

COUNCIL OF CHURCHES IN SIERRA LEONE. STATEMENT ON THE AUGUST 14 2017 FLOODING AND MUD SLIDE IN FREETOWN

In the early hours of Monday August 14, 2017, parts of the capital city Freetown was overtaken by massive flooding and mud slides that led to the loss of hundreds of lives and millions of dollars in property. Communities worst affected are Regent, and Kamayama in the west and Kissy and Waterloo in the East end of the city. In the last 24 hours, the Council of Churches has received many phone calls, e-mails and letters from our many partners around the world expressing their love and prayers for us at yet another very difficult time in our history of tragedies as a nation.

The Council of Churches in Sierra Leone expresses our thanks and appreciation to our many partners around the world who have made phone calls, e-mails and letters to share their concern, love and prayers for us.

As the largest Christian organization in the country, the Council of Churches in Sierra Leone laments the present spate of disaster in Freetown and mourns the death of hundreds of poor and innocent people who lost their lives in this needless and preventable disaster. In the same vein, we empathize with the thousands of people including mainly women and children who survived the disaster and now live under life threatening conditions with no place they could call home.

All Sierra Leoneans are aware that the entire city of Freetown lies below the slopes of surrounding hills that span east to west. Year after year, there is massive destruction of natural vegetation for farming, fuel wood and for building houses. In addition, stone mining has become a huge profession in the city. Through these activities, the soil is laid bare making it vulnerable to excessive run off water and mud slides in the raining season. Freetown goes through this every year with people losing their lives.

This year's flooding in many parts of the city and mud slide in the Regent community in the western part of the city is unprecedented. Never in the history of the city have we experienced such magnitude of sickening and horrifying disaster with houses buried, whole families missing and bodies discovered with dismembered parts. We continue to receive staggering information on the number of people that has so far died as a result of the flood and mudslide. However we are of the opinion that up to one thousand people or more may have already died with about 600 people still unaccounted for. Some of the unaccounted are still buried under rubles while others have been swept away by the floods.

Up to 5 PM yesterday Tuesday, volunteer rescue teams were still recovering and transporting corpses to the mortuary in the limited ambulances available. At the nation's premier Connaught hospital in Freetown, hundreds of corpses are piled at the mortuary for public view and identification.

The Council of Churches in Sierra Leone note with gratitude the several good efforts made by volunteer rescue youth groups and civil society who placed their lives on the line rescuing people and recovering bodies from rubbles and the flood waters. This gallant humanitarian efforts by our youth deserves recognition.

We recognize the great contribution made by the Red Cross to provide vehicles to convey the dead to the mortuary and survivors to the nearest health facilities. We also recognize and acknowledge the role played by the Government of Sierra Leone, the Media, and civil society.

We give thanks to God for those who survived the disaster and pray for the many others who lost their lives. As a nation, our most urgent responsibility now is to be in solidarity with the thousands of those who survived the disaster.

We therefore call on government and the City Council of Freetown as a matter of urgency;

1. To do everything possible to expedite the identification and burial of corpses in order to prevent other unintended health consequences.
2. To expedite the process of registration and to speedily relocate and provide temporary shelters for the survivors of the disaster. This will make it very easy for other agencies to distribute relief items to the survivors.
3. We call on non-governmental organizations, civil society and the religious body to complement government's efforts in providing immediate and urgent relief to the survivors of the disaster
4. We call on all member churches to donate relief items including food, clothing blankets, buckets, plates, cups, toiletries, basic kitchen ware, vitamins, shoes, health and school kits especially for affected children who will be returning to school in September. Please donate all items in care of Ms. Eburn James Dekam, General Secretary, CCSL office, King Harman Road Freetown on or before Tuesday 22 August 2017.
5. We call on all churches to observe three days of mourning, fasting and prayers beginning Friday August 18 through Sunday August 20 for victims and survivors and for God to avert such tragedies in the future.

As a council, we make ourselves available and pledge our continued and unreserved support to work with Government and all other partners not only to address the current disaster, but to put in place systems that will seek to prevent or minimize such unfortunate tragedies in the future.

More especially, our hearts go to families and all those who survived the disaster. We stand by them and support them with our prayers, presence and assistance to help them go through this period of pain, trauma and grief with dignity. I encourage you all not to be afraid of the future. The Lord is with you. (Numbers 14:9)

Long live our beloved Sierra Leone. Long live “peace, freedom and justice” in our Land.

BISHOP JOHN K YAMBASU

PRESIDENT COUNCIL OF CHURCHES IN SIERRA LEONE