



In this edition –

- ...moving INASLA forward...
- ...Ambrose Ganda remembered
- ...networking in unity and purpose
- ...you can't keep Columba Blango down
- ...news and tidbits...and more

Editorial

It seems like ages

since you received this newsletter. This has been due to a number of unforeseen circumstances which are now in the past – thanks to your help and encouragement and support. We would still urge you to tell us about events affecting you, your relations, friends and anything relating to the Sierra Leonean. We thank you for your patience and look forward to regular future publications.

The Editorial team

INASLA Chairman in Sierra Leone



INASLA Chairman Micky Fofanah is back in London after a visit to Sierra Leone during which he attended a Service of Memorial in honour of the late Ambrose Ganda who passed on April 10, 2003. He reports:

In comparison to my previous visit to Sierra Leone in August last year, I observed that fewer folks were actually having what could be called “a good time”. There were less than ten thousand people in the whole country of nearly 5 million people who could boast of living life as it should be.

The average wage for the majority of workers was well below 100 thousand leones a month (around £20) from which expenses for a bag of rice (60 thousand leones), rent and other essential needs had to be met.

Sadly, all types of negative behaviour were observed as people endeavour to supplement their needs. They would steal and hang around holidaymakers, who find it difficult to hide or avoid folks chasing them for money or support. Many people openly attributed the poor quality of life in the country to corruption and inadequacies of resources to meet basic needs in health, education, food or housing.

It was noted that Sierra Leonean residents abroad who could not afford to stay for more than four

weeks were less aware of the squalid condition in other parts of the country. Besides, we usually terminate our holidays in Freetown where we could manage our inconveniences better and enjoyably or simply spend our hard earned foreign currency to support folks. Sadly though, it's never enough to meet their needs or reduce the web of poverty our country is experiencing. (Continued on page 2)

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Letter from a visitor to the INASLA website suggesting a solution to transportation problems in Sierra Leone

TRAINS FOR SIERRA LEONE

Zuabatu Brown

South Africa

My name is Zuaibatu Browne and I'm a Sierra Leonean from Freetown. I was very happy to find out about this site and I plan to tell all my friends and relatives abroad about it. I'm presently in Cape Town South Africa and I have been toying with an idea for Sierra Leoneans for quite some time now. I think trains would do our transport system a whole world of good. I'm not an expert and I don't know what it will entail, but could you think of it too? If you need me to make any enquiries here, I'll be at your service. I know they are normally heavily subsidised by government but I think one could at least give it a thought.

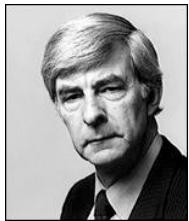
The INASLA website is at:

<http://www.inasla.com>

**VISIT THE WEBSITE FOR MORE ON
INASLA....IT'S WORTH IT**

(A Star is born – the Hastings connection – from page 2)

In an emotional reply, the President of the Sierra Leone Hastings Association, asked the people of Hastings, East Sussex to help rebuild Hastings, Sierra Leone, as he is sure that was what Sir Warren Hastings, the English man who founded Hastings, Sierra Leone would have wanted.



The sister city/town of Hastings in Sierra Leone is about 12 miles from the capital of Freetown. It is a quiet city/town with a population of about 5,000 most of whom are subsistence farmers.

Former UK High Commissioner to Sierra Leone, Mr Peter Penfold also attended the twinning ceremony

Hastings boasts “The Police Training School”, the National Police Academy; an airfield and some faculties of “The National School of Medicine and Allied Sciences. Hastings was partially destroyed by the rebels who invaded the capital, Freetown, on January 6, 1999

It was a very sad chapter in Hastings’ history as well as that of the country. Many people were made homeless and ran for cover in the hills, other places of safety as well as the capital.

We will endeavour to continue to press forward with this friendship link and rebuild our Hastings Sierra Leone for the benefit of posterity.

