



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

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Statement

by

Hon. Mrs. Abator Thomas
Minister of Health and Sanitation of Sierra Leone

at the

**High-Level Meeting and Comprehensive Review
of the Progress Achieved in Realizing the Targets Set Out
in the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS**

New York, 2nd June 2006

Check Against Delivery

**Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,**

I wish on behalf of the government and people of Sierra Leone to thank and commend the co-chairs for their immense contributions to facilitating the process that has culminated in the Draft Political Declaration which we hope will be adopted today. I also wish to commend the Secretary-General for his report on the progress made thus far in this global AIDS response since the 2001 Declaration of Commitment.

To tackle the scourge of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, African governments clearly manifested their political will by adopting the Brazzaville Commitment on **Scaling Up Towards Universal Access to HIV/AIDS Prevention, Treatment, Care and support in Africa by 2010**. My government remains firmly committed to implementing this declaration.

**Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,**

Even though the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in Sierra Leone currently stands at 1.5%, my government fully recognizes that the pandemic constitutes a formidable challenge to human life and dignity and has therefore intensified its efforts to address the threat by adopting the following measures:

- Established a Ministry responsible for Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs to promote women's right and protect women and girls from all forms of discrimination;
- Set up a National HIV/AIDS Council in the office of the President, chaired by the President himself, to formulate and oversee national policy on the pandemic;
- Developed a multi-sector HIV/AIDS response project known as the Sierra Leone HIV/AIDS Response

Project (SHARP), with support from the World Bank and other partners;

- Established the National HIV/AIDS Secretariat to coordinate national response effort;
- Embarked on massive awareness raising, counseling and other social programmes, especially in the rural settings about the disease and its effects, as well as the issue of stigmatization;
- Organized national consultations and workshops on the status of the National HIV/AIDS response, the scaling up process and the country targets for HIV prevention, treatment, care and support, which the country hopes to reach within the stipulated time frame of 2010;
- Significantly increased the involvement of the civil society in national response efforts;
- Partnered with the UN team;
- Approved a Zero tariff and Sales Tax on all drugs and equipment for HIV/AIDS;
- Increased the number of treatment centers throughout the country;
- Provided Anti-Retroviral Drugs (ARVs) to all HIV positive pregnant women.

**Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,**

Although we are still grappling with the aftermath of the civil conflict, we are satisfied that we have made appreciable progress in our HIV/AIDS response against the background of other competing priorities, including malaria, tuberculosis, weak health infrastructure and delivery systems, as well as shortage of trained and experienced health personnel.

In the light of the above, I would like to remind our development partners to make good their commitment to enable us tackle the under-mentioned challenges:

- Adopt and operationalise the THREE ONE Principles;

- Mobilize and allocate additional financial resources for all programme areas;
- Strengthen capacity building for all level of staff;
- Integrate STI/HIV/AIDS into curriculum of schools, colleges and other training;
- Strengthen care and support organizations to provide integrated services for People Living With HIV/AIDS (PLWHA);
- Provide special care for those children orphaned by AIDS;
- Reform and support laws to protect human rights of women, PLWHA, Orphan and Vulnerable Children (OVC) and other vulnerable groups;
- Make scaling up process an integral part of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Programme.

To achieve the goal of universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support, my government has set the following immediate targets which we believe would create the enabling environment in our national HIV/AIDS response efforts:

- Expose the most vulnerable population to appropriate Information on HIV/AIDS;
- Provide effective multisectoral programmes for prevention, treatment, care and support to all individuals, families and communities in need of support;
- To continue to provide regular budgetary support and advocacy;
- Strengthen the health care and social systems;
- Intensify staff training;
- Take legislative measures which will protect the human rights of individuals against discrimination and facilitate the empowerment of women;
- Adopt the THREE ONE Principles by instituting a well-managed, multisectoral and multidisciplinary framework to implement, coordinate, monitor and evaluate programmes.

In conclusion Mr. Chairman, I wish once again on behalf of my Government to assure this august Assembly of our commitment to this global fight against the HIV/AIDS as reflected in the 2001 Declaration of commitment and in the Draft Political Declaration we are about to adopt.

I thank you for your attention.