

Statement by Mr. Jens Anders Toyberg-Frandzen,
Executive Representative of the Secretary-General in Sierra Leone
At the Security Council Briefing
11 September 2012

Mr. President,

Distinguished Members of the Security Council

Thank you for the opportunity to brief you on the latest developments in Sierra Leone, pursuant to the ninth report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone, which was submitted for the Council's consideration.

As detailed in the report, Sierra Leone continues to make steady progress in consolidating its achievements of the past decade. As you are aware, the Joint Government and Peacebuilding Commission progress report on the Agenda for Change was issued. It highlights the country's success in the implementation of the Government's priorities, in particular in the areas of infrastructure development, in the provision of health services, energy and agriculture sectors. Planning for a successor development strategy known as "The Agenda for Prosperity" is underway. At the same time, challenges of unemployment, especially among the youth, high living costs and related economic difficulties still persist, requiring a more longer-term approach and sustained investment.

Mr. President,

With regard to political developments, the main focus during the last six months continued to be on preparations for the November 2012 presidential, parliamentary and local council elections. With technical assistance from the United Nations, major electoral arrangements, particularly the biometric voter register exercise, were successfully concluded. Others, including the procurement of sensitive materials and communication links between regional tallying centers and the Commission's head offices in Freetown are ongoing. The nomination of candidates for various elective positions will commence on 12 September, to be followed by a political campaign period from 17 October to 15 November 2012.

Overall, preparations for the elections have proceeded satisfactorily, albeit with some challenges. In recognition of the complexity of conducting four elections, namely presidential, parliamentary local council and mayoral elections, on the same date throughout the country, the National Electoral Commission (NEC) has planned an intensive voter education programme using Ward Electoral and Education Committees

that comprise of local community representatives. This programme, which will also be supplemented by civil society organizations, is crucial to ensure greater participation in the electoral process.

Mr. President,

Since the completion of the report before the Council, on 6 September the Parliament endorsed the revised nomination fees, which require presidential candidates to pay 100 million leones (US\$23,250); parliamentary candidates 10 million leones (US\$2,325); local council chairs 5 million leones (US\$ 1,167) and local council councilors 2 million leones. The previous rates for the 2002 and 2007 elections were 1 million leones for presidential candidates and 100,000 leones for other elective positions.

Almost all political parties as well as civil society groups and the National Human Rights Commission strongly criticized the proposal for the substantial increase in nomination fees. Women's groups, in particular have pointed out that the increased fees will prevent women from participating in the elections. Throughout this process and given the importance of the concerns raised, I had encouraged all the political parties and the NEC to engage in dialogue and to use the democratic processes to resolve their differences.

Mr. President,

Although the official campaign date is now set to begin on 17 October, the country is already in an election mode, with political parties, in particular the two major parties, APC and SLPP, engaged in extensive tours of the country to mobilize support. All these political activities are so far proceeding in an orderly manner and without any incidents. We welcome this positive trend, and at the same time believe that continued attention should be given to the following four areas: Promoting constructive dialogue and mutual trust among the political actors, in particular the two major political parties – APC and SLPP; ensuring confidence in the security sector, especially the Sierra Leone Police; improving communication and dialogue between the National Electoral Commission and the political parties; and managing the role of the media.

With regard to political dialogue, I am pleased to report that as a manifestation of national ownership of the political process, and in response to the Security Council's call made in its last Presidential statement on Sierra Leone, all ten registered political parties and other major stakeholders have signed a Declaration on 18 May 2012, committing themselves to free, fair and peaceful elections. The Declaration outlines the roles and responsibilities of all the key players, including the political parties, the media, security agencies, civil society and relevant national institutions, such as the National Electoral Commission, in the upcoming elections. At present, UNIPSIL in collaboration with the Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC) and the National Commission for Democracy, is supporting the wider dissemination of the declaration and monitoring its implementation. We continue to urge Sierra Leone's political parties and all major stakeholders to fully implement the commitments they have made under the Declaration.

