

Diaspora at a Crossroads: Sierra Leoneans Abroad Driving Justice and Divisions in the Nation's Healing Journey

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When Mohamed Kamara first read the final report of Sierra Leone's Truth and Reconciliation Commission from his home in the United States of America, the memories of war came rushing back. "My sister disappeared during the conflict. Reading those testimonies was heartbreaking but it strengthened my resolve to support justice from afar," he recalls. Today, Kamara as an individual is helping vulnerable families back home, an effort of hope and solidarity from the diaspora.

Across continents, other Sierra Leoneans have remained deeply involved in the country's transitional justice process, providing financial aid to those in need. They serve as advocates, fundraisers, and intermediaries between international bodies and communities affected by the war that ravaged Sierra Leone from 1991 to 2002.

Fatmata Sesay, a human rights researcher based in the Netherlands, says: "We use our connection to international platforms not just to push for justice and reparations, but also to make sure the voices of war survivors, especially orphans are heard and supported."

However, the diaspora's role is not without complexity. In Freetown, local activists and government officials express concern over a vocal minority of diaspora members whose online rhetoric stoke division rather than healing.

"Some individuals abroad spread misinformation and tribal hatred, undermining the justice mechanisms we've worked so hard to build," says Mohamed Turay, a senior official at the Ministry of Political and Public Affairs (MoPPA). He highlights how social media influencers based mainly in the UK and US post contents that glorifies certain wartime factions or question the legitimacy of post-war justice.

Haja Kallon, a social worker in Kissy, Freetown, describes the real-world consequences. "We are on the front lines trying to mend broken communities, but divisive narratives from overseas reopen old wounds. Those spreading hate do not face the fallout, communities here do."

One such example is "Adebayor," a Netherlands-based Sierra Leonean who frequently uses social media to call on citizens to protest against the government and other institutions he opposes. His broadcasts, which often go viral among young Sierra Leoneans unfamiliar with the country's deeper historical context, risk spreading misinformation and fueling division.

Despite these challenges, constructive diaspora activism continues to thrive. Aminata Kallon, a Toronto-based nurse and refugee, supports young people in implementing peaceful initiatives such as community dialogues and educational campaigns. "We're not just preserving history, we're empowering the next generation to lead with peace and push for justice," she says.

Legal analyst Mariatu Conteh urges better coordination. "The diaspora's potential is immense, but we lack formal structures to engage with their efforts meaningfully." According to her, "A national

framework would help harness the diaspora's positive influence while mitigating the damage caused by those exploiting past grievances for political or personal gain."

Women's rights activist Mariatu Koroma underscores the importance of diaspora responsibility. "Our brothers and sisters abroad have tremendous power, but with power comes duty. Healing requires us all, home and away, to reject divisive rhetoric and commit to truth and reconciliation."

Speaking to Awoko, the Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs, Morie Lengor Esq., said: "Sierra Leone's post-war healing remains a work in progress, shaped by forces both near and far. The diaspora's dual role as bridge and barrier reminds us that justice transcends borders but requires unity, care, and shared purpose."

The Minister reflects: "Justice did not end with the Special Court. It continues in every act of solidarity, every story shared, and every effort to build peace, not just here in Freetown, but in the hearts of Sierra Leoneans worldwide."

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