



## A SIERRA LEONEAN AWARD-WINNER SOME DARE TO SHUN

The first time I saw him, he was learning the rudiments of his future trade. **Sorious Samura** was the man nominated by a kind UNDP official to accompany us, members of the Ganda family, on our sad homeward journey to Serabu (Bo District) with the remains of our beloved mother who had just died in Freetown. His task was to produce a video recording of the funeral rites. It was in August 1990, exactly twelve years ago.

Mamma Louisa was a matriarch in every sense of the word – a mother to virtually all who met and knew her. In addition to rearing us, her very own 13 children, she also raised scores belonging to poor and less privileged parents, who queued yearly to offer her their offspring for fostering. They did this in the full expectation that their children, too, would grow up to become successful adults. Most turned out exactly to be that!

Sorious Samura could scarcely have been described as a son of Mama Louisa. He did not know her and had never heard of her. But there he was, recording for posterity her very last journey on earth. He acquitted himself expertly. I still have copies of the six hours of recordings he made, in which he accurately captured the poignancy of the occasion, while delicately juxtaposing moments of distress with shots of the ritualistic jollity that normally accompanies traditional funeral rites in Mendeland. The masked devils in particular added gaiety to an otherwise sombre atmosphere.

As I watched him wrestle with his bulky video camera it was evident to me, even at that early stage in his career, that Sorious was already a natural with his subjects - a skill which made it easy for him to capture those telling moments that others, less discerning, might have so easily missed.



**Sorious Samura speaking at INASLA's launching on 27 April this year**

From the moment he descended from the dusty minibus, he became an instant hit with the townspeople, and especially with the children. This budding cameraman had no problems cultivating the friendship, and sustaining the attention, of the huge crowds that descended upon our small town for the funeral. He was already aiming his lens at them, before they knew it!

My most vivid and lasting recollection of that time was of Sorious' daily evening replays of his recording of the day's events on a projector, using an exposed whitewashed wall for an improvised screen. In those days, the video was still a novelty in my part of Sierra Leone. He was thus the first true professional to unleash its entrancing effects upon the hundreds who had come from the surrounding towns and villages.

In doing so, and without knowing it, Sorious lifted the spirit of the mourning crowds during the four days of vigil that followed. For nearly all of them, they were seeing themselves live on screen for the very first time!

*(Continued on page 2 col. 2)*

## **EDITORIAL COMMENT**

### **WHY DO SIERRA LEONEANS FIND IT DIFFICULT TO WORK TOGETHER?**

In future editions of the INASLA newsletter, we shall discuss the problems which often make it difficult for Sierra Leoneans to pull and stay together in the numerous organisations that they regularly form, ostensibly, for their welfare and mutual benefit. Even INASLA is not immune from this prospect. The case of its predecessor, ASLA, was cited in several speeches at INASLA's launching ceremony. But in fact scores of organisations before ASLA had suffered a similar fate. The phenomenon is not new.

When the civil war broke out and reached the numbing and disgusting heights of barbarity and inhumanity, Sierra Leoneans in the UK rallied round to form pressure groups, which committed themselves to work for peace. But the disparate character of these groups made them appear fractiousness and short-term. In fact within less than three months of their formation many just phased out of the scene, without as much as attaining the minutest line in their grand aims and objectives.

This is not to belittle the commendable efforts of a handful of organisations, which have succeeded and lasted to the present day. There are charitable and other organisations, including old schools' associations, which are doing valuable work and have achieved wonderful things for worthy causes inside the country. We shall feature their work in the coming editions.

In addition to these there are strong precedents, which prove that things will work when we, as a community, put our minds to them. The very successful peace march that was organised by the Sierra Leone Peace Forum on Saturday, 8 April 1995 is a case to the point. Nearly eight hundred Sierra Leoneans took to the streets of London to demonstrate for an end to the violence in their country, and to appeal for peace and reconciliation. But even that was short-lived. Despite pleas for the Forum to harness the goodwill it had generated, into future co-operative efforts under its aegis, it simply faded away without further trace.

So there is yet to emerge a mass organisation with a national focus that unites all Sierra Leoneans. This is where INASLA comes in. One of our aims is exactly that.

