



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

28 March 1980

PRIME MINISTER

Agree a visit

in principle?

MJS

28/3

Dear Michael,

Open to - But we have  
no further funds for  
aid? - no

SIERRA LEONE

During his call on Lord Carrington in June last year Dr Abdulai Conteh, Foreign Minister of Sierra Leone, said that President Stevens was anxious to pay a working visit to Britain at an early date. Lord Carrington welcomed this proposal in principle but pointed out that such a visit would require careful preparation in view of the President's position as an elder statesman in Africa and the Commonwealth.

President Stevens, who is 74, has been President since 1971 when the country became a Republic. He was Prime Minister for the previous three years. Although he is open to criticism for the ruthless manner in which he has on occasion dealt with his opponents and also for his mismanagement of the economy, Stevens has guided Sierra Leone through a potentially turbulent period of its history with some skill. Following the introduction of a One-Party Constitution in 1978, President Stevens has called for a spirit of national reconciliation and has appointed former political opponents to government office. While at pains to be even-handed in his relations with the East and West, Sierra Leone has generally adopted policies which have been favourable to Western interests.

We have been trying to add more substance to our relations. Two visits by Dr Conteh last year as a guest of HMG were the first Ministerial contact for several years. Sierra Leone has close professional, cultural, educational and sentimental links with this country and we still have a valuable commercial interest. President Stevens retains a deep respect for Britain and its institutions, particularly the Monarchy, but he has commented that we seem to have lost interest in his country, particularly over the question of aid.

A visit later this year would be particularly timely because the President will take up the Chairmanship of the Organisation of African Unity in June. Largely because of this, Sierra Leone has taken much greater interest in African affairs over the last two years, and it is important that we do all we can to encourage the President to maintain his comparatively moderate outlook.

/Lord Carrington

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Lord Carrington, therefore, recommends that President Stevens should be invited to come here during his year of office as Chairman of the OAU. At this stage we have no precise dates to propose, though we incline towards a visit in November. If the Prime Minister agrees in principle that President Stevens should come here we would propose to discuss the timing of a visit with the Sierra Leoneans.

Lord Carrington also proposes that Mr Luce should visit Freetown in May 1980. This would be the first visit by a British Minister to Sierra Leone for several years and would enable us to get our point of view across to President Stevens before he becomes OAU Chairman.

*yours ever*  
*Roderic Lyne*

(R M J Lyne)

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