Mr. President,

Providing an enabling security environment at all stages of the electoral process and in the immediate post-election period will be equally indispensable. In that regard, the role of Sierra Leone's security agencies, in particular the Sierra Leone Police remains critical. Training of the police and provision of the necessary logistics are well underway. However, recent incidents involving the use of force by the Police in response to disturbances and other situations in various parts of the country have caused concerns. We welcome the measures taken by the Government of Sierra Leone to investigate these circumstances that led to the use of lethal force, and stress the need for ensuring respect for the rule of law and professional conduct by all during the electoral period and beyond. The establishment of the Independent Police Complaints mechanism, as envisaged in the 2009 Joint Communiqué, would also contribute to that end.

Mr. President,

Notwithstanding the authority vested in the National Electoral Commission by Sierra Leone's Constitution, the Commission and the political parties should continue to collaborate and address any concerns through open dialogue and in a constructive spirit. In that regard, efforts are underway, with the support of UNIPSIL, to strengthen the Political Parties Liaison Committee, comprised of representatives from all the political parties, the NEC, PPRC and other major actors, to serve as a forum for consultations and dialogue in order to resolve any matters regarding the electoral process.

The Sierra Leone media has an important contribution to make in ensuring free, fair and peaceful elections by providing objective and balanced information to the population. In that regard, the Independent Media Commission should play a more active role in working with the media to discourage divisive and inflammatory reporting that could lead to political tension and violence. Others, in particular the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists and the Guild of Editors should also educate and guide their membership on their roles and responsibilities. As to the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC), I am pleased to report the recent adoption of guidelines, which was signed by all political parties and the SLBC. The guidelines provide for equitable airtime and access for all political parties in the SLBC programmes.

Mr. President,

We are pleased to note that during the past six months and since the adoption of the Declaration of 18 May 2012, there have been no incidents of political violence in the country. The political parties and other stakeholders continue to uphold their commitment to credible and peaceful elections.

However, as the elections draw closer, the intensity of political competition, in particular between the two major political parties – APC and SLPP- is expected to increase and tensions are expected to rise. However, with the prevailing spirit of dialogue and constructive engagement among Sierra Leone’s political actors, we are confident that such tensions will be managed and violence prevented. In that regard, we are encouraged by the level of commitment and active engagement of all segments of the Sierra Leone society in the electoral process. The Non-State Actors project implemented by UNIPSIL with the assistance of the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund supports the efforts of key stakeholders, such as political parties, youth and women groups, tradition leaders and media in promoting non-violence and political participation.

Mr. President,

The successful conduct of elections will demonstrate the maturity of Sierra Leone’s political leadership and institutions, as well as the consolidation of the democratic process in the country. Once the elections are concluded, the immediate focus should be on addressing any potential post-elections issues through dialogue and on ensuring a smooth transition of the elected Government. UNIPSIL stands ready to continue providing the necessary assistance in that respect, working with all stakeholders towards promoting national cohesion and reconciliation. However, consolidating and sustaining Sierra Leone’s achievements would require continued progress in tackling the root causes, including those identified in the report of Sierra Leone’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). In that regard, with Sierra Leoneans taking the lead, continued support from the international community, including the United Nations, will still be needed for some time to come. With that in mind, UNIPSIL and the UN Country Team will continue to assist the Government of Sierra Leone as long as it is deemed appropriate.

Mr. President, in concluding, I wish to take this opportunity to thank President Koroma and his Government for the continued cooperation and support for the work of the United Nations in Sierra Leone. I would also like to thank the Council for the sustained interest in Sierra Leone, as demonstrated in its recent mission to the country. Last, but not least, I wish to acknowledge the very important role the PBC Sierra Leone Configuration continues to play under the able Chairmanship of Ambassador Gullerimo Rischynski in supporting peace consolidation efforts in the country, including the work of UNIPSIL.

Thank you.