



Virtual Annual Meeting Issue

My View

by **Peggy Murrah**
FoSL President

Due to the dangers we have been facing the last few months, Friends of Sierra Leone had no option but to cancel the annual meeting scheduled for late June at Sapelo Island, Georgia. We decided not to reschedule another meeting for later in the year because Covid is still a huge problem. Instead, we thought an extra, hard copy newsletter would be a more appropriate alternate.

We funded one project earlier in the year and chose to hold off on the others for reasons of rain and Covid. Friends of Sierra Leone supported **Street Child** at the beginning of the pandemic and again a few weeks later. Street Child set up sanitary hand washing stations around the country and initiated a food program for children. Life in Salone didn't stop because of Covid. It just got harder. Our projects committee is cognizant of this and have taken it into consideration. As a result, we are in need of funds so that we can give as much assistance as possible to our families, friends, and even the people we don't know who are facing yet another stumbling block in their lives. Remember, we do not use donations for anything other than projects.

Sadly, this is a time of goodbyes as well. **Penny Alexander**, the Peace Corps Country Director, has left Sierra Leone for her new placement in Vanuatu. **Ambassador Brewer**, the US Ambassador to Sierra Leone, will be leaving as well, but not immediately. Her replacement has been named, but not confirmed. **Ambassador David Reimer** is waiting for his Senate confirmation. There is a link at the end that gives information on Ambassador Reimer.

Friends of Sierra Leone would like to thank Penny Alexander for her willingness to communicate and meet with us during her time in Sierra Leone. We wish her well in her new placement and are a little bit jealous!

We would also like to thank Ambassador Brewer for her support and willingness to meet with us in the past. She represented the United States in such an outstanding manner that she was recently awarded the Commander of the Order of the Republic Award. Friends of Sierra Leone would like to congratulate her on such a prestigious award! There is a link at the end to her ceremony and a press release.

Even though we did not have an annual meeting this year, we are already looking forward to next year. If you would like to

host a meeting in your part of the country, please contact Peggy at

info@fosalone.org.

Links

Announcement and nomination of **David Reimer** to be the next U.S. Ambassador to Sierra Leone:

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/president-donald-j-trump-announces-intent-nominate-appoint-individuals-key-administration-posts-41/>

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/two-nominations-sent-senate-6/>

Presentation to **Ambassador Brewer** and press release:

<https://www.facebook.com/AYVSierraLeone/videos/316497262821227/?t=0>

News article from the State House press release:

<https://snradio.net/sierra-leones-president-julius-maada-bio-confers-commander-of-the-order-of-the-republic-award-on-u-s-ambassador/>

Penny Alexander sends a big Thank You

nwali Limba
ממכמ Temne
baika Mende
Nquwali Susu
Tenki Krio

Dear Friends of Sierra Leone,

It has been a while since we last communicated. I hope you are well and flourishing in this new normal. Additionally, hoping you discovered something new about yourself and/ or your family.

There are quite a few updates... Let's start with the global evacuation of Volunteers and next steps for Post. As you know, on March 16th, the Director of

Projects Report

Jim Hanson
projects committee chair

Our projects program has been delayed this year due to the corona virus pandemic. However, FoSL was able to work with Street Child of Sierra Leone to make a rapid response to the virus in Sierra Leone. In March and April of this year, we granted \$7000 to Street Child to fund two programs that included virus education and prevention, hand washing, and food distribution. Street Child was able to respond quickly to the virus through their village outreach program.

Since that time, the Board of Directors approved one project which they believe could be safely implemented. A covered well with a hand pump was funded for \$2896 to an orphanage in the Kakama Community in Bagbo Chiefdom, outside of Bo. The orphanage serves over 50 Ebola orphans and had no source of potable water.

The three other projects selected for funding in June involve grants to schools and are currently on hold until they can safely be carried out and schools can be reopened.

Thank you for your continued support of our projects fund. Our budget stands at about \$7000 and we look forward to getting our program back to full operation soon.

Peace Corps made the challenging decision to recall all Peace Corps Volunteers worldwide due to the COVID-19 pandemic. For us, in Sierra Leone, within 72 hours, our amazing staff with a high level of empathy, professionalism and efficiency collected all Volunteers; then March 18th, all 60 Volunteers departed Mama Salone for the States. The staff's excellence in rendering the evacuation was recognized with an award from the U.S. Embassy in Sierra

Leone.

Next steps for Post – The Director has made a commitment to staff and Volunteers. For staff, they would not lose their job due to the COVID pandemic. Even though there are no Volunteers, all of the staff in Sierra Leone are busy strengthening and preparing for the return of Volunteers- remotely. For the Volunteers, who were evacuated due to the pandemic, they have the opportunity to return to post once we are able to reopen. These two assurances has provided a sense of hope for staff and Volunteers.

The return of Volunteers is a going to be a very thoughtful and measured approach that involves ALL stakeholders in Sierra Leone and Washington: government of Sierra Leone, Embassy, medical (local, Washington), partners (principals, clinic staff, community leaders), etc. Additionally takes into account overall operating environments in the United States and Sierra Leone. As you can see, it is comprehensive and considerate. The big question- when will Post have Volunteers back? The 'hard' answer, when it is safe for all partners. The 'easy' answer, when it is safe for all partners.