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STARZ – a new magazine by Sierra Leoneans for Sierra Leoneans and friends of the country has been launched in the United Kingdom and Sierra Leone. Secure your copy and see why many are yearning for a copy and why when obtained, becomes a treasure. It’s a revolution in journalism!!!! Beat the rush now and become a part of the STARZ revolution, going places and exploring topics none dared before.

**Contact: Navo’s International on 020 7358 4510
Mobile: 07957 546 044**

Summary of INASLA’s basic Aims and Objectives:

- 1 – Establishment of the largest non political voluntary association of Sierra Leoneans abroad,
- 2 – Facilitation of information and knowledge on Sierra Leone and general social development matters,
- 3 – Establishment of a Resource and Recreational Centre for Sierra Leoneans
- 4 – Supporting efforts to reduce poverty in Sierra Leone,
- 5 – Recognising and respecting the contributions and successes of Sierra Leoneans in all fields of human endeavour including, but not limited to the arts, music, sports, education, medical field, business, finance, law etc.

The INASLA website is at:

<http://www.inasla.com>

Birthdays

● **Franold Lemeh – July 8**

● **Lela Jusu – May 15**

● **Francis Lemeh – May 25**

● **Michael Fofanah – May 5**

● **Jennifer Durosinmi – July 3**

● **Mamawa Koya – May 14**

● **Nurianie Salaam – June 12**

An easy way to pay INASLA monthly contributions: Barclays Bank London Bridge Branch, 29 Borough High Street, London, SE1 1LY. A/C No. 80566608. Sort Code 20-80-57.

**COLUMBA BLANGO GETS MORE
RESPONSIBILITY IN SOUTHWARK COUNCIL**

The first African to become a Mayor in the London Borough of Southwark, Sierra Leonean born Dr Columba Blango has now ended his one-year term in office during which Sierra Leone received a very high profile in the UK and international arena.

His term as Mayor of the London borough with the highest number of Sierra Leoneans ran from May 14, 2003 to May 19, 2004.



Dr Blango with partner Frances (left) and Chairman, Bo Council

Dr Blango in an interview said that one of the high points during his term of office was the launch of the Southwark Community Games, a programme that is aimed at promoting sport throughout the borough. The first such programme in the UK, the programme is aimed at getting all sectors of the community engaged in sport with a view, among others, to demonstrate the value of sports in the promotion of health.

The programme has become so successful that Manchester City Council sent representatives to Southwark with a view of seeing how such a programme could be replicated in Manchester.

While still a Councillor serving Southwark, Dr Columba Blango has now been appointed a member in the ruling council inner caucus, a kind of Local Government Cabinet Minister and is responsible for Equality, Diversity and Sports, among others.

He will now be responsible for such programmes like International Development, Twinning, Leisure, Arts, Tourism and Libraries.

Asked about plans that would help Sierra Leone, the former Mayor revealed that plans are underway for the twinning of another town in Sierra Leone with Southwark and said that Southwark Council's active involvement in Prime Minister Tony Blair's plan for Africa should provide a platform for the further development of Sierra Leone.

Dr Blango, an active member and supporter of INASLA is known for his presence at meetings and activities of the organization and is to be seen at events involving Sierra Leonean organizations and friends of the country.

Synopsis of Councillor Columba Blango, former Mayor of Southwark

Columba Blango was elected Mayor of the London Borough of Southwark on Wednesday, 14th May 2003.

Columba was born in April 1956 in Bo, Sierra Leone in West Africa.

In 1981 he left Sierra Leone for Europe to further his education. He attained a Master's Degree in Sports in 1986 and finished with a Doctorate in Sports Science (Theory & Methods of Sports) in 1990.

Between 1975 and 1987, he took part in many international competitions in athletics, mainly in the decathlon. Competitions included the West African games, African Games and the Olympic Games, to name but a few.

After settling in the UK in 1990, he was first elected to Southwark Council in 1998 (for the Liberal Democratic Party) representing Dockyard Ward in Surrey Quays.

He was re-elected in 2002 for the new Rotherhithe Ward.