Some of the problems of getting us together are hard to understand. For example all year round we meet at social functions, where we socialise and enjoy each other's company. But we just seem unable to co-operate for a sustained period to achieve a unity of purpose. Now and again, personal, tribal, and political rivalries beset our best endeavours. Visit a party these days and you will notice attendance based largely on tribal/regional lines. Surely something is responsible for this.

But there is absolutely nothing inherent in our nature to suggest that we cannot work together.

These are some of the challenges that face a nascent INASLA. Our membership is determined to expunge these negative factors from our midst and hopefully create an environment, in which everyone is free and able to relate and co-operate with one another to achieve the very best for our community and our country.

## **Cameraman Sorious Samura**

*(Continued from page 1)*

It was an exhilarating experience for them! Uncannily, however, it never seemed to detract from the solemnity of the occasion he was there to cover.

I did not have an opportunity to converse much with Sorious at the time and so I did not get to know him well enough. But when years later he came out with the harrowing and graphic depiction of the tragic civil war in our country, I recognised his face instantly.

Today Sorious is an internationally acclaimed cameraman, standing shoulder high with the very best in his profession. In the natural order of things, Sierra Leoneans ought to be proud of him because it was through people like him that the desperate plight of Sierra Leone was so effectively and convincingly put across the often-reactionary western media, which had become afflicted by disaster fatigue.

Curiously, and to my utter dismay, I have too often heard disparaging comments made by some of our compatriots about him. They charge that he was capitalising on the plight of the unfortunate in Sierra Leone; and, that he is in it for the money.

Poppcock! How else do they expect an honest camera craftsman - and a family man at that - to earn his living if not by taking photographs of events that are of interest and, in Sierra Leone's case, of serious concern for the whole world? And what if he risks his own life in the process? If he makes money (and I do not know nor am I concerned that he has) in the process, why should any one begrudge him for that?

As for the purely infantile charge of 'capitalising on misery', one has to put that down simply to envy and, most probably also, to this incomprehensible trait among Sierra Leoneans generally to run down their own people. It is an attitude that those of us in INASLA are determined to fight to change.

Thankfully, Sorious does not seem to be bothered by these distracters. Even as I write he has jetted off to Greece for another possible commissioning, and he is lining up for more work in the USA. He has won many international accolades and, without doubt, he is poised to win many more in the future.

His best three documentaries to date are: 'Cry Freetown', 'Exodus' (from Africa), and 'Return to Freetown'.

- 'Cry Freetown' graphically depicted the brutality of the war when Freetown (for a long time insulated from the war) was invaded and, for a while, parts of it fell into rebel hands in January 1999;
- In 'Exodus' he tracked would-be African exiles in Nigeria, Mali, The Sahara, Morocco and Spain, and followed them on their journeys to reach the "promised land" of Europe.
- 'Return to Freetown' records a recent trip back to Sierra Leone to escort three traumatised child soldiers, and his attempt to reunite them with their estranged families and friends.

These works have earned Sorious prestigious awards, some of which I list below:

- Rory Peck Award- Winner (1999)
- The Mohamed Amin Award (1999)
- Award - TV Documentary - Amnesty International Media Awards (2000)
- George Foster Peabody Award - Winner (2000)
- ICRC Dignity in Conflict Award - Winner (2000)
- TV Documentary Award - One World Media Awards (2000)
- BAFTA - News and Current Affairs Journalism (2001)
- TV Documentary Award - One World Media Awards (2001)
- DuPont Award - Winner (Jan 2001).

Recently, I was reading the Lagos *Vanguard Daily* and came across an interview given by Sorious to its editor. In answer to the question why he was taking such risks to make these documentaries, he came up with this somewhat clichéd answer: "*The point is, I want to make the difference not just for Sierra Leone, but for the continent.*" For my money this is one person who has certainly made the difference for Sierra Leone, never mind the continent. Sierra Leoneans must recognise this fact and thank God for his work.

We, who belong to INASLA, honour him as one of our own, and we are proud to have him in our midst as a member – a founding member. Long may he continue to triumph for both his and all our sakes.

### Ambrose Ganda

Member, INASLA

Co-ordinator, Newsletter Editorial Committee

## THE TREASURER REPORTS ...

Last month, I wrote to you about the need for continued financial support for our organisation.

