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**PRESS RELEASE**

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**INAUGURATION OF THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION**

*Freetown* – A ceremony to inaugurate the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was held this morning at State House, Freetown. During the ceremony the seven Commissioners of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission took an oath.

The ceremony was witnessed by President Ahmad Tejan Kabba, Vice President Solomon Berewa, the Attorney General and Minister of Justice, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ambassador Oluyemi Adeniji, the Executive Secretary of the TRC, Ms. Yasmin Jusu-Sheriff, and the Representative of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr. Bacre Waly Ndiaje.

In his address, President Kabba said that the inauguration of the TRC represented a milestone on the journey to peace. He stressed that it was important to see the work of the TRC as a “therapeutic process” and that the TRC was “an instrument of national reconciliation and another means to strengthen peace”. He said that the seven Commissioners were meticulously identified to ensure that the impartiality of the appointees. He expressed his satisfaction with the outcome of the selection process in which, he said, “the international community participated fully”.

President Kabba stressed that international composition of the members of the TRC indicated the determination of international community to collaborate “in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights”. He said that the success of the TRC would also depend on the cooperation from the people of Sierra Leone and the failure to support and cooperate with the Commission will be seen as a “disservice to the nation”. He therefore called on all those committed to peace to cooperate with the TRC.

In his speech, Ambassador Adeniji said the inauguration of the TRC was a sign of the great progress that Sierra Leone had made to achieve peace and of the beginning of a crucial process for the people of Sierra Leone. He said the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), working together with many human rights and civil society organizations, had facilitated consultations processes on the TRC and taken part in nationwide sensitization efforts. “The consultations which we have held” he said “have shown that the people of SL are committed to and are enthusiastic about the Commission”. Ambassador Adeniji stressed that that was a sign of the sense of national ownership of the

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Commission, which had always been regarded by the United Nations as an indispensable element, “the Commission must be a nationally owned institution” he said.

Ambassador Adeniji also underlined that in order to build sustainable peace “Sierra Leone must first turn to its past”. He said that people had to come to terms with the events of the ten-year conflict. The aim was to examine the wounds of war “in the spirit of healing” and for the purpose “of moving ahead to a better future”. “It is much easier to accept the past, forgive wrong doings and thus facilitate reconciliation once the facts of what took place are clarified and acknowledged”, said Ambassador Adeniji. He expressed confidence that the international community will give the necessary pledges to the TRC.

Ms. Jusu-Sheriff congratulated the people of Sierra Leone for their efforts in making the TRC inauguration day a reality. She also encouraged “everyone who has something to say to say it to the TRC”. On behalf of the Interim Secretariat she pledged its continuous support and commitment to the members of the TRC. She also appealed to those who have the resources, in and out of the country, to support the TRC and “give us the tools we require to make this Sierra Leonean institution a success”.

Mr. Ndiaye said that the inauguration ceremony of the TRC marked an important landmark in the history of Sierra Leone. He stressed that care had been taken to select the Commissioners. He said that the selection process had been long because the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson, and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ambassador Oluyemi Adeniji, who acted as selection coordinator, wanted to ensure that all requirements were met. Speaking about financial support to the TRC, Mr. Ndiaye emphasized that “the donors’ response has been very poor”. He therefore urged the Government of Sierra Leone to actively engage in funding the TRC. He concluded that the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights stood ready to provide support to TRC bearing in mind its independence and the importance of national ownership.

Rt. Rev. Dr. Joseph Christian Humper, Chairman of the Commission, said that the Commissioners appreciated the challenge before them. He also said that they would be guided by what is in the best interest to the people of Sierra Leone. He also called on the Government of Sierra Leone to provide substantial assistance to the TRC.

The Commissioners were presented by the Attorney-General and Minister of Justice. The Commissioners are Professor John Kamara (Sierra Leone), Mr. Sylvanus Torto (Sierra Leone), and Hon. Justice Laura Augusta Ebunolorun Marcus-Jones (Sierra Leone), Ms. Yasmin Louise Sooka (South Africa), Madam Ajaaratou Santang Jow (Gambia) and Professor William Schabas (Canada).