

## Silence Broken

At the end of August 2008, Krio Descendants Union of Texas, an offshoot of the settlers Union formed in the 1950s in Sierra Leone as is the Krio Descendants Union (KDY) of Freetown (Freetown) currently headed by Mrs. Cassandra Garber, held a 3-day family reunion in the great state of Texas, to enhance its cultural heritage through reflection, education and charitable giving.

It was Mrs. Cassandra Garber, the former principal of the Freetown Secondary School for Girls (FSSG), current civic activist and president of KDY Freetown, who galvanized families in the Dallas area to bring together scattered thoughts into a framework that is infinitely persuasive and presented in a manner that will help all Sierra Leoneans seek a path to be a more responsible people and create a better wellbeing for our people.

But charity begins at home so Mrs. Garber challenged krios across the United States (US) and United Kingdom (UK) to abandon the complacent attitudes and get involved in the development of Sierra Leone saying, "our ancestors made a lot of sacrifice to establish the homestead of Freetown and it is a betrayal to give up to circumstances and let go." Freetown was actually founded in 1787 for the re-settlement of freed slaves after the philanthropist Granville Sharpe, an Englishman who was deeply concerned about their welfare, published in 1786, his proposal to take them all back to Africa and settle them there where they could prosper in a genial climate.

Mrs. Garber asked all Krios therefore to rescue their commitment from a morass of self doubt believing that the time is now to make a difference in the lives of Krios, offer plans for the future and suggest some practical ways to get there. To this end, KDU Texas on Friday August 28 2008 broke the conspiracy of silence with a family reunion weekend in Carrollton, Texas where krio families across the U.S met in a relaxed atmosphere to discuss their future believing that to talk about the future is useful only if it leads to action now.

The following morning, a luncheon sale that energized countless others, brought to prominence several of krio sumptuous dishes like sawa sawa, crain crain and bitters. The three- hour event was only a prelude to a black tie dinner in the evening at the Holiday Inn Hotel, in Plano, Texas to extend the discussion and ask the question, what can Krios who are abroad do now while still in the position to make a significant contribution to Freetown in particular?

At the dinner, monetary pledges were made to fund projects already underway in York, Gloucester and Bathurst villages, embarked upon by KDU Texas. Speaking on the need to promote education, chairman Dr. Jerry-Cline-Bailey who taught at the University of Sierra Leone, the University of Texas in Austin and is presently Associate Professor in English at Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio, wasted no time in citing himself as a beneficiary of scholarships, thereby underscoring the importance of this much needed enterprise.

Keynote speaker Mr. Ebenezer Strasser-King in his address, told of the combination of power, politics and exploitation that led to our current state of economic development or lack thereof. He was frank about the purchase of Freetown as a place for freed slaves and recognized the role of chief Demba who because of his age was called Pa Demba. A street in Freetown was named after him.

Guests drank from the rich cup of experience of the co-chair Ms. Frederica M. Williams, who has more than 20 years of experience in health care administration, finance and operations management as well as a wealth of knowledge concerning community-based health care, international public health, strategic planning, revenue control, physician practice management and technology. She stressed the importance of health and education in eliminating poverty.

Not to understate the magnitude of our problems, Mr. Jonathan Tani Nicol, president of KDU Texas, a licensed professional civil engineer with world renowned Jacobs Engineering Group and currently senior project manager of the Dallas Area Rapid Transit light rail improvements project, laid bare explanatory calculations that can help improve our judgment as it relates to the “preservation of our very rich Krio heritage and culture and the present deplorable conditions of some of our kith and kin in Freetown.”

He reiterated the goals of the organization including but not limited to the following: Conduct educational seminars to share krio family history and culture, establish economic development programs and finance literacy classes to revive and empower the krio business community in Sierra Leone, establish a scholarship fund to aid and assist low income families to provide quality education for children of Krio descent, provide access to healthcare for the forgotten people in the greater Freetown area, provide support to Krio descendants to reconnect to their heritage and conduct a Krio family reunion on a periodic basis.

Mr. Nicol was quick to “reassure all that KDU Texas is not an organization with a separatist or elitist agenda but one that recognizes the uniqueness of Krio history, heritage and culture and appreciate its role in a collaborative effort to strengthen and promote a unified Sierra Leone.”

Highlights of the black tie dinner included a beautiful rendition of Sister Sledge’s “**We are family**” by Shilah Philips, Miss America runner up and was Miss Texas 2006. Mrs. Cassandra Garber received the pioneer award and lifetime achievement awards were given to Rev. Ernest King and Mama Hannah Clarke respectively, both Krio seniors now living in Dallas, Texas.

Realizing assuredly that we have not come about by accident, and certainly have not made ourselves, Sunday’s activities started with a thanksgiving service to the Almighty God. This beautiful service was held at The Servant House Church, Lewisville Texas where Pastor Ernest King called on us as Christians to be committed to God’s call in service to our kith and kin. His message was based on the Biblical scripture text Ephesians 1:17-23.

Later that afternoon, everyone gathered at Hedrick House, Lewisville for a picnic that presented the kids with a milieu to have fun.  
Items including the traditional Krio cabaslot were raffled to help support our projects.