

When August 10 happened, many people looked up to President Bio to lead the nation out of the horror and fear that gripped the country. There were calls for him to return home and talk to the nation, hoping that he would reassure citizens, diffuse the tensions and chart a path for dialogue. He did return home and did deliver a speech which took an already familiar tone—defiant, defensive and dismissive, with a touch of demagoguery meant for the *Pao-pa-riat*. Many Sierra Leoneans expected a deviation from the initial fiery rhetoric by top officials of the administration and other hardliners. Alas!

Solomon Jamiru, President Bio's deputy information minister, struck a pacifying tone, to the applause of many, including opposition supporters and independents. He called for calm, reasoning and dialogue, inviting well-meaning Sierra Leoneans to come together to have a conversation that would promote peace. In simple terms, he seemed to understand the anger and therefore spoke to all Sierra Leoneans. That was unlike the rhetoric of other government officials who had already taken a position that only sought to point fingers at everyone else but themselves, creating more anxiety and fear. Jamiru ended up being a lone voice in the administration, completely ignored by his government and party and attacked by the *Pao-pa-riat* on social media. At a time when the nation needs reassurance, empathy and responsible leadership, people in government did not have an appetite for the Jamiru language and direction. *Jamiru-lese* gained no traction.

Instead, the President and his government's rhetoric remains the same—consistently framing the protests as purely political and dismissing the genuine concerns and anger of the people who took to the streets. This stance only reinforces the existing discontent and continued alienation of sections of the population that disagree with the government. The Government has chosen the *Pao-Pa* way, instead of the Jamiru route to resolving the crisis.

The crackdown on people believed to have been involved in the protests continues. There have been reports of forceful disappearances and mass arbitrary arrests and detentions. The police have so far not disclosed the number of people they have arrested and who they are. The raids continue. Last week, a well-known opposition supporter and activist, Hassan Dumbuya commonly known as Evangelist Samson was killed in Makeni. The explanation for the killing sounds more like an amateur attempt to cover up. Just too many holes in it. The President has vowed to investigate the incidents of August 10 and apply the law fully on people found to be behind the violence. In a recent meeting with traditional leaders, he reinforced his initial position—“we will go after them”.

So far, no one in government seems to be interested in talking about the death of civilians from police violence—something that has sadly become familiar. The lessons and opportunities offered by the protests are being ignored for actions and rhetoric that lead to no sustainable path to peace—serving only the hardliners in the *Bio Pao-Pa-riat*.

As we stated in our previous piece, it is a choice that the President has to make, and he seems to be clear about the direction he is headed. At this point, we cannot keep assuming that the Government's preferred route is a mistake. While it might be a miscalculation, the intention is clear. However, it is not the direction that addresses the underlying issues of the protest. It is a path that appeases the hardliners and hardens the opponents. What you get from such posturing is a temporary treatment of the symptoms, while the disease festers. And the consequences could be costly, especially with the level of dangerous polarisation we see today.

The current state of affairs is a test of this administration's ability to hold the nation together and promote cohesion, despite our differences. So far, it only seems to have exposed the oldness in the 'New Direction' but still presents another opportunity for the President to steer the ship towards an actual and meaningful New Direction. The fact that elections are on the horizon is not helping because you can sense the nervousness in some of these actions.

Aware of the risk of this falling on deaf ears, we should remind the government that the Jamiru way is not a sign of weakness. It is what is needed to help resolve the issues and those lonely Jamiru-type voices are the ones that are supposed to be closest to the President's ears at this time. So, Mr. President, do you still want to go the *Pao-pa* way or build on the Jamiru route? It is a choice.

Whatever you are up to, try to have a nice weekend and stay out of trouble.

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