As a Ward Councillor he took a leading role in Youth, Education, Sports and Leisure issues. In opposition on the Council he was the Liberal Democrat Shadow Cabinet Member for Community Relations.

Since 1991 he has been very much involved in community and voluntary work in the Borough. He is a trustee for one of the oldest voluntary organisations in Southwark as well as a school governor for two schools, one of which he is the Vice Chair of Governors. Also he is a catechist at his local church.

Before he became Mayor in May 2003, he was Vice Chair of Education, Youth & Leisure Scrutiny Sub-Committee.

Columba is a Teacher by profession – teaching physical education at a secondary school in East London. He is also an athletics club coach for BAAB. He took a year's "leave" from work to carry out his Mayoral Duties.

He is passionate about sports & youth and wanting to make a difference He chose "Youth & Sports" as his theme for his year in office. His ambition was to make the year a special one for youth & sports in Southwark.

He has been living in Camberwell for a year, having lived in Surrey Quays for approximately 11 years. He lives with his Wife, Frances, and 3 children – Christian (17), Columba (11) and Yaennie-Martha (9).

His hobbies include most sports, particularly swimming and

<http://www.inasla.com>

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**A NEW VOICE FOR AFRICA'S
DEVELOPMENT RAISED IN LONDON**

A new NGO, aimed at bringing together all African organisations in a unique network is to be launched on Saturday July 3, 2004 in the UK capital city, London.



The African Diaspora Voices for Africa's Development (ADVAD) has the overall aim of establishing "a strong partnership of African development organisations in the UK that will

achieve" certain objectives, among them:

- To build a network and establish strong and effective communication links with African and African development organisations in the UK.
- To develop a strong and united voice for African community organisations.
- To advocate effectively with governments, mainstream institutions, service providers, funders and policy makers on behalf of member organisations, member communities and the African Diaspora.
- To increase the effectiveness of member organisations by the provision of relevant information, advice, representation, development and advocacy service.

MISSION

A network through which Africans in the Diaspora can speak with one voice on issues pertaining to Africans and Africa's development

VISION

To increase the ability and capacity of Africans in the Diaspora to enhance and influence the rate of Africa's development and well-being

The Draft Constitution of ADVAD makes provisions for Full Membership and Associate Membership as well as how the organisation is to be run for the good of all taking into consideration the key principles of accountability, transparency and accurate reporting of activities undertaken by ADVAD.



Initial membership, in the 80's at the last count, appears to be very encouraging and given the UK government's commitment to Africa's development, ADVAD should provide the proper forum for deliberations and positive action on Africa's development.

ADVAD's Steering Committee has made it quite clear that its purpose is not to be in control of funds of the interested member organisations. "All organisations within ADVAD are independent and will run as usual with no interference from ADVAD. What ADVAD is asking for is one voice for Africa. We are too divisive and that is not good enough. We should use our diversity for Africa's good", they added.

INASLA has been invited to preparatory meetings of ADVAD and members are urged to actively participate in the launching ceremony at the Greater London Authority, City Hall, The Queen's Walk, London SE1 2AA

For more



information on ADVAD please contact Berni Sesay (berni@afford-uk.org) or Georgina Akibo-Betts on (georgina@slwt.org) or phone +44 208 291 3627

INASLA AT MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR THE LATE AMBROSE GANDA

INASLA Chairman Micky Fofanah was among many mourners and sympathisers at a Memorial service to commemorate the first anniversary of the passing away of INASLA pillar and stalwart, the late Ambrose Ganda who was a pillar of strength within INASLA, towering in every area and willing to render assistance in whatever area that was necessary in moving INASLA forward.

This is Micky's report:

As promised, I attended the memorial of our past INASLA colleague, Ambrose Ganda (of blessed memory) at Serabu in the Southern Region of Sierra Leone.

The ceremony started with a vigil on Saturday followed by a mass the next day April 18, 2004 at the Sacred Heart Church led by the Most Rev. Dr Joseph Ganda, Ambrose's elder brother.

