

SIERRA LEONE PEACE MUSEUM PRESERVING HISTORY AND PROMOTING RECONCILIATION

By Mohamed Nagimu Deen

After the 11-year civil war in Sierra Leone, which started in 1991 and ended in 2002, there was a great need to address the critical issues that had led to the war. In line with this, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established to investigate the antecedents to the conflict and make recommendations. In its reports, it called for the need for memorialization, and this is what gave birth to the formation of the Peace Museum.

The Sierra Leone Peace Museum's responsibility is to preserve the history of the civil war, honor its victims, and promote sustainable peace, human rights, and the rule of law. It serves as a memorial, research center, and educational institution by collecting and sharing the country's war history through exhibits, archives, and outreach programs, thereby playing a key role in the transitional justice process in Sierra Leone.

According to the head of Outreach for the Residual Special Court, Patrick Fatorma, they have been ensuring that the Museum is open to people in the country and foreigners visiting the country. He stated that the Peace Museum organizes study visits for schoolchildren so that they would be aware of the issues that gave rise to the 11-year bloody Civil War in the country. "There is no winning in a war; everybody loses," Patrick Fatorma said. This is what they usually tell the kids.

He apparently stated that the Peace Museum is currently being run by the Residual Special Court with support from developed countries, as it is not receiving any support from the government. Patrick Fatorma revealed that they used to run school and university clubs, whereas they were doing regular public lectures in schools, universities, and communities. However, because they are presently not getting sufficient support, the clubs are no more, and they now barely go to communities. He said they have done mobile exhibitions by taking the artifacts of the Museum to different places in the country, both in Freetown and the rural communities.

The Information and Communication person for the Ministry of Tourism and Culture, Alieu Kondor, said the Peace Museum is one of the top places they consider in doing their work as a ministry. Alieu Kondor said that they have been working proactively with the Museum by taking people, especially tourists and school-going pupils, to visit and see some of the causes of the Civil War in Sierra Leone, something he believes is helping the Museum to meet its mandate. He said over the years, they have been working to ensure the Museum's visibility grows, and he continued by stating that they are striving to make the Museum go digital, which would help to ease the workload of the Museum. Alieu Kondor ended by pleading for assistance from all and sundry in order to make the Peace Museum visible and viable.

The head of Fambul Tok, a civil society organization, John Caulker, said that the Peace Museum is a laudable opportunity for the younger ones to know what went wrong and later led to an 11-year bloody Civil War in Sierra Leone. He questioned the way and manner the Peace Museum was established, without giving ownership to Sierra Leone. He said, "Sierra Leone is a very good shining example of how we transformed from conflict to peace." He said they, as an organization, have been engaging schools and communities on Transitional Justice issues in Sierra Leone, and he urged public institutions to help the Museum get very good visibility.

John Caulker said Transitional Justice issues need to be included in schools and universities' curricula, and the management of the Museum needs to embark on regular roadshow exhibitions of the Museum. He said the causes of the Civil War are still prevalent; therefore, there must be staunch awareness in the country so that we do not go back to war.

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