I am pleased to say that the response to my appeal has been very positive. I have received enquiries about our bank account details and some members have also paid money into our account.

I urge those members who are yet to make a contribution to contact me, or any member of the INASLA executive.

Anyone interested in contributing to the financial well being of our organisation is encouraged to make payments directly into INASLA's bank account. The details are as follows: **Barclays Bank PLC Borough High Street, Sort Code: 20-80-57 Account Number: 80566608.**

An alternative method of payment is for individuals to set up either a standing order or a direct debit for a fixed amount, which ensures that their regular contributions to INASLA are guaranteed.

The past month has been quiet in terms of financial receipts and payments. Expenditure in the month has been minimal. The only expenses incurred were in respect of the publication of the monthly newsletter amounting to £250. This has been the main focus of



INASLA during the last month and it is expected that the newsletter will increase awareness of the organisation within the Sierra Leonean community in the U.K. and abroad. We fervently hope that members and well-wishers will make a donation to INASLA on receipt of this newsletter to offset the costs of printing.

Members are kindly asked to participate in all the fundraising activities that INASLA undertakes. Please send any suggestions for raising funds to

either the chairman, or me, in the event that you cannot attend any of our monthly meetings.

The trustees and members of INASLA have detailed plans for the way forward for the organisation, and request your continued support both morally and financially so that we can really make a difference to the lives of all Sierra Leoneans.

**Herbert Marlin**

Financial Secretary/Treasurer

## LIFTING SALONE HIGHER

Sierra Leoneans everywhere should have realised by now the importance of working assiduously towards re-instating the status of our beloved country, to the pedestal on which she once so proudly stood and paraded her wondrous virtues for all the world to see. We must come together and work in unison for the progress and development of our nation. Let us forget about sectionalism and regionalism; let us put aside our tribal allegiances; in their place let us strive to promote the unity and indivisibility of our people and nation.

Our current practice of preferential grouping has led to horrible consequences for all of us, and has dropped our country into a state of helplessness that defies all logic. Now is the time for us to come together under one umbrella, to address the real issues affecting our country, debate the approach necessary to rectify our problems, and create and develop programmes that will guarantee a better future for the present and future generation of Sierra Leoneans.

We can argue over many issues - which is a healthy thing to do in a democracy - but the hard fact will remain that we ourselves have treated (and sadly still continue to treat) our country with gross neglect. We adopted a nonchalant attitude to the problems facing our country, i.e. our own problems, and took refuge in denying our identity as children of Sierra Leone. In other words we have proved beyond doubt to be unpatriotic towards our motherland. That's been our greatest shame!

We need to stir ourselves out of our deep slumber and wake up with a vision for a progressive Sierra Leone. A Sierra Leone we can proudly associate with and not be ashamed of, which is modelled on the very best values and attributes which have helped us during these very troubled years of war and misery. Chief among these have been the



resilience, wisdom and understanding of the ordinary Sierra Leonean man and woman. We need now to re-deploy these innate qualities into our collective efforts, to lift Sierra Leone to the heights of esteem that she was used to, only this time to even higher heights.

Let's put our differences aside and work together to attain this end. Let us use all and everybody's talents to create the new community that we can be truly proud of. We owe this to ourselves and to Sierra Leone.

**Sam Jusu**

Member, INASLA

The **INASLA newsletter** will feature various Sierra Leonean organisations and their achievements, in future editions. If you have an organisation that is working to promote the welfare and interest of Sierra Leone and its people, and especially for the Sierra Leonean communities overseas, then write to us, in not more than 150 words, to tell us about it.

## INASLA MEMBERSHIP IS OPEN TO ALL

INASLA continues to attract the good and great among Sierra Leoneans. One, who often puts aside his diplomatic duties to share in the INASLA experience, is the First Secretary at the Sierra Leone High Commission in London, Mr Suleiman Kpukumu (right).



He spoke eloquently at the formal launching of INASLA and again at a recent general meeting, where he restated his faith in the organisation. He explained to the audience that he was not there as an official of the high commission, or by virtue of his diplomatic status, but as a Sierra Leonean who wanted to share in the experience of Sierra Leoneans in the Diaspora working in harmony.

