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**OPENING STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY
THE PRESIDENT
ALHAJI DR AHMAD TEJAN KABBAH
AT THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON
DISARMAMENT, DEMOBILIZATION AND REINTEGRATION
(DDR) AND STABILITY IN AFRICA
AT THE MIATTA CONFERENCE CENTRE BROOKFIELDS,
FREETOWN, SIERRA LEONE
ON TUESDAY, 21ST JUNE, 2005**

SALUTATION.

On behalf of the Government and people of Sierra Leone, I would firstly extend a warm welcome, to all participants, to Sierra Leone at this very important conference on DDR and stability in Africa. I would particularly like to thank the Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, for putting together a Task Force that has done an excellent job organizing this conference. In this regard, let me extend special thanks to Ambassador Ibrahim Gambari whose outstanding leadership in this process is duly recognized. Sierra Leoneans feel exceptionally proud and challenged by the choice of our country to host this very important event at this point in our post-conflict transition.

Mr. Chairman,

the timing and theme of the conference are very significant for the African continent for several reasons. Firstly, Africa has experienced and is still enduring too many gruesome conflicts and senseless acts of violence. In the last 2-3 decades, our sub-region, West Africa has been in turmoil with my country Sierra Leone, together with Liberia, Guinea Bissau and La Cote d' Ivoire bearing the brunt of instability. Similar conflicts have also engulfed some countries in East, Central and Southern Africa, thus making the continent unsafe from

within and without. These conflicts, whether they are ethnic, civil, or inter-state wars, have dehumanized, killed and displaced our people, and led to gross abuse and violation of their human rights.

Secondly, these conflicts have eroded the human resource base and overall potential for development in the continent. The overwhelming impact on the continent has been deepening poverty and huge governance problems. These developments have only attracted the attention of the international community after they have reached epidemic proportions in some countries and at that point they had caused so much loss of human lives, misery and suffering of innocent people. In future, the timely intervention of the international community should forestall destruction and thereby save many lives.

Mr Chairman,

In spite of the instability that swathed the continent, Africa has devoted much time, efforts and resources to resolve or manage its own conflicts. The reason for this is simple. It has now dawned on African leaders that peace, security and development are inextricably linked.

West Africa, like other sub-regions in the continent has seen many peace initiatives from regional groupings like Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Mano River Union and the wider international community including the African Union and the United Nations. We therefore owe a debt of gratitude and appreciation to these bodies for their support and initiatives in bringing about calm and quiet to the various countries affected by conflict in the continent.

This conference, Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, sends the right signals and shows the continued commitment of the United Nations and the rest of the international community to breaking the cycle of violence and promoting durable peace and stability in Africa. The world should no longer remain

indifferent to a continent drifting to cyclical chaos and anarchy, while other regions of the world are forging ahead in terms of sustainable development and meeting the basic needs of their people.

When the United Nations requested Sierra Leone to host this conference, I saw it as opportunity to show case our well earned experience in making and achieving peace after experiencing one of the most horrendous wars and sufferings in this continent. This country drifted towards chaos following an invasion by a group of rebels from Liberia in 1991 against the backdrop of deprivation, disaffection, widespread poverty, and bad governance, including endemic corruption. After a protracted peace process and the steadfast support of the international community, including efforts from sub-regional organizations, we have gone through a transition, from war-to-peace. DDR has been at the heart of this process as will be elaborated in the course of this conference.

Post-DDR peace building, consolidation and promoting long-term stability are intertwined and therefore challenging. Our collective experience in handling the conflict in Sierra Leone tells us that a DDR programme should feature prominently in any Peace Agreement. Without a comprehensive DDR programme, the prospects for long-term stability will remain dim. All post conflict programmes – be they political, social, or economic – depend on DDR and how people judge its success. Sierra Leone's DDR programme has been assessed as successful by all stakeholders and has provided the basis for the progress recorded in our post-conflict stabilization and development programme.

Our experience also tells us that DDR planning and design must be guided by three key pillars:

The first pillar is the framework defined by the Peace Agreement among the warring factions. This framework will define the role of other key actors and institutions that are critical to peace making, peace consolidation and

peace building. In Sierra Leone after protracted negotiations, we made provision for a Commission for the Consolidation of Peace (CCP); allowed participation of the rebels in government and the setting up of their own political party. These processes assisted the DDR programme to go on relatively smoothly.

