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March 13, 2024

Via Email: africana@sas.upenn.edu

Professor Camille Z. Charles, Department Chair
Center for Africana Studies, University of Pennsylvania
Philadelphia, PA 19104

Dear Professor Charles,

We hope this message finds you well in body, mind and spirit. We are the *United Voices for Sierra Leone*, a collective of impassioned Sierra Leonean nationals in the diaspora tirelessly advocating for human rights and democracy in our beloved homeland. We come to you with a profound sense of urgency and a plea to reconsider the choice of Mr. Julius Maada Bio, President of Sierra Leone, as the speaker for the upcoming *3rd Annual Distinguished Lecture in African Studies* scheduled for March 25, 2024.

Our disappointment stems from the stark inconsistencies between the chosen topic, *Navigating the Future: Democracy, Progressive Politics, and Inclusive Development in Africa*, and the track record of the speaker, Mr. Julius Maada Bio, the current autocratic president of Sierra Leone. In his biography you published for the event, it says that Mr. Bio *...is currently serving his second five-year mandate*. This is not true because Mr. Bio is currently holding on to power for a second term illegitimately after he staged an electoral coup d'état in June 2023.

Furthermore, in your published biography of Mr. Bio, it is stated that, *President Bio began his public service career as a school teacher before joining the Sierra Leone Armed Forces, where he rose to become the country's military Head of State in January 1996*. We notice some vital facts missing about Mr. Bio's activities here and that is the fact that Mr. Bio is a serial coup d'état maker in Sierra Leone. He is so notorious for making coups that his current wife, Mrs. Fatima Bio, in 2022, told Sierra Leoneans and the world that her husband holds a PhD in coup d'état. Here is why:

1. **First coup d'état on April 29, 1992:** While a bloody war was raging, Mr. Bio and his junior military colleagues overthrew the government of Joseph Saidu Momoh and formed the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC). Captain Valentine Strasser became the Chairman of the Supreme Council of State (Head of State) and Captain Julius Maada Bio became the Vice Chairman and Chief Secretary of State (Deputy Head of State) in Sierra Leone.
2. **Second coup d'état January 16, 1996:** Mr. Bio and his colleagues ruled the country under the NPRC military junta government for four years, with Mr. Bio playing a huge role in the junta's countless atrocities, including several extrajudicial killings. The soldiers and rabels perpetrated mayhem on the people, leading the people to refer to the war as the "sobel" war, which means soldier/rabel war. The junta's involvement exacerbated the war that continued to rage for several years more, resulting in the killing and maiming of tens of thousands of civilians. An internal power struggle in the NPRC resulted in Julius Maada Bio's overthrow of his comrade Captain Valentine Strasser. That was how Mr. Bio became *the country's military Head of State in January 1996*, and ruled Sierra Leone for three months (please see references).

3. **Electoral coup d'état On June 27, 2023:** Mr. Bio's appointed Commissioner of the Electoral Commission for Sierra Leone (ECSL), announced Mr. Bio the winner, without the completion of vote tabulations. Independent accredited national and international election observation missions, including the National Election Watch, Carter Center, European Union, etc., have questioned the integrity of the ECSL's official results. This is how Mr. Bio has remained in power for a second term, even though there has been no independent, outside investigation of the elections process to validate his legitimacy.

Therefore, Mr. Bio's claim of being called the "Father of Democracy in Sierra Leone" are facetious and insincere. During his presidency over the past five years, Sierra Leoneans have witnessed a distressing reminiscence of the NPRC junta era with the erosion of democracy, marked by extra-judicial killings, arbitrary arrests of opposition party members, election fraud, and a heavy-handed crackdown on civilian protesters and journalists. As recently as November 17, 2023, a U.S. Senator, James Risch, of the Foreign Relations Committee called into question the Bio administration's commitment to democracy in the aftermath of the June 2023 multi-tier elections, described by most stakeholders as contentious, unfair, and lacking transparency.

The people of Sierra Leone are living in an oppressive environment where free speech is stifled, and their fundamental human rights are continually violated under Mr. Bio's leadership. Selecting Mr. Bio as the lecturer on *democracy and progressive politics* not only diminishes the credibility of the University of Pennsylvania's Africana Studies Program, but also perpetuates the mockery of the very principles the lecture claims to promote. His leadership has regrettably contributed to a narrowing and retrogression of the democratic space in Sierra Leone, contradicting the ideals of democracy that the University of Pennsylvania claims to hold dear.

Our request is founded on numerous well-documented human rights violations and Mr. Bio's government's anti-democratic practices substantiated by credible references, which we have compiled in the links below for your perusal. It is imperative that stakeholders at the University of Pennsylvania carefully examine this information to comprehend the severe implications of having Mr. Bio deliver this lecture, which could effectively lend credence to a leader whose actions contradict the principles of democracy.

Your immediate attention to this matter is crucial, as the impact of the selected speaker will resonate far beyond the lecture hall. Your thoughtful decision to choose an alternate speaker will align with our shared goals and stand as a powerful statement supporting democracy in Africa.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Fatima Babih

Fatima Babih, EdD

On behalf of **United Voices for Sierra Leone**

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[Mr. Bio's security forces Tortured and killed a former soldier in November 2023.](#)

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[YouTube: Market Women in Freetown under attack by Mr. Bio's security forces.](#)

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