

Remembering J-6: It's time Mr. President to end the Arata and leatherboot-esque political violence and indiscipline

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The history of our nation is freckled with tales of violence—civil unrest, political violence and coups and counter-coups dating as far back as the 1960s. But January 6 would perhaps forever steal the limelight in the history of Sierra Leone as the climax of our civil conflict which began in March 1991. One would certainly run out of adjectives to describe the human-orchestrated barbarity which was unleashed on residents of Freetown on that day. If there is any foreshadow of Armageddon, the events of 6th day of January 1999 would fill the bill.

There is no gainsaying that civil discontent and indiscipline are the breeding grounds for civil unrest. Perhaps, this view informed the President Bio's declaration of a war on indiscipline, one of his triad of wars. Forget the argument about the oft-practice of the state taking a posture of belligerence on social menaces, knowing our country's sad history of senseless hostilities. But for someone who was Commander-in-Chief, for at least a couple of months during the era of civil conflict, one could understand his militant resolve to stamp out indiscipline in the country. In 2007, when the incumbent Sierra Leone People's Party lost to the opposition All People's Congress, the former's party office was comprehensively ransacked with allegations of rape committed against some of its female inhabitants. Then the era of leatherboot dawned; political violence perpetrated in broad daylight by leatherboot and his ilk was sanctioned by the deafening silence of the ruling party—APC and ratified by state processes. As trophy for his violence, leatherboot was enlisted as state body-guard for then President. Then came 2018, the APC with all their leatherboot was booted out. And then emerged, Arata—Paopa. As if Arata had studied to mastery the violence antics of leather-boot, no sooner had the SLPP gained the reins of power than he emerged as the face of SLPP's own tale of political violence. Arata talking; Arata Speaking has become the latest refrain for political violence. And yet again the state and the ruling party have become all deaf and mute at the excesses of the new kid of political violence.

If January 6 should remind us of anything, it should be that these speckles of political violence and indiscipline are undesired flashbacks of the bitter carnage of our past. The gory reminders of the events of some 21 years today should nudge our Commander-in-Chief to take a firm position against violence and indiscipline as he swore he would on

the day he was inaugurated into office. Charity, must begin at home. The President as leader of his ruling party should ensure that Arata does not speak and talk violence in a democracy for which limbs were chopped and lives and destines lost forever. As the gallant soldier he is (once a soldier, always a soldier), he must take action against political violence and the abuse of power and authority in subverting the rule of law. The “*APC did it*” melody should end now. It is time to start this war against indiscipline and violence. This day could record just another history—and you—Mr. President could be the one who erases what J-6 is known for.