Another update from Post— After 1383 days of service to Sierra Leone, my tenure has officially ended. Similarly to you, Sierra Leone has found a special place in my heart and mind. For the most part, I have LOVED my time in this amazing country with her dynamic and vibrant people. Even in our darkest days, the resilient and committed staff found bright spots and humor; helped me keep focused on the possibilities and hope for tomorrow. The only way to 'move on' from Mama Salone, was to be CD in a totally different environment. I am CD for Vanuatu... Yes, Vanuatu, an island nation in the South Pacific with a population of 280,000 people. This year, they are celebrating 30 years of continuous Peace Corps operations. A replacement has not been identified for Sierra Leone as of yet.

Peace Corps is currently interviewing... if you are interested--- please apply!

To make it extra easy—here is the link:
<https://www.usajobs.gov/Search/Results?k=Peace%20Corps%20Country%20Director>

As I depart—I want to send a HUGE thank you to Peggy. During our darkest days, her unwavering and thoughtful support was a blessing. She always had Mama Salone and the Volunteers at the core of her actions. Thank you Peggy!

Also, I want to send a HUGE thank you to the members of this group. You have supported Volunteers in their service in more ways than I will ever know. Additionally, you have demonstrated to Volunteers what is possible after their service- for work and how to continue engaging with their communities in a sustainable manner.

Thank you for the gift of continuing the excellence you started

In Peace, Penny!

Announcements

Friends of Sierra Leone is adding a new section to our newsletters. Occasionally people contact us and are looking for someone from their Peace Corps or, in the case of Sierra Leoneans, looking for a Peace Corps Volunteer friend. Since we are not able to share contact information due to that pesky privacy issue, we thought this may help. If you are looking for someone who we might know, drop Peggy a line at info@fosalone.org and she will include it in the next newsletter. If anyone responds to your query, she will connect them to you. You may also send announcements for inclusion. Marriages, births, new jobs, deaths, or any other item of interest is welcome.

Looking for:

Dan Howell is looking for **Gwen Glover** originally from South Carolina. Secondary Education Volunteer 1978-1980 and taught at St. Paul's Secondary School, Pujehun



Ambassador Maria Brewer

Dear Friends of Sierra Leone,

As you may have seen, my successor, Ambassador David Reimer, has been nominated by the White House. He is currently the United States Ambassador to the Republic of Mauritius and the Republic of Seychelles. Prior to that, he was the Director in the Office of West African Affairs at the Department of State, among other assignments. As Ambassador Reimer is awaiting his Senate confirmation hearing, I will remain in place for some time. The exact time frame for the transition is unknown. Like much of life these days, we are remaining flexible and adapting to new situations.

I have truly enjoyed the three years I have served as the U.S. Ambassador to Sierra Leone. We have supported a peaceful change in administration from one party to another via a democratic election that was judged to be broadly fair and transparent. We have strengthened the health systems of Sierra Leone, to build back better after the devastation of Ebola, investments that are bearing rich fruit these days as we confront the COVID-19 pandemic. Most recently, we have supported the return of more than 500 Americans and family in the wake of the closure of the commercial airport. We have assisted with preserving the Bunce Island historic site, even as we continue to grapple with the legacy of enslavement

of Africans in America.

On a personal note, I have enjoyed the warm welcome of Sierra Leoneans across the nation as I have traveled. Another of my many joys has been learning Krio. My Sierra Leonean friends and colleagues have been kind in humoring me and forgiving my American-Kringlish accent and mangling of grammar, etc. I have especially loved learning Krio proverbs and sayings, and will be leaving with quite a collection of phrases.

You may have seen that I was awarded the Commander of the Order of the Republic of Sierra Leone by President Bio in a beautiful ceremony on July 30. That was a great honor, reflecting the long and close friendship of our two nations. I received the honor on behalf of the entire U.S. Mission to Sierra Leone, the several hundred Sierra Leonean and American staff who have supported the Embassy in achieving our goals. They have been wonderful colleagues and I will miss them as I move on to my next posting.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, I have been unable to complete the last few up-country trips I had planned, and farewell events will be greatly diminished. I will definitely post video and audio messages directly to the American and Sierra Leonean communities before I depart.

I would like to close by saying a special “thank you” to this community. I often say that the U.S. Embassy represents just one facet of our overall bilateral relationship, as we have many ties between our two countries from universities, churches, NGOs, and of course former Peace Corps Volunteers. As I learned when I left after my initial posting to Freetown (1999-2001), you can leave Sierra Leone, but this country never leaves you. Thank you for all that you are doing to keep our relationship strong and to support Sierra Leone’s development.

