



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

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**STATEMENT**

by

**THE HONOURABLE STEPHEN J. GAOJIA**

Minister of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs

at the

56<sup>TH</sup> SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

**On Agenda Item 3:**

*"FOLLOW UP TO THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN  
AND THE TWENTY-THIRD SPECIAL SESSION OF THE GENERAL  
ASSEMBLY ENTITLED "WOMEN 2000: GENDER EQUALITY,  
DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY"*

New York, 29<sup>th</sup> February, 2012

*Check Against Delivery*

**Madam Chair,**

**Distinguished delegates,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Permit me on behalf of my delegation to congratulate you and the other members of the Bureau for the excellent manner in which you are conducting the work of the Commission. We are confident that under your leadership will have a productive outcome. I assure you of my delegation's cooperation and support.

Sierra Leone aligns itself with the statements delivered by Tunisia on behalf of the African Group and Algeria on behalf of the G77 and China.

We welcome the various reports submitted by the Secretary-General under the priority theme and take note of the recommendations contained therein.

**Madam Chair,**

The theme "**The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges**" is important to Sierra Leone because rural women constitute a significant percentage of the country's female population. We are cognizant of the role they play in building the socio-economic structure of the society. Their invaluable and unquantifiable contribution to, for instance, house-hold economy and well-being, cannot be over-emphasized. Yet they often bear the brunt of armed conflicts, natural disasters and various forms of marginalization.

In that connection, we are now, with assistance from our development partners, fully engaged in community empowerment of our rural women, specifically in the areas of training, health, education, agriculture, economic self-sufficiency as well as protection from all forms of violence, exploitation and abuse.

Regarding the status of women as a whole Madam Chair, I would like to highlight some key successes we have achieved in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) and the outcome of the 23<sup>rd</sup> special session of the General Assembly. We have indeed demonstrated genuine political will and commitment towards achieving gender equality and the advancement of the status of our women and girls.

**Madam Chair,**

We have made the issue of violence against women a top priority. We have, among other measures, enacted three gender laws to address issues such as domestic violence, rights to property, inheritance, registration of customary marriages and divorces. Additionally, a Sexual Offences bill, when enacted will address all forms of sexual abuse and exploitation such as rape, including marital rape. It will provide further protection for victims with tough penalties for perpetrators.

**Madam Chair,**

There is a strong commitment to accord a minimum of 30% quota to the women of Sierra Leone at levels of decision making. H.E. President Koroma has made a strong policy statement in this direction. Furthermore, in keeping with our obligations under CEDAW and the AU Protocol; we are currently reviewing our Chieftaincy Act of 2009 to address the specific issue of discrimination against women in chieftaincy. The position to increase female representation in chieftaincy has been endorsed by the Paramount Chiefs at the recently concluded National Conference on Development and Transformation.

We also continue to respect our reporting obligation in compliance with the relevant provisions under CEDAW. Our 6<sup>th</sup> Periodic report has been completed and awaiting consideration by the Committee.

**Madam Chair,**

We have also continued to build on the gains achieved in the area of health. The Free Health Care Initiative for pregnant women, lactating mothers and children under the age of five will reduce the incidence of maternal and infant mortality, particularly in the rural areas.

In the area of education, the affirmative action for girl child education has motivated not only the enrolment but also the retention of girls in schools. We are also providing opportunities for training in various trades and vocations to reduce the level of illiteracy among our women and girls.

Our laudable achievements notwithstanding Madam Chair, challenges still abound. The Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs is facing budgetary and human resource constraints. For instance, there is need to set up a gender responsive database to enhance integration of gender perspectives into government policies and programmes. Improving the status of rural women also remains a critical challenge.

**Madam Chair,**

The constraints I have just outlined are not exhaustive. We are therefore determined to meet the challenges in pursuit of our objectives. Of course, we need the continued engagement and support of our development partners to accelerate progress towards the attainment of the MDGs addressing the specific needs of our women and girls.

**Madam Chair, distinguished delegates,**

Let me conclude by calling for our continued collective action to combat indifference towards poverty, hunger, armed conflicts, illiteracy, disease, violence and all forms of marginalization of women. Together we can win any battle against neglect and abuse of fundamental human rights of our women irrespective of where they occur. Let us all continue to make gender equality and women's empowerment a major priority.

I thank you for your attention.