



ERSG's SPEECH

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**SLBC STAKEHOLDERS VALIDATION OF DRAFT
GUIDELINES ON ELECTIONS**

6/28/2012

Mr. Chairman; My Lord Honourable Justice Cowan;
Honourable I. B. Kargbo, Minister for Information;
Members of the Diplomatic Corps, here present;
Distinguished Representatives of Political Parties;
Chairman of SLBC, Mr. Festus Minah;
Director General SLBC and Staffs;
Representatives of State Democratic Institutions;
Representatives of the Fourth Estate
Representatives of Civil Society Organisations;
Colleagues of the UN Family;
Distinguish Ladies and Gentlemen

Today marks one of the important mile stones in the collective effort of the people and government of this great nation, Sierra Leone, in deepening democratic culture since the unfortunate hostilities which formally ended in 2002. These national efforts of strengthening democratic values and institutions will invariably augur well for the realization of goals of sustainable development; which is the aspiration of all states.

Mr. Chairman distinguished ladies and gentlemen, this meeting, which comes to a close today, had an objective of bringing together all key national stakeholders to discuss and validate draft SLBC guidelines on elections, which is essentially about how identifiable political parties and candidates get equitable access to SLBC as an independent national broadcaster. I have been reliably briefed that the nature of the discussions which have taken place here has been of high quality and constructive in charting the way forward on this subject of national importance.

This is in a sense SLBC, and all national key actors living up to their obligations and responsibilities in the run-up to the elections.

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Diplomatic Corps, ladies and gentlemen; the UN therefore feels very proud to be associated with the noble objective and outcome of this consultative meeting.

Permit me, Mr. Chairman, My Lord Justice, to put into proper perspective why I make these bold claims and also why I am excited about the meeting.

It is a common knowledge that the overarching aim of UN support to the Government and people of Sierra Leone is to help consolidate the peace that has been reigning in the country for over a decade now. All Security Council Resolutions point towards the direction of peace consolidation. Some of the hard indisputable evidence of the successes of post conflict national reconstruction has been the three successful elections which have been held and acclaimed as exemplary best practice not just in the sub-region but the continent as a whole.

In this respect, this validation exercise therefore has two significant implications: and they are:

- 1) As part of the ongoing national effort of consolidating peace and creating the enabling climate for sustainable development;
- 2) As part of the overall national processes of ensuring peaceful and non-violent elections whereby every political party and key candidates will feel they have access to the Public Broadcaster equitably and

- 3) To ensure that voters have accurate information so as to make informed decisions and choices.

Mr. Chairman, my Lord Justice, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, the UN's engagement with SLBC can be better understood if one appreciates how we are working very closely all the diverse national actors, both state and non-state actors, to ensure that the government and people of Sierra Leone achieve their pledge of non-violent free and fair elections as they have done for some time now. It is this consideration that informs our support for NEC, PPRC, HRCSL, and state institutions.

The UN has placed a considerable premium on and instructed by the experience elsewhere that properly harnessed the media to play a very positive role in elections.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished ladies and gentlemen; SLBC is of particular historic significance in this country and perhaps the whole of the continent of Africa. It will be recalled that in March 2009, against the backdrop of an unfortunate national event, which resulted in a the signing of a communiqué by the two Political Parties, The All Peoples' Congress (APC) and Sierra Leone Peoples' Party (SLPP), and subsequently parliament in its wisdom passed an Act of 2010 which led to the creation of SLBC as an independent public broadcaster being second to the only other one in South Africa.

Mr. Chairman, the UN was so committed to the idea that it agreed to merge its own radio station with the government owned SLBS to form the independent broadcaster.

It is also worth noting that the UN handed over all physical assets and staff from a UN radio station then to the new entity, SLBC. The UN has given support in following areas: staff salaries, refurbishment, IT, office and broadcasting equipment.

This to me is a shining testimony of the confidence of the Government and people of Sierra Leone in their efforts to set the bar for democratic governance very high. And, the various stipulations of the said act attest to this claim. This was a pioneering act which is rarely easy.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, two years on since its inception in 2010, SLBC has been faced with challenges, some very serious. Elsewhere, this has been articulated and needs no re-statement. And, it was recognition of the problems that the government, with the support of the UN, commissioned evaluation on how to address the challenges.

On our part as UN, keen to ensure that SLBC succeeds, the reports and their findings were studied very carefully and used the same as the basis of our engagement with SLBC as envisioned by the act of 2010. The response is very encouraging.

I therefore fully agree with the DG that this event marks an important step in SLBC's evolution and response to public expectations.

This venture is also consistent with the obligation that the nation has as a member state of AU and ECOWAS treaties on elections and good governance.

More importantly on 18 May, national stakeholders undertook commitments by signing up to the declaration on the 2012 elections during the National Conference of Stakeholders for the 2012 elections.

Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen; rest assured that the UN will continue to accompany all national stakeholders in the quest for a peaceful and non-violent elections. We will provide support and expertise to SLBC to ensure that all that has been said is implemented and monitored.

Mr. Chairman, my Lord Justice, Cowan, Members of the Diplomatic Corps, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much.