

OPEN LETTER TO DR. JULIUS SPENCER ON THE STRING OF RESIGNATIONS AT RADIO DEMOCRACY (98.1 FM)

By Augustine Sorie-Sengbe Marrah (Pro-democracy activist lawyer)

6/8/2023

Dear Dr. Julius Spencer,

Growing up as a teenager, your voice including those of Hannah Foullah and Alie Bangura, was as important as the hail of bombs by ‘Alpha Jet’ against the renegade and mutinous Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC). Our nation would not easily name ten heroes or sheroes of the democracy we enjoy or aspire for without mentioning the risky role, your trio, so valiantly played at Radio Democracy in the war trenches. Inspired by your legacy, Radio Democracy has over the years evolved into a significant non-state pillar of our nation’s democracy. It has earned its reputation as a watchdog of our democracy. Every weekday, citizens across the nation wake up to the signature tune and characteristic fierce engagements on issues of governance and scrutiny of those to whom we have entrusted power.

Yesterday, I read with keen interest a press statement you signed as Chairman of the Board of the Society for Radio Democracy 98.1 FM, officially announcing the departure of Asmaa James as Station Manager and the resignations of Mabel Kabba and Khadija Bangura. Let me disclose for starters, that however imperfect, I love the work and leadership that Asmaa did and showed at 98.1. She has left an indelible footprints in the sands of time as a consummate journalist.

But Doc, I am puzzled that you so loudly omitted to explain the nexus or lack thereof between the departure of Asmaa and the resignations of Mabel and Khadija. Even more puzzling is your announcement of the hire of a consultant to caretake for a period of six months until a new leader is appointed. I took my time to speak with a few folks who understand the backstory—none of them was any of the resigning parties—and I learnt that the resignations of Mabel and Khadija were triggered in part by the many critical but yet unaddressed issues which gnaw at the very foundation of the institution coupled with the appointment of the consultant without any consultation with the production (senior management) team. I am open to correction but I also learnt that Mabel, being the committed deputy station manager was never offered the opportunity to superintend until a new station manager is found. If this is true, then it begs the questions: Can Mabel not bring fresh ideas to 98.1 in a manner that would revitalise the station? Can she not provide leadership to meet the current and future challenges of the media sector? Was she offered the opportunity to lead in a manner that meets these criteria? Was she empowered and supported to do so? Was she tried and tested and proven to have failed? Or was she determined as only fit for deputy and unfit for anything higher?

Therefore Dr. Spencer, an unabridged explanation of the deep-seated concerns which prompted these resignations is what would put an end to the “rather wild speculations” and ongoing discussions regarding the recent resignations at 98.1. *And dare I say that it is only right that people are informed in whole and not in part.*

Those who follow 98.1 would attest that Mabel and Khadija were to Asmaa what Iniesta and Xavi were to Messi (pardon me if you are not a football enthusiast). In essence, they were great contributors to her leadership at 98.1. And in truth, each of them is competent to lead and sustain the legacy and vision of Radio D. The government has set out on an ambitious journey to drive women’s empowerment; therefore overlooking these women, as if they are incapable of caretaking, at least until a new leader is appointed at 98.1 is out of tune with the national chorus on giving fair opportunities to women in the workplace. Mabel and Khadija deserve to be seen—they deserve commendation for their loyalty, support and dedication to the work and vision of Radio Democracy. Women who are aspiring to take up leadership roles and decision-making spots on the table should

be motivated to do so. They say the reward for hard work is more work—it is not snub and deflation!

Doc, I know that 98.1's legacy is built in part on your selfless service. I listened to you on 98.1fm as a teenager, now my children and the youth I mentor reference 98.1 as authority on issues of national concern. For my part, I can only hope that the integrity of such legacy is wholly bequeathed to posterity; and for your part, I hope you would always remember that it is very difficult to build but easy to plunder.