped bullets in the town on the day of elections.

The Bo-Freetown route is till[sic] unsafe and since election it was closed. Only military convoy could bring vehicles. This has brought in shortage in food and other essential commodities.

The Bo Government Hospital is choked with maimed or badly wounded patients who suffered at the hands of the rebels - Thanks to the Medecins Sans Frontiers or the hospital would have been a cemetery,

So this is the situation we have found ourselves in. We can't get out now. We are always praying that this election becomes the solution to rebel war.

With second round of voting and restoration of civilian government there is hope that life in Sa. Leone will return to normal .

Bo - OWL is still functioning as a group. Our activities are however limited because of funds. Members hardly pay their dues because of economic and war situation in the country....