The following is a partial list of activities during our past 26 years:

1995  Special Olympics World Games
Friends of Sierra Leone formed to organize for the Games

1996  Al Marder and Althea Norcott meet to write the application
Alderwoman Esther Armmand brings motion to New Haven Board of Aldermen

1997  Twelve community leaders travel to Freetown on a factfinding mission.
The Official Signing of the Sister City Agreement on the New Haven Green–Mayor John DeStefano,
Mayor Florence Dillsworth and John Leigh, Sierra Leone Ambassador to the US
1st Taste of the Tropics exhibit at Edgerton Park (ongoing)
The Connecticut Children’s Museum’s Sister Cities Suitcases
Hosting students from Afula, Israel at Hillhouse High School (ongoing)

1998  Joe Opala speaks at New Haven Colony Historical Society

1999  Dr. Abraham speaks at New Haven Colony Historical Society
1st Amistad Sunday at Dixwell Avenue Congregational UCC (ongoing)
Reception at Peabody Museum for the new Ambassador to the United Nations from Sierra Leone
Amistad players perform at Hillhouse High School and AME Varick Church
Reception for six families from Sierra Leone who have been resettled by the CT UCC
Shirley Gbujama, Minister of Social Welfare, Gender and Children’s Affairs, speaks at Hillhouse HS

2000  Launching of the Freedom Schooner La Amistad
1st of many shipments from Dixwell Avenue Congregational UCC Church
Home Port Celebration
Sent $1800 to repair roof damaged by war of St. Joseph’s Convent School

2001  Archbishop of Sierra Leone, Joseph Ganda conducts Mass at St. Mary’s Church;
Nathan Garland designs Freetown-New Haven Sister Cities stationery;
Support Amistad Crew when it returns to its Home Port, New Haven

2002  Sierra Leone students visit Yale University as part of the First Human Rights Clinic
Fundraiser with Amistad America, Inc. at Hot Tomato's
Workshop by Prof. Joe Opala on the Transatlantic Links between US and SL at Luce Hall
Supported Amistad Friendship Fisheries
2nd Shipment with First Farmington UCC

2003  Amistad America, Inc. dinner in New York
First Thanksgiving dinner with Sierra Leone families (ongoing)
Freetown Quilters formed – 1st Quilt-
Sydney Coaker, Sierra Leone Poet Laureate visits and gives workshops for Arts and Ideas
1st Amistad Sunday at Dixwell Avenue Congregational UCC (ongoing)
Community Crusade helps with 3rd shipment with First Farmington UCC

2004  2nd Quilt “Market Ladies”
4th Shipment with First Farmington UCC

2005  Visit to SL with group from 1st Farmington UCC – Guests of Vice Chancellor Victor Strasser King
Silent Auction fund raiser with Amistad America Inc. at the Greek Olive
5th Shipment with First Farmington UCC
Joe Opala speaks at Community Baptist Church

2006  Vice Chancellor and Mrs. Victor Strasser King first visit to NH and speak with HH students
1st Oratorical Contest at Hope Day School
Helped purchase land for new Hope Day School
Tooth Brushes for Sierra Leone; 6th Shipment
Exhibits at Arts and Ideas on the New Haven Green
10th Anniversary Celebration at Lighthouse Point Park Carousel

2007  Collect 5,000 pencils and sharpeners to take to Freetown as several members traveled to Freetown to
meet La Amistad as it docked there on its transatlantic journey.

2008  Form Freetown-New Haven Sister Cities Committee in Freetown.

2009  1st Abalabai at Southern Connecticut State University
to celebrate raising $10,000 for Water Library and announce the formation of Sierra Leoneans in Connecticut

2010-2013  Sent $5000 to Fort Street School in Freetown to build a library and much needed water tower. $2000 to Faith
Cathedral Primary School in Freetown to help with building supplies.

2014-2016  Ebola Crisis Raised over $150,000 in three months to purchase and send medical supplies and four vehicles to be
used as ambulances. 2015 Volunteer of Year Award and Humanitarian Assistance Award from Sister Cities International

2017-2018  Sent funds to assist with Mud Slides; shipments to St. George’s Orphanage; Sweet Mother Award

2019-2022  Sports equipment to St. George’s Orphanage; Honored Mohammed Barrie at NHSC 45th Anniversary Celebration

2023  Mayor Yvonne Aki-Sawyerr visits New Haven
Freetown-New Haven Sister Cities History

Little did anyone know that the 1995 Special Olympics World Games in New Haven would lead to the formation of a Sister Cities program between New Haven, Connecticut and Freetown, Sierra Leone.

Through the friendships made and bonds formed at these games, the interest and deep roots in these coastal cities were nourished. The relationship between our two cities goes back over 180 years, to the historic Amistad Incident, and has been kept alive by The Amistad Committee, Amistad American, Inc. and many others. The games provided an opportunity for ordinary citizens, separated by an ocean to connect, interact and develop friendships. They had a chance to share hopes and dreams and work and cheer for a common cause – the Sierra Leone athletes. In 1992, the statue of Sengbe Pieh, the leader of the Amistad Revolt, was dedicated in front of New Haven City Hall. This exciting and historic event was witnessed by New Haveners and a large delegation from Sierra Leone.

As the World Games ended, Al Marder, president of The Amistad Committee in New Haven, approached Althea Norcott (former co-chair of Sierra Leone’s Host Town program for Special Olympics), about forming a Sister Cities Committee. The application was completed and accepted by the International Sister Cities. In September 1996, Alderwoman Esther Armmand sponsored a resolution before the New Haven Board of Alderman “designating New Haven and Freetown, Republic of Sierra Leone as Sister Cities for the purpose of exchanging ideas and cultures on a long-term continuous basis.” The resolution was accepted by the Board. That same year, 1996, Mayor Florence Dillsworth and Mayor John DeStefano signed the official agreement on our New Haven Green with the Ambassador to the United States, John Leigh, attending. Thus, Freetown, Sierra Leone West Africa, became New Haven’s sixth Sister City. The following year, twelve New Haven community leaders went to Freetown on a fact-finding mission to meet with various people to begin planning ways to work together.

This small group of dedicated individuals, representing New Haven’s diverse population and churches embarked on twenty-six years of fundraising, collecting and donating, educating, collaborating and traveling to Sierra Leone. Over $300,000 has been raised with another $200,000 worth of furniture, books, medical and school supplies donated to our Sister City and local Sierra Leone families. $150,000 alone was raised during the Ebola Crisis to purchase four vehicles to be used for ambulances during the Ebola Crisis. Medical supplies and water were also shipped to help. We may have been the only city in the United States to make such a commitment. We also sent money to assist our sister city during the Mud Slides and the Covid 19 virus outbreak. Most recently we sent shipments of clothes, toys, school supplies and sports equipment to the St. George’s Orphanage. One of the shipments included over 35 soccer balls and enough soccer uniforms so the orphanage could play with and against other teams.

Mayor Aki-Sawyerr, we hope this book will give you a snapshot of the work we have done on behalf of our Sister City over the past 26 years and you will share with others in Freetown, especially the Freetown City Council.

Sincerely,

Althea Norcott
Freetown-New Haven Sister Cities Chairperson