He wished the organisation well and promised to participate in all its activities as long as they did not compromise or conflict with his normal diplomatic functions.

INASLA wishes the first secretary every success during his tour of duty at the London mission.

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## WHAT HAPPENED TO THE FORMER SIERRA LEONE STUDENTS UNION?

A noticeable factor in the links between Sierra Leoneans in the UK and the mother country has been the absence of a students union. Ten or so years ago, and routinely before that, the Sierra Leone Students Union was the all-embracing umbrella group, which brought together students of all persuasions, disciplines, regions and tribes of Sierra Leone, who were resident in the United Kingdom and Eire.

Functioning more or less like a trade union, it looked after the interest and welfare of Sierra Leone students, both scholarship and non-scholarship holders alike. It mounted vigorous campaigns with the home government, and succeeded in securing improvements in the welfare of its members, arguing for periodic increases in subsistence and book allowances. It even set up a distress and welfare fund for non-scholarship holders, with facilities for grants and loans.

It may be argued that nowadays scholarships, especially national Sierra Leone government

scholarships, are a rarity and that students have become more or less private and independent, thus obviating the need for the glue of a students union to hold them together.

However, it cannot escape older and past members resident both here and in Sierra Leone, that the students union as it was then, became the focus of social interaction within the Sierra Leone community in especially the UK.

Admittedly, it was also a hotbed of politics, exactly mirroring the political rivalries that went on inside Sierra Leone. So, for example, when its end finally came, the terminal blow was landed by in-fighting, lack of trust, and massive corruption among the officials, typical of the corruption that went on inside the country. Funds raised mainly through yearly subscriptions and the annual subvention from the central government in Freetown, and that generated from students' fund-raising activities and social functions like dances and outings, were misappropriated.

But perhaps the biggest fleecing was that relating to students' charter flights. Every Christmas and during the summer vacations, the students union would organise charter flights to Freetown with airlines. From this, it received huge commissions and concessions. In the end, this money, which in some years ran into thousands of pounds (sterling), ended in the pockets of some of the rogue officials of the union, many of whom subsequently left the UK for Sierra Leone after they were found out.

When the union commanded respect, governments at home feared it. Many of its officials and members used it as a stepping-stone to holding high office in Sierra Leone. Some of its officials went on to become part of the ruling establishment in the country.

Former officials who became very important people on the political scene in Sierra Leone, included people like: V J V Mambu, Francis Minah, Abdulai Conteh, Abbas Bundu, Christie Green and Francis Conteh, all of whom became cabinet ministers; Musa K Souma of SLPMB fame; Lawyers David B Quee and Simon Carew; and Messrs M J Idris (Income Tax), M C Koya, and Joe Swarray, and many others.

It remains to be seen whether the new generation of Sierra Leone students would be minded sufficiently to contemplate the revival of such an institution, to fight their corner. Undeniably, it will have huge advantages for them and for the country. INASLA hopes they can rise to meet that challenge.

## SUMMER OUTINGS

Summer, glorious summer! You know when summer is here, when you begin to see more people, less clothes. The natives simply go mad. The uninterrupted sunshine may be something Africans take for granted but for the British it is a privilege, not a right. Actually it is a privilege for everyone who lives in Britain. Come July, August and out come the hot pants, straps, convertible open tops and sunglasses, barbecues and outings.



Yes, outings! And that's where Sierra Leoneans come into their own. Just like 'paddle', which comes out 'wan tem for year' (once a year), Sierra Leoneans come from far and near. They come from the USA, Europe, and of course Sierra Leone itself, to join Churches, community organisations, clubs, and just groups of friends heading for the British seaside. And they come in all sizes. From two coach loads to the Fourah Bay-Foulah Town outing which has been known to fill fifty huge coach loads of revellers! And the usually tame British seaside comes alive with the sound of African music. And remarkable muscles for people who usually have no time for the gym.

One suspects that underneath all the merriment is a deep nostalgia for the riches - and the beaches - we left behind. Freetown is blessed with beaches, just as the country as a whole is blessed with natural resources. So many beaches for such a small city, with deep blue waters, waves to make surfers drip, and shimmering sands like ...well, if heaven had beaches they would have to look exactly like the ones in Sierra Leone. If you don't believe me, ask the British friends who are now on peacekeeping duty in Freetown. Sierra Leone has been through a lot, but from all accounts, it's beginning to feel like home again. And as we guzzle our several hundred litres of lager and soft drinks, there will no doubt also be lots of conversations about home. So folks, Enjoy!

