Good morning Mr. Mayor and Councilors:

I bring you warm and season's greetings from the Sierra Leone community.

The Sierra Leone Nationals Association of Manitoba (SALNAM) is a community based organization that promotes the cultural heritage of Sierra Leoneans living in Winnipeg. It strives to assist its members to integrate into Canadian society.

One of the ways the organization does this is by running the Community Resource Centre, which serves as a vehicle for the delivery of culturally-sensitive programs and services to its members. These are programs for youth and for other disadvantaged groups in our community. The Centre's programs and services are also open to all interested Canadians.

SALNAM's vision is a community that is strong, viable, caring, and united with the expressed goal of maximizing its social, educational, economic and cultural well being in the context of Canadian society.

The Centre's programs have benefitted many within and outside our community. These programs include the After School Tutoring Program; Computer Literacy and Employment Counseling; and the Cultural Awareness Program. Other programs offered at the Centre include: Adult Basic Education; youth drop-in program for physical and recreational activities. The Centre is also used for information and library service, and for holding community meetings. It is also used for cultural dance training and rehearsals for events such as Folklorama and other cultural events.

Our community is young and growing, and it has serious challenges which impede integration with the rest of the Winnipeg community. We have an estimated population of about 800 to 1000 people. Ninety percent are refugees and about 80 percent are under the age of 30. More than 50 percent of households are headed by single parents, mostly women, many with little or no formal education.

Also, many of our youths some of whom had no formal educational background prior to coming to Canada, ended up dropping out of school simply because they couldn't cope with the "one size fits all" admission policy. And many of them, as a result of the cultural vacuum in which they operate, end up becoming recruits for gangs and engaging in criminal related activities. They also end up becoming ward of the criminal justice system, leaving them as unproductive members and a burden to themselves, their families, the community, the city, and to society at large.

Mr. Mayor and councilors, SALNAM strongly believes that one of the best ways of addressing or overcoming these challenges is by continuing to provide the Centre's programs and services, which have benefitted many people within and outside our community.

Also, with the influx of the Syrian refugees into Winnipeg, there is the need for Resource Centres such as ours, to provide settlement services for these new immigrants who will benefit from our services, such as the Employment Counseling, and the Basic Adult Education Program, including the Computer Literacy program.

We are therefore hopeful that the city will give our application a favorable consideration. We are making a modest request for funding in the amount of $42,483 to assist us to hire a Community Development Worker, and to cover the cost of some programs, rent, and utilities.

Relying solely on volunteer service is not an effective means for the Centre to achieve its service delivery obligations in a timely basis. Hiring a Community Development Worker on a part-time basis is very crucial to the effectiveness and the success of the Centre in service delivery. It will also help to build the organization's capacity both in the short and long term. The Community Development Worker will also serve as Office Manager at the Centre.

The candidate for this position should have some university education with an understanding of Research techniques and the ability to work with people from various socio-economic and cultural backgrounds.

He or she will be required to give some volunteer hours from time to time in order for him or her to fully execute his or her duties as outlined in our proposal. As Community Development Worker, he or she will be responsible for collecting membership dues, and for soliciting donations from businesses and community members from time to time. This will help to raise funds to sustain the Resource Centre and its programs and services in the long run.

As I also informed you the last time, we are also looking into operating a Daycare program as a part of the global set of services provided at the Centre which has a total space of about 3,000 square feet. Income from the operation of the Daycare program will help us to sustain the Centre in the long run.

Mr. Mayor and Councilors, we strongly believe that a Daycare program will be a viable one, as the need for daycare space in the province continues to rise. It was recently reported in the news that about 15,000 Manitobans are currently on the waiting list for childcare services. A Daycare program will certainly help to address the high demand for daycare services within and out of our community.

The Centre gives our members a sense of pride and belonging in this great city. It is also a symbol of our commitment to help promote diversity in Winnipeg as law abiding citizens of this great city. It serves as a formidable link with other Winnipeg communities, for the purpose of promoting cultural diversity among the diverse cultures in Winnipeg. Our Centre is the public face of our growing community in Winnipeg. Sierra Leoneans have had a long history with Winnipeg, starting with the arrival of Sierra Leonean students in the early sixties.

Finally your worship and councilors, on behalf of SALNAM and the Sierra Leone community, I would like to thank the entire council for the $5,000 grant approved to assist us cover some operating costs of the Centre. Please note that this Resource Centre project, if it is continued, will provide benefits to individuals, our community, and to the city in several ways, as outlined in our proposal.

I thank you for your invaluable time.

Presented by:

Abu Bakarr Kamara,

President,
Sierra Leone Nationals Association of Manitoba (SALNAM)