

STATEMENT BY THE HONOURABLE MR. MOMODU KOROMA MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING CEREMONY OF THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT, DEMOBILIZATION REINTEGRATION AND STABILITY IN AFRICA, HELD AT MIATTA CONFERENCE CENTRE, FREETOWN, 21ST – 24TH JUNE 2005.

Your Excellency, Alhaji Dr. Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, President of the Republic of Sierra Leone,

Cabinet Ministers,

Honourable Members of Parliament,

Excellencies Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps,

Excellency, Professor Ibrahim Gambari and the UN Task Force,

Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It gives me great pleasure to warmly welcome you all to Sierra Leone. The Government and People of Sierra Leone wish to extend to the United Nations, and in particular, the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa (OSAA), its deepest appreciation for giving us the opportunity to host the first DDR Conference of this nature on the African continent. This is a clear manifestation of the interest we all have in promoting peace and stability on the continent. It also shows the level of confidence the international

community now have in the peace and stability that prevails in our country.

Thanks to the wisdom, the vision and the courage displayed by our President, His Excellency Alhaji Dr. Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, our DDR programme in Sierra Leone has been described in many quarters as being a great success. Indeed since the DDR was completed in December 2001 the country has enjoyed relative peace and stability and there has not been a single incident that would give the slightest indication that the DDR was not successful.

The choice made by the United Nations to host this conference in Sierra Leone came therefore as no surprise to the Government. The idea was therefore heartily welcomed, as most of our combatants have returned to normal civilian life and the country is well underway to sustainable development. It is therefore our pleasure and pride to share with you our humble experience in this regard.

Mr. Co-chairman, Your Excellency, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, looking closely at our own DDR programme and others in some of our sister states, it has been observed that the ad hoc basis on which DDR programmes have been carried out on the continent, has often been responsible for a fragile peace and the

resurgence of conflicts in some countries. Very often combatants are not properly catered for in hurriedly concluded DDR Programmes with combatants often ending up with no substantial change in their lives and nothing to look forward to in the future. They therefore are left with no option but to recourse to taking up arms to revert to war.

Mr. Co-chairman, Your Excellency, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, DDR programmes have been undertaken in many African countries. Both the content and the structure of these programmes have varied from country to country to the extent that the level of success has also varied. What is it that has made some DDR programmes more successful than others? What should be the main ingredients of successful DDR programme? If one should ask further, how has the political social and economic environment of the conflict affected the success of the DDR? DDR programmes have also varied in length and in administration from place to place. How has the length of the various elements of the DDR programmes affected their success? How long ideally should the entire DDR programme last for and what should be the main elements of a successful administration of the programme?

Mr. Co-chairman, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, the response to these questions and many more that may arise during the course of the Conference will serve to throw light on this subject and help determine the outcome. This hopefully will serve to improve on the understanding of African Governments and the international community in the future. It is therefore hoped that with this assembly of experts, victims and beneficiaries of past and present DDR programmes, we will be able to chart a better way forward for peace and stability to prevail on the entire continent.

DDR programmes are a vital component of any peace process but they cannot be implemented in a vacuum nor can they on their own make a peace process successful. I hope as we deliberate on these important issues we shall also examine the environment and the interlinkages that are bound to have an impact on the success of the DDR and the sustainability of peace.

The hosting of this Conference should therefore serve as an opportunity for all the delegates to examine in detail the political, economic and social issues that are bound to have an influence on the DDR Programmes and to reflect on the numerous conflicts that had engulfed the continent, the efforts that have been made at sub-regional, regional and global levels to resolve these conflicts, and

the extent to which the cause of sustainable peace has been advanced.

To conclude, we should be aware that there is no way Africa is going to attain sustainable development in line with the Millennium Development Goals, without first peacefully resolving the conflicts that are tearing the continent apart. We must therefore endeavour to put in place appropriate mechanisms for successful implementation of DDR programmes through our respective regional organizations with the support of the United Nations.

I therefore wish to implore all the delegates to carefully examine the issues, drawing on different country experiences to enrich our knowledge of the subject matter and therefore our preparedness for conflict resolution and peace-building.

Mr. Co-chairman, Your Excellency, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish you all fruitful deliberations and a successful outcome.

I Thank You.