



PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF
SIERRA LEONE TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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STATEMENT

by

Honourable Mrs. Zainab Hawa Bangura
Minister of Health and Sanitation

at the

The High-Level Meeting on the Comprehensive Review
of the Progress Achieved in Realizing the Declaration
of Commitment on HIV/AIDS and
the Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS

New York, 9th June, 2011

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Mr. President,

Excellencies Heads of State and Governments,

Heads of delegations,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of His Excellency Dr. Ernest Bai Koroma, the Government and People of Sierra Leone, we are very delighted to be part of this historic gathering particularly when it has been specifically designed for us to report progress on our commitment towards the implementation of the 2001 Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS and the 2006 Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS by our respective Heads of State and Governments.

Mr. President,

Sierra Leone's commitment to implement the two Declarations of Commitment on HIV/AIDS has been unwavering ever since their adoption in 2001 and 2006. This is evident in the different approaches and measures we have adopted over the years as our national HIV/AIDS response strategy.

Let me use this opportunity, Mr. President to inform this august Assembly that it was in recognition of the progress we have achieved in implementing the Millennium Development Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other Diseases that we received the distinct honour from the UN MDGs Awards Committee in September last year as winner of the 2010 MDG Awards for goal 6; a clear testament to our commitment to halting and reversing the Spread of HIV/AIDS by 2015.

As a follow-up to that recognition and with support from our development partners and civil society, including People Living with HIV (PLHIVs), we agreed on a 5 pillar activity as a nation namely:

- i) Know your Epidemic; Know your Response study to help us better characterise our epidemic and to assess the extent to which our current responses address the real factors of the epidemic;
- ii) Final Joint Programme Review of our 2006 – 2010 National Strategic Plan on HIV and AIDS;
- iii) Development of our second National Strategic Plan to HIV and AIDS for the years 2011 – 2015;
- iv) Development of a National Monitoring and Evaluation Plan on HIV and AIDS 2011-2015;
- v) Development of a two-year costed Operational Plan 2011 – 2012 on HIV and AIDS.

These pillar activities were guided by and aligned with President Korma's Agenda for Change and the United Nations Joint Vision for Sierra Leone. They are strategically designed to compliment and feed into one another to deliver ONE robust and comprehensive road map for our multi-sector response to HIV and AIDS in Sierra Leone with the ultimate aim of achieving the MDG 6 HIV-related targets by 2015.

Secondly, we were also quick to come to the realization that the pandemic was without doubt a major obstacle to the development of a nation and that to effectively combat the scourge requires political involvement at the highest level. The role of H.E. President Koroma as Chairman of the National AIDS Council was therefore a move in the right direction.

Cognisant of the fact that the disease is a multi-sectoral development challenge and that to address it effectively warrants a comprehensive, coordinated, and sustained action by all stakeholders including People Living with HIV (PLHIV) and the Civil Society, we ensured that all sectors are given the opportunity to engage constructively at the national, regional and international levels in all discourse on the issue. By so doing, we have managed to stabilize our adult HIV prevalence at 1.5%; while prevalence among pregnant women has taken a downward trend to an estimated 3.2%. We have also put structures in place that will enable us emulate best practices that will ensure we achieve Zero new HIV infections and universal access to HIV and AIDS services by 2015.

Quite recently, His Excellency Dr. Ernest Bai Koroma, declared the Year 2011 as the Year of Implementation. In response to that Declaration, we conducted a comprehensive assessment of our Prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission (PMTCT) and paediatric care programme and have developed a scale-up plan. We also conducted a Situational Assessment of sexual minority group in the country - men who have sex with men with a view to ascertain HIV prevalence among the group.

Additionally, we revised our 2007 HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Act to address emerging issues relating to stigma and discrimination. We are also in the process of transforming the National AIDS Secretariat into a National AIDS Commission. As recently as May 10 2011, we engaged our stakeholders from the public and private sectors, the United Nations Family, the Sierra Leone Parliament, civil society including implementing partners, workers associations, People Living with HIV groups, Local Councils, most at risk populations as well as the media in a one-day consultation on Country ownership and sustainable AIDS Response. Our vision is to promote our on-going dialogue on participation, involvement of stakeholders, ownership and buy-in for effective partnerships and collaboration in our response to HIV and AIDS.

Mr. President, distinguished delegates,

Amidst the building blocks we have put in place, we are faced with unprecedented challenge that threatens to reverse the gains we have already made. We need support to balance scaling-up programmes with institutional capacity. Our healthcare infrastructure is overstretched and characterized by shortages of skilled health personnel. We are also challenged by reaching our population that are most-at-risk to HIV infection. To sustain the gains achieved so far requires resources well beyond the capability of a small and struggling economy such as ours. There is therefore need for the global development partners to support us. The foundation for a sustainable AIDS response in our country has already been laid. What we need is the sustained support of all our partners if we should attain the Millennium Development Goal 6 - Combat HIV /AIDS, malaria and other Diseases by 2015. We do not

want the global development community to assess our needs based on our HIV prevalence; rather, our needs should be assessed based on the structures and initiatives we have put in place. We have a unique opportunity to show to the world that together as ONE, we can halt and reverse the trend of HIV in not only Sierra Leone but the world at large.

Let me at this juncture take the opportunity to congratulate our sister Governments for the success and immeasurable efforts made so far in trying to halt and mitigate the impact of this monstrous disease on the world's people. We in Sierra Leone are particularly indebted to our development partners including the United Nations Family, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, and other bilateral and multilateral partners, as well as the world civil society for supporting our respective governments to deliver as ONE in our efforts to halt and start reversing the spread of the pandemic.

Mr. President, Distinguished Delegates, as we meet under the roof and auspices of the United Nations, a decade after the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV and AIDS, let me paraphrase Winston Churchill's famous World War II quote, this is perhaps the "end of the beginning" of our renewed and proactive commitment of our country to achieving Zero New HIV infections, Zero HIV-related stigma and discrimination and Zero AIDS-related deaths by 2015.

I thank you for your attention.