

Letter from Raymond James to Myf Hodkin dated 4th May 1998

It's almost a year I could not get in touch with you. There had been serious political upheaval which has rented all aspects of the country in shambles. The elected government of Tejan Kabba was thrown by a gang of low-ranked military bandits on 25th May 1997. Their usurpation was followed by massive looting and killing and raping of civilians in Freetown and the South and East of the country. They called on the rebels (who called themselves the "peoples army") to join them to ravage and plunder the country. The joint ill-gotten gang of thieves formed a council which they named as Armed Forces Revolutionary Council which civilians nick-named 'All Fools' Rubbish Camp. They had as a chairman a Johnny Paul Koroma, a prisoner at the Pademba Maximum prison released during the overthrow.

The elected president and some of his cabinet ministers had to flee to neighbouring Guinea to seek for refuge. Top-ranking civil servants, NGOs and business tycoons deserted the country. Banks, government offices and other public services halted. Everything came to a standstill but for atrocities they reigned in the country. We the civilians were reduced to painful inferiority. Indeed the junta's main aim for usurping the throne was to torture, murder and dispossess we the civilians. Night was the time we feared most. For any one group of the junta's will visit ones house and threaten one to open the door. On entering they will take anything and if lucky leave the house without hurting one. There was no where to report- in fact, there was no judiciary- most of the lawyers were beaten and some ran away to other countries. For more than nine months schools were closed.

Indeed these were horrible days in the country. The worst was done when ECOMOG intervened militarily in the middle of Feb '98. In Bo, overt killing, looting and burning of houses were done in broad daylight. The strong supporters of the elected government suffered most, the Mendes who live in the South and East of the country. For complete two days we were indoors as there was sporadic shooting in the township of Bo. On the third day we were able to be out of doors and one could not imagine the sight we beheld : - the towns' lorry park, shops or shopping centres along the main roads were vandalised and burnt down. Dead human bodies were strewn on the streets of the town. After all these handwork they disappeared with the looted properties on hearing the Civil Defence Force (C.D.F.) was advancing. After three days, the juntas reappeared attacking the C.D.F. - this made us flee to villages around the town. For a whole week we were in hiding in the bush of the villages with hardly any food to eat. Our houses in the town were licked clean of our properties and many more dwelling houses, shops and some N.G.O. offices were burnt down.

We only returned to the town when we heard of ECOMOG presence in Bo. Of course, the first three weeks after our return to Bo were difficult ones as there was no money to buy food and even to see it.

Today, we can give thanks to God as work has resumed and things are returning to normalcy, though conditions are still difficult. Schools have

reopened but its operation difficult as most of the materials were destroyed. Children have returned to school but most do not have uniform. The elected government Tejan Kabba is trying very hard to bring situation to sanity.

The last money (£2000) was received by the link in Bo with joy as it came at the right time. Rice was bought and distributed to executive and general membership. Also Cheshire Home, Unaccompanied Children of Sierra Leone Church Mission, Handicapped Institution at Sewa Road, were all supplied the quota. This humanitarian gesture from the link at Leamington Spa sensitized a lot of people/ institution and they intend registering with the link in Bo....