The Ambrose Ganda Memorial service was also a commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of the late father of Ambrose, Sir Joseph Tommy Ganda.

The graveside ceremonies in Serabu



Among the many who witnessed the various ceremonies were Mrs

Alison Ganda, the ever reliable and supportive wife of Ambrose, Mrs Sunderland (Alison Ganda's mum), David Walker - who some of you may recall was the Groomsman in the wedding of Alison and Ambrose, Charles Margai, Barrister, J B Dauda, the Minister of Finance and his wife Dr Theresa Ganda.

The vigil was a combination of the celebration of the lives of the departed as well as a reminder that in the midst of life, there is death and that in life's cycle, that which must come to pass must be fulfilled. Cultural performances and displays stirred the hearts of many with joy as excitement mounted and the well-wishers asked for more!!!



I noted that besides traditional dancers, some of the participants had been benefactors of Alison and Ambrose's charitable sponsorship, either for personal education or for philanthropic community purposes. The guests had much to eat and drink and at various stages, took to the floor to share some steps on the dance floor with our hospitable hosts.

However, we did not forget the solemnity of the occasion on the day the mass was conducted. Prayers were said at the gravesides and as was customary, toast of drinks were made by elders and family members to the sweet repose of the departed and for the well-being of the living.

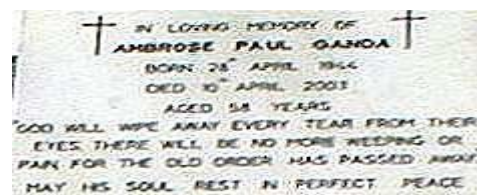


At the Mass, Alison (third from left) and mother Mrs Sunderland (second from left)

I must emphasise that the Gandas, their relations and the people of Serabu were very warm - from our arrival until we departed the town.

The lasting memory I left Serabu with was the paved grave of Ambrose, where he was laid to rest with other deceased family members in their compound.

The headstone at the grave of the late Ambrose



I struggled to hold back the tears on my return journey via Bumpah

but oh no; my tears just kept flowing ceaselessly for an INASLA colleague, who until his death fervently shared my belief that poverty in Sierra Leone could be better challenged if more Sierra Leoneans abroad worked together for the common good.

ABOUT SMILE

from an anonymous sender

I am a mother of three (ages 14, 12, 3) and have recently completed my college degree. The last class I had to take was Sociology. The teacher was absolutely inspiring with the qualities that I wish every human being had been graced with. Her last project of the term was called "Smile." The class was asked to go out and smile at three people and document their reactions. I am a very friendly person and always smile at everyone and say hello anyway, so, I thought this would be a piece of cake, literally.

Soon after we were assigned the project, my husband, youngest son, and I went out to McDonald's one crisp March morning. It was just our way of sharing special playtime with our son. We were standing in line, waiting to be served, when all of a sudden everyone around us began to back away, and then even my husband did. I did not move an inch... an overwhelming feeling of panic welled up inside of me as I turned to see why they had moved. As I turned around I smelled a horrible "dirty body" smell, and there standing behind me were two poor homeless men. As I looked down at the short gentleman, close to me, he was "smiling". His beautiful sky blue eyes were full of God's Light as he searched for acceptance. He said, "Good day" as he counted the few coins he had been clutching. The second man fumbled with his hands as he stood behind his friend. I realized the second man was mentally challenged and the blue-eyed gentleman was his salvation. I held my tears as I stood there with them. The young lady at the counter asked him what they wanted. He said, "Coffee is all Miss" because that was all they could afford. (If they wanted to sit in the restaurant and warm up, they had to buy something. He just wanted to be warm). Then I really felt it - the compulsion was so great I almost reached out and embraced the little man with the blue eyes. That is when I noticed all eyes in the restaurant were set on me, judging my every action. I smiled and asked the young lady behind the counter to give me two more breakfast meals on a separate tray. I then walked around the corner to the table that the men had chosen as a resting spot. I put the tray on the table and laid my hand on the blue-eyed gentleman's cold hand. He looked up at me, with

tears in his eyes, and said, "Thank you." I leaned over, began to pat his hand and said, "I did not do this for you. God is here working through me to give you hope." I started to cry as I walked away to join my husband and son. When I sat down my husband smiled at me and said, "That is why God gave you to me, Honey, to give me hope." We held hands for a moment and at that time, we knew that only because of the Grace that we had been given were we able to give.