The second pillar is the political, economic and social environment within which a DDR programme is implemented, which has also proved to be very significant both in the short and long-term. To promote long-term stability on the continent, it is imperative that an inclusive environment is built for all to participate within the provisions of the law. The political interests of the warring factions must not be ignored. From the outset, my administration conceived of a dual track approach – one for combatants through the DDR programme, the other for the displaced civilian population through the National Commission for Resettlement, Reconstruction and Rehabilitation (NCRRR). The DDR also made provision for military reintegration in the context of a Security Sector Reform which entailed a comprehensive programme for the restructuring of our security system including the retraining of our security forces, for which we are particularly grateful to the British Government. The synergy between the two tracks has been effective and created the link between short and medium-term approach required in building peace in Sierra Leone.

A third pillar is the drive for a genuine national reconciliation of the population between the victims of atrocities and human rights abuses on the one hand, and the perpetrators of these atrocities and war crimes on the other. In our specific case in Sierra Leone, apart from setting up a Truth and Reconciliation Commission as well as the establishment of the Special Court to address impunity, with the support of the United Nations, we also went the extra mile in designing programmes that took

into account our specific political and cultural sensitivities.

Beyond the immediate DDR phase of the conflict it is important to focus on long term stability issues which would address the root causes of conflicts – be they poverty, ethnic issues, land or control over resources. The root causes of Sierra Leone's conflict have been embedded in poverty and bad governance that led to widespread social and political disaffection among the population. These problems had to be tackled headlong and systematically in order to build durable peace and set the pace for longer-term development.

Since I declared the end of the war in Sierra Leone in January 2002, we have focused on resolving some of these problems. For example, completion of reintegration of ex-combatants, reform and restructuring of the security forces (Police and the Army); resettlement of displaced persons; the basic rehabilitation and reconstruction of communities; the provision of basic social services and the establishment of state authority in all parts of the country.

Mr Chairman, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

In this connection we have already embarked on a measure to correct a mistake committed 32 years ago, that is, the abolition of elected local authorities. In order to correct this anomaly in governance, we have conducted local government elections countrywide and have comprehensively decentralized functions and services hitherto performed by the central government to the newly elected local councils. This will help us focus on the immediate solutions to problems of communities at the level where they can be addressed more effectively. We have been able to achieve all these goals in a relatively short time because of the provision of a secure environment for government to operate by UNAMSIL and the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), our sub-regional peace monitoring and peace keeping organization.

My Government has also just completed the preparation of a Poverty Reduction Strategy that will now guide our mobilization of resources and implementation of programmes that focus on what the poor need most in the next 2-3 years in food security, jobs and reliable social and economic services. We need urgent investment in our productive sectors, human capacity development and infrastructure, focusing on roads, communications and power. The biggest challenge we face as a nation is the mobilization of adequate resources from domestic and outside sources to implement these important strategies in a more predictable manner. This could be the real remaining challenge to stability in our country in the medium to long-term.

Extrapolating the Sierra Leone experience to other African conflict ridden countries the focus should not only be on the immediate requirements to remove weapons from the hands of non-state (rebel) actors and to bring them back to mainstream society, but also to set within Peace Agreements, the long-term stabilization and development programmes.

At this juncture, I would urge the United Nations, the African Union and the rest of the international community to continue to emphasize in their peace building strategies the fact that peace building is not a specific short-term event, but a set of complex transitional processes that will continue well beyond the normal horizons of peacekeeping. While national governments have a primary responsibility to ensure that these processes are appropriately designed and implemented, long-term stability requires continued commitment from the international community as well, even after a Peace Keeping Mission has wound up its activities and mandate.

In closing, I should like to express our grateful thanks to our sub-regional organization ECOWAS and the UN, especially troop contributing countries and those member states of the International Community that contributed financially to the colossal cost of peace keeping in Sierra Leone. I am sure that my colleagues in other African countries will join me in

assuring them that Africa will continue to rely on a genuine partnership with countries and organizations that have invested and continue to invest in peace and stability in the continent, as we believe that there is no alternative to multilateralism. In the meantime we shall continue to build our capacity as individual countries first of all to prevent conflicts and where necessary to manage such conflicts without too much dependence on the rest of the world.

I hope that during this conference, delegates will be able to share their countries' experiences, by looking at different ways of tackling the issue of DDR and stability in Africa against the background of the underlying causes of African conflicts, problems, challenges and lessons learnt, to chart a better way forward.

I now have the pleasure to formally declare this conference open and wish all our foreign guests and delegates a fruitful deliberations and pleasant stay in Sierra Leone.

I thank you all and may God bless Africa!!

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