



Friends of Sierra Leone  
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September 2015

Kushe and welcome to FoSL's second e-newsletter! There are a few things going on between now and our December paper newsletter that we wanted to share. For more information about FoSL and Sierra Leone please follow and contribute to our Twitter and Facebook accounts.

<https://twitter.com/FoSalone>

[www.facebook.com/Friends-of-Sierra-Leone-100382183352420/timeline/](http://www.facebook.com/Friends-of-Sierra-Leone-100382183352420/timeline/)

All grant applications and membership forms can be found on our website:

[www.fosalone.org](http://www.fosalone.org)

As always please email our membership chair with any questions, requests, or suggestions. ([meghan@fosalone.org](mailto:meghan@fosalone.org))

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## Annual Meeting Report -----

From Michael Lee ([michael@fosalone.org](mailto:michael@fosalone.org))

In August, we held our annual meeting in downtown Washington, D.C. This wildly successful two-day event was hosted by the Sierra Leonean Ambassador Bockari Stevens at the Embassy of Sierra Leone. We started the meeting on Friday, August 14<sup>th</sup> with a meet and greet of members and invited guests. Then, quickly, we got down to business! There were many wonderful presentations during our first day. After our Vice President and President of FOSL called the meeting to order, Ambassador Stevens welcomed our members to the Embassy



and discussed the challenges being faced in Sierra Leone.

Following Ambassador Stevens' welcome address, we were able to video chat with the United States Ambassador to Sierra Leone, John Hoover, via Skype. Ambassador Hoover described the current state of affairs concerning the Ebola outbreak. He detailed the progress being made throughout the country and outlined the US Embassy's plans in moving forward into the Post-Ebola phase of this difficult outbreak.

Graced with such luck, we were honored to have former Ambassador Michael Owen speak about his and his wife Annerieke's efforts during the Ebola outbreak. Currently, Owen is the Director of the Office of Analysis for Africa in the Department of State's Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) in Washington, D.C.

Other presenters on Friday included Madiou Williams, a former football player in the NFL and founder of the Madiou Williams Foundation, which focuses on education, health, and wellness for underprivileged youth both in the United States and in Sierra Leone. Kristin Caspar, a RPCV from Liberia and current country desk officer for Liberia, Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Mali, updated our members on the status of Peace Corps in Sierra Leone. We were lucky to have Sallieu Timbo speak to our membership about his position at Restless Development in Sierra Leone and his experience as Sierra Leone's sole representative for President Obama's Young African Leader's Initiative. Hindolo Pokawa, a Sierra Leonean and Founder of Sierra Leone Foundation for New Democracy (SLFND), gave our members a little insight to his new organization which focuses on building local communities' capacity to see themselves as part of the solution to many problems faces in villages. Lastly, Glenn Blumhorst, President of the National Peace Corps Association, came to our meeting and updated our membership on progress made over the past year as well as upcoming events in D.C. to celebrate 55 years of Peace Corps in 2016.

On Friday, we awarded the late Mike Diliberti for his years of dedication to Sierra Leone. FOSL also honored Annerieke Owen Huisman for her commitment to helping those in need during this Ebola outbreak in Sierra Leone. After all the presentations on Friday were complete, members and invited speakers went to Sumah's Restaurant for authentic Sierra Leonean cuisine, including potato leaf, cassava leaf, okra, groundnut soap, and many more! It was a night back in sweet, sweet Salone!



On the following day, our Vice President Aiah Fanday called the meeting to order and introduced the Board members of FOSL. The Board heard the committee reports for membership, advocacy, projects, fundraising, newsletters, and annual meeting. After lunch, the Board discussed fundraising ideas for the coming year as well as membership recruitment opportunities. This was a wonderful annual meeting, put together by dedicated individuals. What better way to end a Sierra Leone event than with food, drinks, and a jam! That night, members met up at the Salone Club House in Hyattsville, Maryland, where we ate, drank, and laughed. It was a great night to remember and we cannot wait for next year! To see more photos from the annual meeting, please visit our Facebook page and our Twitter feed.

## **The Passing of Mike Diliberti -----**

taken from his obituary

MICHAEL DILIBERTI passed away on Sunday, August 9, at his residence in Falls Church, VA, following a two-year battle with cancer, fought with his characteristic optimism and sense of humor. He is survived by his loving wife of 36 years, Wendy, a daughter, Elizabeth, and a son, Joe. Mike was born and raised in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and was fiercely proud of his roots there. He also leaves behind a close-knit circle of friends in Milwaukee, some of whom he knew since grade school.

After receiving a degree in Education from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, he served for four years in the Peace Corps in Sierra Leone, West Africa, teaching primary school and becoming the founding principal of a new secondary school in his village. He received two Master's degrees (Geography and International Affairs) from Ohio University in Athens.

He worked at the World Bank for 30 years, first in the Latin America, then the Africa region. He lived and worked in Juba, South Sudan, shortly before it became an independent country, and then lived for four years in Nairobi, Kenya, as a Senior Resource Management Officer, overseeing and meeting with staff in 16 African countries.