A CALL TO MOTIVATE YOU – THE
SIERRA LEONEAN

Land that we love our Sierra Leone

Yes, no matter what - we love Sierra Leone.

Do you want to show your love for Sierra Leone?

We can join hands together to re-develop our nation

Should we neglect the majority of our people who suffer?

Act now, my brothers and sisters; we can help the needy.

Yes, we can help the country and the people of Sierra Leone.

Join the unity match for a big association; a new hope, a new dawn for the masses is near.

I can, you can, and we all can do it; All our well-wishers can do it too.

Let us all raise our voices and tell the masses, that we can make our country a better home to be.

You have the talent, I have the means; we both live abroad and cherish the life we live.

CALL FOR AN INASLA OFFICE SPACE

The Sierra Leone community, through INASLA, has been pressing Southwark Council for an office space to facilitate its activities. Past efforts had not been successful despite the unflinching effort of notables like Harriet Harman (MP), Simon Hughes (MP), Councillor Columba Blango and Marie Staunton of PLAN UK.

NEWS FROM SIERRA LEONE

It is with great sadness that we have to report the death of 24 people in a UN helicopter crash in Kono in the east of the country. Reports from Freetown say that the Russian-built MI-8 helicopter hit a hillside before crashing into thick forest.

Our heartfelt and deep wishes of condolence go to all the bereaved relations. May their souls rest in perfect peace. Amen

Representatives of the revived Local Government Councils in all districts have now been sworn in by President Kabbah after elections for the various seats. The ruling SLPP garnered some 70 percent of total seats, with the opposition APC and Independent candidates getting the rest. Freetown residents, in what looked like a protest vote, gave the SLPP great food for thought as the ruling party performed rather badly. SLPP representatives insist that this was because they believe in true democracy and that lessons have been learnt. These elections were held after three decades. Latest reports from Freetown say that Mr Winstanley Johnson, a popular businessman and former bank official is the new Mayor of Freetown. We pray that they will all perform their duty for the benefit of the majority in a selfless manner.

			
Harriet Harman MP	Simon Hughes MP	Columba Blango	Marie Staunton PLAN

These well wishers have participated and supported our activities over the years and have manifested a high degree of respect for the work we are doing in the borough. Unfortunately, the Regeneration and Development Office at Portland Street have continually let us down. We know they can help us if they want to. Nevertheless, we as a community group will not give up hope. We shall continue working and networking from home with individuals and groups until that great day when we get an office space in Southwark.

The United States Embassy in Freetown has put a visa ban on Sierra Leone officials in the present and past administrations whom, in the opinion of the US, are believed to be corrupt. The Embassy is keeping a list of the barred secret and speculations are rife as to what names could be on that document. The US embassy statement said the action was in line with the pronouncement of President Bush that “the US would not be a haven for the corrupt”. Anti corruption campaigners have welcomed the ban, but would like the list to be made public in a “name and shame” gesture.

The Special Court in Sierra Leone began its case against the alleged perpetrators of war crimes and other crimes relating to gross violations of human rights on Thursday June 3, 2004 with former Deputy Defence minister and Head of the Civil Defence forces Chief Sam Hinga Norman and two other co-defendants hearing the various allegations against them. These ranged from rape and abductions to summary executions of suspected opponents. July should see some members of the AFRC/RUF junta of Johnny Paul Koroma and Foday Sankoh appearing in court to answer to similar charges as well as the abduction of UN peacekeepers.