### Shefumi Swill

Member, INASLA

#### COST RECOVERY

INASLA Newsletter is printed in black & white and its free: If anyone needs coloured copies please request in advance and send £5 plus 50p for postage.

## NEWS FROM SALONE

In *Issue No 1* we carried a stop-press about the appointment and pending ordination of the second indigenous Sierra Leonean RC Bishop. Rev Fr **Patrick Koroma** (pictured, centre, in full regalia) was ordained Bishop of the Diocese of Kenema, in an impressive ceremony at St Paul's Cathedral, Kenema on Saturday 29 June. The event was witnessed by thousands, including vice President Solomon Berewa, deputising for President Kabbah, and senior representatives of the various religious denominations in the country. It was broadcast live on SLBS and SLTV. INASLA congratulates the new Bishop and wishes him God's guidance.



British troops, which first arrived in May 2000 to add teeth and muscle to a demoralised UN peacekeeping force after RUF rebels seized more than 500 UN troops and began their advance on Freetown, have finally completed their withdrawal from Sierra Leone. But as a parting shot, the British Force Commander has promised Sierra Leoneans that if there is any trouble they will most certainly be back, to ensure that the present peace is not shattered. *"If things were to take a turn for the worse, I'm quite sure you'd see us increasing our support here, because we made such an investment in this country to help them get through this terrible, terrible period of ten or eleven years of civil war ... we are desperately keen to see in the long term that the future is secured,"* he said. About 100 British military personnel will stay behind to continue the retraining programme for the Sierra Leone army.



The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) has been in the news lately. The TRC is charged with creating an independent, objective and impartial record of the abuses committed during the armed conflict and help thereby to promote healing for both victims and alleged perpetrators, and encourage true reconciliation and redress.

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# Community Notice Board

## Who wants to be a ...?

Remember, you have 3 lifelines:

**Ask the audience**      **50/50**      **Phone a friend**



But you don't have to do any of the above.

Membership is free and subscription is by donation.

You decide how much you want to donate to INASLA

- £5, £10, £20, £25, £50, £100 etc.

Cheques can be made payable to INASLA, 18 Keswick House, Crawford Estate London SE5 9NL. A/C Barclays Bank: Account No 80566608 Sort code 208057

You can phone 0207 733 7872 / 07956 924 864 for a direct debit form. Email: [inasla27@aol.com](mailto:inasla27@aol.com)

## ...OH, BUT WAIT A MINUTE!

INASLA has learnt with dismay that a particular Sierra Leone group published information to take credit for the INASLA rally and launching ceremony on the 27<sup>th</sup> April. We warn all groups to desist from such conduct and that INASLA will not treat lightly any repeat of similar nefarious and irresponsible action.

## Enterprises

**Jays Travel** – 0207 639 7724. Agent for Sierra National Airlines, has started business with a bang. Ticket sales are comparatively low and service is fast and consumer friendly. Their travel services now extends to Banjul and they fly out every Friday. What more can the costumer ask for?

**Leone Legal Services** - Specialising in immigration & nationality; divorce and general legal advice. 57 Camberwell Church Street, SE5 8TR. Tel & Fax 0207 703 1333 or 07941 423 393.

Email: [abdul.conteh@virgin.net](mailto:abdul.conteh@virgin.net)

[www.leonelegalservices.co.uk](http://www.leonelegalservices.co.uk)

**Sheila Barber** – 0207 640 2682. Sheila is young enterprising decorator who can cater for all your party needs.

Send your children's birthday wishes and photos to INASLA and we will publish them. You can also send your advertisements by email to: [inasla27@aol.com](mailto:inasla27@aol.com) or phone: 07956 924 864 / 0207 733 7872

## What's On?

**African Cultural Entertainment (ACE)** - The culture champions in the Diaspora, blessed with unique and talented Sierra Leoneans, have just had a re-union millennium dance. The good news is that ACE Theatre will be coming up with WARA – the life and times of a 'koro' in Lewisham. More information later.



