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REINTEGRATION AND STABILITY IN AFRICA

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It gives me great pleasure to be invited to address the closing Session of this Conference. I had hoped to be present for the entire period, however, due to a very tight scheduling programme, I could not make it. Here I am now. I will address a few issues.

I would like first of all, to thank the Government of Sierra Leone for hosting this important Conference and to all the participants who have come from various countries and organizations to contribute to its success.

The path to peace and stability in the country has been quite eventful. All stakeholders have worked very hard

together in pursuit of the common goal and today the Sierra Leone DDR programme stands out as a success story.

From the experience of Sierra Leone and many others, planning for DDR must take into account the technical, human resources and financial implications of the whole process in addition to reliable data on the combatants. Adequate funding for the whole programme, particularly for reintegration should be available and not delayed. However, reintegration is a long-term process in which case provision of resources on a continuing basis is essential. Current practice is that funding for reintegration is from voluntary sources. This is one aspect that needs revisiting at least to allow the initial process to begin in earnest.

One issue that needs significant attention centres on women combatants. On the one hand, there is the definition part. I have in mind here the many abductees who served as

“bush wives” and porters for war material. Then of course there are the fighting combatants. For purpose of DDR perhaps they could all be considered as one category for demobilization. Women combatants, including those forced into rebel camps as abductees, camp followers, dependants of combatants, should not be excluded from the DDR programme. Special arrangements should be made to resettle amputees and their families where applicable so that they do not become the eye-sore of a post-conflict country as they invariably turn into beggars for their survival. I might add here, it is very tempting for one to use his disability as an economic trap for self aggrandizement even where good facilities have been put in place.

One cannot over-stress the danger embedded in the large concentration of unemployed ex-combatants in a country which has just come out of war. It could constitute a

potential threat to the security of the country concerned and also to the region as well. Now with conflicts in Africa taking regional dimensions, there is a real need to harmonize these programmes on a regional level to help curb the cross-border movements of combatants, arms and light weapons. Consequently, it is essential that the United Nations continues to take the lead that would enable to revise and improve upon its approach to the critical issue of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of combatants.

DDR programmes should also be planned as part of the wider recovery strategy so that long-term stability could be effectively attained in the recipient countries in which they have been implemented.

Accordingly, these issues call for better designing, planning, and coordination of implementation strategies. It is

expected that the lessons learnt from previously implemented DDR programmes in Africa, like the Sierra Leone programme, would serve as a guide for better designing and execution of ongoing programmes.

For the donor community, it would be appreciated if assurance for support would be given not only for the short-term DDR strategy but also for the long-term recovery strategy because countries emerging from conflicts are really more in need of longer-term recovery strategy support. Recent experience in the process has given the impression of a quick-fix, first aid treatment (DDR programme) and then the scene is vacated at a time when the need is greatest.

Finally, it should be realized that no peace can be achieved in a war torn country without an effective DDR programme.

Let the conclusions and the recommendations of this Conference be the guiding beacon which shows the path to successful DDR programmes in the future.

It is my hope you had three fruitful days of serious discussions on the very rich agenda that had been set for you.

At the end of the day, good recommendations or conclusions are only good if they can be implemented. I am sure you have resolved to make a difference where ever you are.

I wish you God's speed.

Thank you all.