

**All Political Parties Women Association Delegates Conference**

**STATEMENT BY MR. BERHANEMESKEL NEGA**

**Officer- in Charge, United Nations Integrated Mission in Sierra Leone**

**12 June 2011**

Your Excellency, Dr. Ernest Bai Koroma, President of the Republic of Sierra Leone,

Honorable Ministers,

Honorable members of Parliament,

Leaders of Political Parties,

Your worship Mayor of Bo,

Traditional leaders,

Members of civil society,

Members of the interim executive of APPWA,

Members of the diplomatic corps and the Colleagues from the UN family,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentle men,

Mme. Chairperson,

Allow me at the outset, on behalf of the UN family and Sierra Leone's international development partners, to congratulate the interim executives of the All Political Parties Women's Association and their membership on this auspicious occasion of the launching of APPWA. Today's event is a result of dedicated efforts undertaken by the women leaders of the four political parties in Sierra Leone- APC, SLPP, PMDC and NDA. Working closely with the interim Executives of APPWA over the past several months, we have witnessed their commitment and drive, as female political leaders, for the common good of the country, and the consolidation of the democratic process through greater political participation and empowerment of women. In that regard, we would like to recognize in particular the outstanding leadership of the interim president, Mrs. Isatu Jabie Kabbah.

The engagement of the United Nations family in Sierra Leone in the formation of APPWA and our continued support to its activities is part of our mandate under the United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 which seeks, among other things, to increase the representation of women in decision making institutions of member states. In that respect, a laudable commitment has been made by the Government through the adoption of the Sierra Leone National Action Plan for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820.

The United Nations family and Sierra Leone's international development partners will continue to support the Government in the implementation of the Action Plan, including the commitments undertaken to increase women's political participation through a minimum 30% quota at all levels of decision making.

Mme. Chairperson,

In a relatively short period since the formal end of the conflict in 2002, Sierra Leone has made significant strides in the consolidation of peace and in advancing a democratic system of governance. Two successive free and fair democratic elections were held and preparations for the third elections are underway. Government has restored and consolidated civil authority throughout the country, and far-reaching reforms, especially in the security sector, as well as in Local Governance and decentralization have been implemented. At present, Sierra Leone has embarked on the implementation of an ambitious development strategy. All these landmark achievements of the past ten years were made under both the present and past Governments of the All People's Congress Party and the Sierra Leone Peoples Party.

With these and many other achievements, Sierra Leone has distinguished itself as a success story and has become a model to be emulated by countries emerging out of conflict and others. At the same time, much more remains to be done to consolidate and expand further these gains and to prevent their reversal.

Today's launching of APPWA adds another millstone to the list of Sierra Leone's achievements and its political transformation. The fact that the major arms of opposing political parties, often perceived as partisan and belligerent, have come together setting aside their political differences to form an association to work together for the common good of the country and its people is a further testimony to the maturity of Sierra Leone's democracy. The formation of APPWA also manifests the enthusiasm and commitment of women in political parties to bring about a fundamental change in the participation and representation of women in politics and governance.

The priority attention that HE the President accorded to the empowerment of women through his important announcements at the celebration of international women's' day held in Magburaka earlier this year and indeed his presence today to launch APPWA give us the more reason for optimism and confidence that the objective of a 30% quota for women is indeed within reach in 2012.

As APPWA promotes this ambitious and yet achievable agenda, it will be essential to ensure a coordinated and holistic approach that would involve all segments of society who are working on this important goal. In that regard, we are pleased to note the presence and participation in this conference of many other women's associations and civil society organizations.

The formation of APPWA would also send a positive message to the leadership of political parties that politics should not always be seen as adversarial and a zero-sum game, but a vehicle for advancement of the common good of the country through dialogue, peaceful competition and cooperation.

We welcome the high-level representation of the leadership of the major political parties, which signifies commitment on their part to APPWA's objectives. We also commend the political parties that have already adopted their respective Gender policy, committing themselves to increasing the participation of their female members in leadership positions both within party structures as well as in national positions. We encourage the other parties to do the same.

Mme. Chairperson,

While APPWA's major objective is to promote the empowerment and political participation of women, it can also play an important role in encouraging political dialogue and cooperation among all political parties, and promoting political tolerance and non-violence. As the country prepares for and conducts the 2012 elections, we envisage APPWA as key stakeholders in promoting violence free elections, and ensuring women, and girls in particular, are protected from gender based violence during the election process and beyond. We also hope that APPWA, working with other stakeholders, will motivate more women to utilize their comparative population advantage to fully participate in the 2012 elections.

For the United Nations, we are pleased that we had already established a very positive working relationship with APPWA. Let me conclude, once again by pledging the continued support of the UN family to APPWA, in close partnership with the Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC), in building its capacity, promoting its activities and positioning itself to play a positive role in Sierra Leone's democratic process through greater political participation of women. This support will be provided under the UN Election Basket Fund to which key development partners and the UN are contributing, and I am pleased to recognize the presence at this conference of the representatives of the European Union delegation, UNDP, UK, and others.

Thank you for your attention.