Thank you,

Maria Brewer, Ambassador
U.S. Embassy Freetown

Updates on Covid-19 Virus in Sierra Leone

The Covid-19 Virus is affecting all of us in this world, including Sierra Leone. The statistics of cases change every day, so we are listing some links to various websites to get the most recent numbers:

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/world/coronavirus-maps.html>

<https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/sierra-leone/>

Link to article about the virus in Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia:

<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-02173-z>

Timeline of events for Sierra Leone

source:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/COVID-19_pandemic_in_Sierra_Leone

March 2020

The president of Sierra Leone, Julius Maada Bio, confirmed the country's first case of coronavirus disease 2019 on **31 March**, a 37-year-old man who traveled from France on 16 March and had been in isolation since. This single case remained active at the end of the month.

April 2020

On **1 April**, Sierra Leone confirmed its second case which had no history of travel or contact with the country's first case. The government announced a 3-day lockdown starting on 5 April.

On **4 April**, two more cases were confirmed and a further two on 5 April bringing the total to 6.

On **9 April**, after the end of the three-day lockdown, the government announced additional measures. For an initial period of 14 days all inter-district travel is restricted, a curfew from 21:00 - 06:00 is in effect, shops are to sell essential items only and people are to stay at home unless they have good reason not to. Face masks are strongly encouraged, especially in public places.

Project Update

Hi Jim,

Once again, Sierra Leone is preparing for what could be a devastating time and has sadly sent all the Peace Corps Volunteers home.

Due to the Government's declaration of a national emergency, starting in March, RHCI has decided to delay the opening of the Gondama Birth Waiting Home. Thank you for the \$1150 in funds FOSL provided for the construction of the latrine, kitchen, and renovation of the existing building to be used. RHCI received a grant of \$6030 from the US Embassy in Sierra Leone for this project also, and the community provided the equivalent of 25% in labor, land and building.

I'm attaching some pictures to confirm the construction was completed. Once the COVID 19 Pandemic is resolved, and the Government emergency Declaration has ended, we plan to open this 10 bed facility in Gondama, where it is very much needed. In the meantime, RHCI is partnering with the Gondama CHC staff to operate motorbike outreach clinics to 4 villages in their catchment area.

Thank you to you and all the FOSL members for the support of this project, which will improve maternal health.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Warm Regards and stay safe,

Carol Nelson MD MPH



Rural Health Care Initiative

Pursuing healthy pregnancies & children in Sierra Leone

www.rhcimnsl.org

PO BOX 14822, Minneapolis, MN 55414

651-503-1369

On **12 April**, a government press release stated that the last 3 of the 10 infected people had been undergoing self isolation and all 10 are in the treatment facility in a stable condition. In total 1,354 people had entered quarantine for 2 weeks and 736 had completed the 2 weeks and been released.

On **19 April**, the first 6 recoveries were reported, following negative test results for the virus. 29 people remained in a stable condition with the virus and 516 were in quarantine.

On **21 April**, it was announced that President Julius Maada Bio was self isolating following a positive test for the virus by one of his body guards.

On **23 April**, the first death of a 76-year-old male was reported,^[16] followed by a 69-year-old male later in the day. Both cases were in people taken to hospital and found to be infected after death. All those infected and in isolation remain in a stable condition.

On **24 April**, a third death was reported of a 37-year-old male.

By the **end of April**, 124 persons had tested positive and seven had died. Of the remaining 117 patients, 21 had recovered while 96 remained active cases at the end of the month.

May 2020

A new 3 day lockdown was announced starting on **3 May**.

On **3 May**, 1,341 people were in quarantine with 29 total recoveries.

In May there were 737 new cases, bringing the total number of confirmed cases to 861. The death toll rose to 46. The number of recovered patients increased to 454, leaving 361 active cases at the end of the month. Model-based simulations suggest that the 95% confidence interval for the time-varying reproduction number R_t was below 1.0 in May.

June 2020

From **1 June**, wearing of face masks became compulsory. Also on this day, frontline workers declared a strike because of unpaid salaries.

By **4 June**, a total of 4,827 people had passed through quarantine, there were 468 female

cases and 446 male cases.

On **13 June** there were 563 female and 569 male cases reported. Karene District was the only district still reporting no cases and Western Urban had the most at 667 cases.

On **21 June** there were 642 female and 685 male cases. A total of 6,602 people had passed through quarantine. Karene district (in the north of the country) remained without a case whilst Freetown's Western Urban had a total of 718 cases.

During June there were 601 new cases, bringing the total number of confirmed cases to 1462. The death toll rose by 14 to 60. The number of recovered patients more than doubled to 974, leaving 428 active cases at the end of the month. Model-based simulations suggest that the 95% confidence interval for the time-varying reproduction rate R_t was higher than in May, though still below 1.0 until the last week of June when it climbed to around 1.

July 2020

2 July, the government changed the international travel restrictions, banning all passenger flights until 15 July.

On **5 July** there were 759 female cases and 783 male. 7,738 people had passed through quarantine. All districts had reported cases with Falaba District having the lowest case count of 4 and Western Urban (Freetown) the highest at 763.

On **10 July** the president announced that places of worship could reopen from 13 July. Air travel could resume from the same date.

Model-based simulations suggest that the 95% confidence interval for the time-varying reproduction rate R_t was stable around 1.0 in July.



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