He was passionate about Wisconsin, Africa, history, politics, and geography, and had a knack for keeping people spellbound with his knowledge and humorous stories. Although he did not get to complete his dream of walking the entire length of the Wisconsin Ice Age Trail, he was able, with tremendous support from his family, to walk parts of it, in what was a celebration of nature, togetherness, love, and ice cream.

As a president of Friends of Sierra Leone, a volunteer organization, Mike was instrumental in bringing former Peace Corps volunteers back to the country for an annual meeting following its devastating 10-year civil war. This inspired many former volunteers, who re-visited where they had been posted, to begin myriad charitable endeavors in that country. Mike's love of Sierra Leone was a theme throughout his adult

life. Following the war, he and Wendy visited Sierra Leone three times, reconnecting with former students, and friends, some of whom had become chiefs and respected elders in their communities. Friends of Sierra Leone posthumously awarded him a Humanitarian Service Award August, 14, 2015, in appreciation for his outstanding leadership and success promoting humanitarian causes and for his dedication and commitment to the organization and to Sierra Leone.

A funeral was held in Arlington, VA and there will be a service for Mike in Milwaukee on September 19, 2015.

The Milwaukee services for Mike are the following:

Our Lady of Lourdes Parish

3722 South 58th Street (58th and Forest Home Avenue)

Milwaukee, WI

On: Saturday, September 19, 2015.

Visitation: 9:00-10:00AM

Service: 10:00 AM - with a social immediately following



*Please plan on following us to the community room for food, drink, ice cream, and visiting.*

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to Friends of Sierra Leone in remembrance of Mike. To do this, go to [www.fosalone.org](http://www.fosalone.org). Click "Donate Now!", select a donation amount, then click "Donate Now." Once you complete the payment information, click on the Add link next to "Note to Seller." There you should note that this is in remembrance of Mike Diliberti and add your name(s) and address.

Mike will be missed tremendously by the Friends of Sierra Leone

## **Projects Update**-----

From Jim Hanson ([jimh@fosalone.org](mailto:jimh@fosalone.org))

The Friends of Sierra Leone projects committee would like to thank all of our loyal donors for their support during the Ebola epidemic. Since December of 2014, FoSL has granted over \$19,000 to fund community feeding programs, Ebola education, and health and sanitation projects. Our latest grant went to Family Enrichment Services to repair and modernize the health clinic in Baiima, Bo District.

With the end of Ebola in sight, The Board of Directors moved to reinstate our regular projects program, while keeping the Ebola projects program in place for the near future. The applications for both programs are now available on the FoSL website. The deadline for regular project submissions is October 31, and the grant limit is \$3000. We expect many new project applications as Sierra Leone works to recover from the Ebola epidemic, and we look forward to helping as many communities as possible rebuild their lives.



*Photo: Twenty five women receiving Ebola survivor psycho-social first aid conducted by Women in Action with a FoSL grant in March.*



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## EBOLA DAILY NEWS SUMMARY

### THE STORY BEHIND THE HEADLINES

By Gary Schulze ([gary@fosalone.org](mailto:gary@fosalone.org))

Several RPCVs asked me how the Ebola news summaries came about. Here is the story. A few weeks after I left Sierra Leone last August, the first Ebola case arrived at the Government Hospital in Kenema. Stories about victims of the virus had already been reported from Guinea and soon the press began writing about how the epidemic was spreading throughout Liberia. A great deal of misinformation was coming out in the press about the causes and symptoms of this deadly disease. By September there were frightening headlines like **“Ebola In Sierra Leone: 1115 Cases, 396 Deaths,”** **“Ebola Demands An Urgent Response From The United States And Its Allies”**, and **“A Hospital From Hell, In Makeni, Swamped By Ebola.”** Rumors began spreading that victims of the disease were dropping dead on the streets of Freetown. Frightening pictures of corpses collected by burial workers were cropping up all over the internet. Some people began to believe that Ebola was an airborne virus which could be contracted by breathing the same air as a victim.

I wanted to do something to help Sierra Leone in the effort to combat the epidemic but wasn't sure how I could help. Soliciting contributions was one possibility but anything

raised would have been a tiny drop in the bucket compared to the funding coming from international organizations. On the other hand, I thought it might be helpful to put out a daily summary of major news stories dealing with the disease. Although this information was publicly available, I figured few people had time to scour the news sources every day to find it. My first news summary was sent out on August 31, 2014. The emails were addressed to the FOSL membership list and blind-copied to hundreds of other people including Sierra Leoneans, and U.S. government and health officials. Copies went to the U.S. Ambassador, the Sierra Leone Ambassadors to Washington and the UN, the State House, GOSL Ministers, Peace Corps and USAID officials, American and Sierra Leonean doctors as well as many NGOs working in Sierra Leone and Liberia. A number of the recipients forwarded the news summaries to their own distribution lists so the information was disseminated even further. Friends of Liberia reproduced the summaries for their members. To date over 1,200 people are receiving the emails. My news sources include all major Sierra Leone newspapers, the Liberian and Nigerian papers, the New York Times, the Washington Post, The Guardian, Al Jazeera, Bloomberg, USA Today, the Huffington Post, Reuters, Foreign Affairs Magazine, H5N1, The Telegraph, NPR, the Voice of America, BBC, Toronto Star, TIME, Newsweek, ITV News, All Africa, Africa Young Voices, Makoni Times, CBS, CBC, NBC and many others including a number of medical websites like the New England Journal of Medicine. I also report daily statistics from the National Ebola Resource Center (NERC), and the Sierra Leone Ministry of Health & Sanitation. Some of the sources I had never even heard of before. And soon after I started, readers began sending me links to stories I missed.

