



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

245 East 49th Street • New York, NY 10017

STATEMENT

by

THE HONOURABLE DR. SOCCOH KABIA
Minister of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs

at

THE 52ND 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, 3rd March 2010

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**Chairperson,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Firstly, I would, on behalf of the Government and people of Sierra Leone, like to offer our deepest condolences to the Government and people of Chile for the recent tragedy that befell them.

We are honoured to be able to participate in this 54th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women. Chairperson, we are confident that under your leadership, we would successfully advance actions for the full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BDPfA) and the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.

Chairperson,

We align ourselves with the eloquent statements delivered by Yemen and Equatorial Guinea on behalf of the G 77 and China and the African Group respectively.

Chairperson,

Indeed, we are grateful for his opportunity to give account of what has so far been achieved and the challenges we have faced in the context of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BDPfA). Our country is recovering from an eleven year old civil war that resulted in a complete breakdown of civil and political authority with dire social consequences. We are now in the process of rebuilding our nation and consolidating our democratic institutions, to ensure the rights and welfare of our citizens are protected. In particular we have a special obligation to protect our women and children who were victims of untold horror during the civil conflict. In this direction, we are happy to report that we have made significant progress in implementing the two outcome documents pertaining to Beijing under review.

Chairperson, distinguished delegates,

The Government of Sierra Leone remains fully committed to addressing and implementing all 12 critical areas of concern specified in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action as well as the provisions of the outcome document of the 23rd Special Session of the General Assembly. We have amply demonstrated commitments at the national, sub-regional and regional levels by coordinating the appropriate mechanisms to advance the rights of our women by our engagements in various fora to share experiences and engage with other nations and experts to adopt best practices for the benefit of our people.

In 2007, the MDG needs assessment was done and costed. This helped policy planners in implementing programmes for relevant service delivery and enhance the development of the PRSP II also known as the Government's Agenda for Change. Furthermore, we participated in the 8th African Regional Conference on women (Beijing+15), held in the Gambia in November 2009, which adopted a key document for our region with Strategies for the Acceleration of the implementation of the Dakar and Beijing Platforms for Action.

Chairperson,

Our Government under the leadership of the H.E. Dr. Ernest Bai Koroma is fully committed to gender parity and equity in all areas. In education, the government funds girl-child education scheme, a key strategy that is yielding dividend and has ensured the girl primary school enrolment is almost at parity with the boys.

Also significant to note that gender and Child rights legislations have been enacted. In addition to the Anti-Human Trafficking Act enacted in 2005 to address national and international trafficking issues, the Registration of Customary Marriage and Divorce Act seeks to address rights of rural women in marriage, the Domestic Violence Act and the Devolution of Estates Acts (2007) to ensure protection of women's inheritance rights. Sexual Offences and Matrimonial Causes Bills will soon be enacted into law. The Family Support Unit (FSU) established through a Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs and the Sierra Leone Police in 2002. Currently we have 40 FSU stations that serve as the first port of call for sexual and gender-based violence victims. Additionally, a National Committee on Gender-Based Violence (GBV) plays a coordinating and monitoring role related to gender-based violence nation-wide. The Committee is a multi-stakeholder group comprising of the government departments, UN System, International and National Non-Governmental Organizations preventing and responding to GBV issues. The committee meets regularly chaired by the Minister and co-chaired by the Assistant Inspector General of Police in charge of crime services. The Anti-Human Trafficking Act and the Adoption Acts are undergoing review for amendments to make them more robust.

Chairperson,

Even in the face of the current global financial crisis, we are faced with challenges but have are resolved to remain committed to promotion of gender equity. A reproductive and child health strategic plan has been launched to address the unacceptably high maternal and child mortality and morbidity. In fact a basic health package has been developed and will be launched by H.E. the President in April of this year. Key components include free health care for all pregnant and lactating mothers and children in public health centers and hospitals.

Chairperson,

The same commitment applies to the area of area of governance. In this connection a National Gender Strategic Plan has been developed with support from development partners. The plan include six priorities namely: capacity building and coordination; women's participation in governance; reproductive and sexual reproductive health rights; women's empowerment; gender budgeting and accountability; ICT Research and Documentation. The Sierra Leone National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 and 1820 has also been developed and will be launched very shortly. Government has ratified CEDAW and the sixth report writing is at an advanced stage.

Chairperson,

All of the above is yielding fruit. We have also witnessed an increase in the number of women participating in public and political spheres. In the Judiciary for instance, 9 out of 21 Judges are females, while 4 out of the 7 the Supreme Court Justices are women. In 2008 a Landmark appointment of a women as Chief Justice was made. As we speak, the chairperson of the National Electoral Commission is a woman. In Parliament we have 14 percent female representation in Parliament. We have 2 female Cabinet Ministers and 4 female Deputy Ministers. We now have increased number of female recruitment in the Security Sector Institutions for instance, female participation in the Sierra Leone Police increased from 5% during the pre and conflict era to 20% in the post conflict era. The appointment of the first female Brigadier in West Africa is another case in point. At the Local Council level, we have about 20 percent female representation in the Councils.

Chairperson,

Women's economic empowerment is well articulated in both the Government's Agenda for Change and the National Gender Strategic Plan. We have a Ministry devoted to gender issues and the advancement of women and gender concerns have been mainstreamed into most of nations policies, plans and programmes.

Chairperson,

Encouraging though the afore-mentioned achievements the full and effective implementation of BDPfA is still a challenge. The Family Support Unit is key to ensuring that the legal rights of women and children are protected and needs to b strengthened and expanded. The capacity of the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs should be should be enhanced to train well-qualified social workers. There is need to develop operational guidelines for the Sierra Leone Police to address and prosecute perpetrators of sexual and gender-based violence. There is need to increase the number of safe homes for victims of domestic violence, ensuring access to justice and timely judicial interventions

including prosecution of perpetrators to combating impunity through close monitoring and evaluation. Improvement of the access to health care service delivery due to lack of financial and technical resources.

In conclusion, chairperson, progress has been made but much remains to be done. We must remain committed to the cause until ultimate achievement of gender parity and equity. We have to ensure that women enjoy their full rights and protection under the law and that their human rights are respected. This is to ensure their full participation in decision-making to determine their own destiny and by extension the destiny of humanity. The rights and protection of women is inextricably linked with the development of our nation and indeed any nation.

I thank you for your attention.