## Kids' Birthdays

**Richard Kamara** is 5yrs on 26<sup>th</sup> August. Congratulations and love to you from your proud parents.

Twins **Hassan & Hussien Jalloh** will be 14yrs on 20<sup>th</sup> August. Best wishes from Mum Olematu Tejan-sie.

**Michaela Antonia Fofanah** will be 17yrs on 31<sup>st</sup> August. Your dad, Micky, wishes you peace, love, happiness and God's blessing.

## Also, belated birthday greetings to:

☺ **Samuel Dunkoh** - 5 years on 5th August; **Sam Jusu** – 11 years on 8 August; and **Joseph Songa**, also 11 years on 12 August.



## Adults' Birthdays

**Zainab Kamara**, member of INASLA whose birthday falls on 20 August.

**Mr & Mrs Ibrahim H Kamara** of Hammersmith, West London; He is 65 and she is 60. Congratulations to both of you.

## Recent Visitors to London

☺ **Dr Dennis Bright**, Sierra Leone's new Minister for Youth and Sport who accompanied the Sierra Leone athletics team to Manchester for the recent Commonwealth Games. INASLA wishes our national team better luck next time!

*(Continued from page 6 col. 2)*

It will hear testimony from both the victims and the perpetrators of wartime atrocities. Its seven commissioners were sworn in recently and have commenced their work in earnest. The Chairman is Bishop Joseph Hunter of the United Methodist Church of Sierra Leone, pictured left, (courtesy Sierra Leone web news). Despite being hampered by severe financial constraints, the Commissioners have begun touring Provincial centres on a mission of public sensitisation, and hope to soon commence taking depositions from various witnesses. Recently, they called on Sierra Leoneans not to disturb the sites of suspected mass graves and executions, which have been discovered and mapped by an Argentinean forensic team. The TRC's Executive Secretary, Ms Yasmin Jusu-Sheriff, seen here, has often reassured the Sierra Leone public about the impartiality of the Commission. But she believes that because of lack of funds the pace of its work could be slowed down, and forward planning would be almost impossible. President Tejan Kabbah has promised to personally solicit funds for the Commission to do its work.



Running parallel to the TRC, is the **Special (International) Court**, established by the UN Security Council to try (it is believed at least 20) persons deemed to bear the greatest responsibility for war crimes committed in Sierra Leone since the signing of the Abidjan Peace Agreement in November 1996. The court's remit also includes the violation of international humanitarian law and serious crimes under Sierra Leonean law. Its Chief Prosecutor is a US citizen, David Crane (right). Two Sierra Leoneans, both former senior judges, have also been appointed to the court. Former High Court Judge Bankole Thompson will sit in the trial court, and former Supreme Court Justice Gelaga King in the appeal court. Mr Crane has responded to fears that the special court is a distraction from the TRC and could be seen as a rival to the TRC's operation. *"The TRC and the Special Court can and will work together,"* he said.



## Recent Visitors to London *(Continued)*

☺ Senior Police Officers **Chris Charley, Oliver Somasa, and Frank Alpha** (left, centre, and right in the pictures below) are attending various commanding officer courses in the United Kingdom. Charley and Alpha are doing the International Commanders Programme, while Somasa is undergoing the Programme for Strategic Commanders.



☺ Welcome to Reverend Fr **Peter Konteh** the co-ordinator of St Mary's Children's Home in Bo, which is home to 50 orphans, and a centre providing fostering services for destitute children. He is here to thank numerous benefactors in especially Southwark and Hull, and also to make further appeals for funds to continue the work of the orphanage.



**We support community development  
...with pride!**



## *Forthcoming Weddings*

**Josephine Adama Fofanah and Mohamed Sayour Bangura** at the Masjidul Quddus (Brixton) Mosque on Saturday 17 August.

**Winston Ojukutu-Macauley Jnr. and Habibatu Saudatu Sesay** on 24 August at Quex Road Methodist Church.

**Fattu Mattia and Peter John Smith** at Lambeth Registry Office on Saturday 24 August.

**Gbotima Margai and Hassan Sabrah** at Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church, Wanstead on 31 August.

**Rosalyn Golia and David Momoh** at the Cathedral of the Annunciation, Stockton, California, USA on 31 August.

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