I chose a logo which would be easily recognizable – a green, white and blue map of



Sierra Leone shown above the title, **SIERRA LEONE DAILY NEWS SUMMARY**. This became the “trademark” for the emails to distinguish them from messages readers receive from other news sources.

As the epidemic grew, the number of stories multiplied. At one point I was sending out two summaries a day. But every article had to be read to make sure I wasn't including articles which might suggest I was favoring one Sierra Leone political faction over another. And it was essential to avoid articles which containing inaccurate or unproven information. For example, I did not include a number of stories charging that Ebola was created in U.S. biowarfare laboratories in West Africa. As tempting as these stories were, they could not be substantiated. Some of the other stories rejected were really off the wall, like the one titled “Ebola Zombie In Liberia Returns To Life”, with a gruesome picture no less. And often the headlines, especially in the Sierra Leone and Liberia articles, had to be re-written because they either made no sense or they didn't reflect the body of the story. This was a sad commentary on the decline of secondary school education in the country.

As Ebola spread throughout Liberia, the number of stories from the Liberian press began to proliferate the ones about Sierra Leone (Liberia has twice as many

newspapers). It was also difficult to get information about what was happening in Guinea, partly because little reporting was coming from there and also because I don't speak French.

It was depressing going through all these stories of human suffering. Some of the accompanying photographs were chilling. I was especially haunted by the photographs listed below. One of them shows a health worker, suited-up looking like someone from another planet, carrying a small child into an Ebola treatment unit where she probably succumbed to the virus. In the second one, a little girl is looking up at suited health professionals with a frightened look on her face. The next picture shows the desperation of a woman whose sister just succumbed to the deadly virus. The fourth one shows a small child looking at her mother who is critically ill with Ebola. The stories about Ebola orphans were especially heartbreaking since most of the 12,000 children were left to fend for themselves or became the targets of predators.



I try to include video and audio links whenever possible. NPR, the Voice of America, and the BBC were good sources for this. When Dr. Khan died after contracting the virus I put out a separate tribute describing him as a "True Sierra Leone Patriot", and followed it up later with special tributes to the other health professionals who became Ebola victims. Messages from the U.S. Embassy, press releases from State House, conference calls with CDC and the NERC, President Koroma's messages on Ebola,

President Johnson Sirleaf's address to the UN and the White House Ebola Report To Congress were all sent out as supplemental "Sierra Leone Daily News" emails.

When the Sierra Leone Minister of Information held an interactive press conference about the Ebola situation on the internet, I registered as "Editor" of the newsletter. They listed the Ebola Daily News Summary on a side panel on the website between the BBC and Al Jazeera. It came as a surprise to hear Mr. Kanu say, "This next question comes from The Ebola Daily News Summary. Why are so many children surviving when both parents died from the virus?" His answer, by the way, was that children have a stronger immune system. That seemed to make sense until a report came in that everyone in an entire Liberian family had been wiped out by Ebola with the exception of a 100-year-old grandmother.

I've reported on the multiple attempts by pharmaceutical companies to come up with an Ebola vaccine. To date, only one of these has proven to be effective in preventing the virus and, as of this writing, Ebola vaccine testing is going on around the globe.

One big problem has been the reliability of the statistics reported by the Sierra Leone and Liberian governments, as well as the absence of reporting from Guinea. In the beginning both Health Ministries seemed to be lowballing both the number of new cases and resulting deaths. Some of this could be attributed to the fact that many of the deaths in remote villages went unreported. On the other hand, recently Xinhua, the Chinese news agency reported 5 Ebola cases in the Kambia District, none of which were mentioned in either the NERC or the Ministry of Health websites.

In the past year I've received thank-you messages from a number of recipients of the newsletter, including many RPCVs who served in Sierra Leone and Liberia as well as diplomats and Sierra Leoneans. The comments received were very gratifying, especially the one from a Sierra Leonean in England who told me the news summaries were useful in changing the minds of a number of Africans who have lived for years in the UK and believed that the whole Ebola story had been exaggerated, was only a ruse to collect donations, and that the virus never reached Freetown.

I had hoped to visit Sierra Leone last April but realized it would mean ending the daily news summaries. With the poor communications system over there it would have been impossible to keep sending out reports from Freetown. Now I'm hoping to return in December although I suspect Ebola will still be present when I get there. After reporting on the virus for over a year, I believe Ebola will be around for a long time to come. The analogy to a forest fire is a good one. As long as one ember is left smoldering, the fire will flare up again. We can only pray that one of the many vaccine research projects currently underway around the world will prove to be 100% effective and that the deadly Ebola disease will finally disappear from the face of the African continent. As our Muslim friends would say, "Inshallah."

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