

## Sierra Leone

### **Statement to the Security Council**

Michael von der Schulenburg  
Executive Representative of the Secretary-General  
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Mr. President,  
Distinguished Members of the Security Council,

Thank you for this opportunity to introduce the Fifth Report of the Secretary-General on Sierra Leone.

When the Secretary-General visited Freetown on 14 and 15 of June this year, he wanted to draw attention to Sierra Leone's extra-ordinary achievements in regaining its peace and stability since the end of its civil war. Indeed, Sierra Leone is a country that was able to leave years of dictatorships, of repeated military coups and of eleven years of a devastating civil war behind it and to embark on building a new peaceful, democratic and more prosperous society. Over the more recent period, Sierra Leone made considerable economic and social progress. The government mastered successfully the impact of the recent global food and financial crises on the country, engaged in an ambitious infrastructure development programme, improved agricultural production and increased energy production. On the background of the on-going review of the Millennium Development Goals, the government's efforts to provide free medical care for mothers and children under five, its successful programmes to fight HIV/AIDS and malaria, its commercialization programme for small and often desperately poor farmers and the construction of feeder roads connecting isolated villages to the national road grid are particularly laudable. It is therefore not surprising that Sierra Leone has made steady progress in achieving the MDG goals. In this context, we have also to recognize the considerable long-term support that Sierra Leone has received and still receives from the international community.

In particular, we commend President Koroma's commitment to create Africa's only second independent public broadcaster, Sierra Leone's Broadcasting Cooperation, which was inaugurated during the Secretary-General's visit. The SLBC is still in its infancy and will have to overcome many challenges to live up to its aspirations and our expectations as a professional and impartial voice for Sierra Leone and, hopefully, one day for the sub-region. But, I am convinced that the enthusiasm and integrity of its independent Board members will make it a reliable and impartial voice for Sierra Leone's newly found democracy and an example for other countries in the region to follow.

Mr. President, I will not expand on these developmental issues here further as they will be discussed at the Peacebuilding Commission meeting this afternoon. Instead, I would like to use this opportunity to concentrate on three more recent developments that could have a major impact on shaping Sierra Leone's political, social and economic future: first, the Government's efforts at making greater use of the country's mineral and natural resources, second, the preparations for the 2012 elections and third, developments in neighboring Guinea.

All three of these developments have the potential of bringing great benefits for the Sierra Leone. The increase in the exploitation of Sierra Leone's rich mineral resources could help break the country's high donor dependency and give it the resources needed to pursue its

development goals more aggressively. The 2012 elections could strengthen the country's still young democracy, increase the credibility of state institutions and ultimately help Sierra Leone to cross the magical line of its tenth post-conflict year. Finally, elections and a successful democratic transition in Guinea could, for the first time, create a sub-region of like-minded states and open the potential for greater cooperation among the three countries of the Mano River Union in solving many of the shared problems.

Mr. President, while these three developments are indeed a source of hope for Sierra Leone, they bear also considerable risks for its future that, if not managed carefully, could impact adversely the progress that Sierra Leone has achieved over the last years.

### Recent mining agreements

Mr. President, Sierra Leone is a country endowed with rich natural and mineral resources. To manage its mineral resources better, the Government enacted a new mining law last year and began, with UNDP assistance, to renegotiate existing mining contracts for the exploitation of diamonds and rutile, a precursor for titanium. More recently, the Government concluded two significant mining contracts for the exploitation of the country's large iron ore resources that would give extractive industries in Sierra Leone's economy an unprecedented dominant role. In fact, with its largely unexploited gold resources and the potential of economically viable off-shore oil and gas reserves, Sierra Leone may be at the verge of turning from major recipient of foreign aid to becoming a major exporter of primary mineral and hydrocarbon products. This is surely a welcome development for Sierra Leone as well as for an international community that had invested so much into Sierra Leone's stability and development over the last ten years or more.

However, experiences in different parts of the world suggest that countries depending on the export of raw materials are often plagued with great difficulties. Dependence on mining and oil exports has often resulted in social dislocations, huge income disparities and rampant corruption that at times erupted into violent internal conflicts. In fact, Sierra Leone itself has made such bitter experience. Today, its formerly diamond-rich district of Kono is one of the poorest areas of Sierra Leone with one of the highest unemployment rates in the country, especially among its youth. Much of its once fertile agricultural lands are now dotted with water-logged holes and Kono's destroyed infrastructure and the many burned out houses still bear witness of the destructive force of a civil war that was largely funded by so-called "blood diamonds" from this very district.

Mr. President, it is the sheer size of the two iron ore mining contracts that draw unease, as they could become "game-changer" for Sierra Leone, with a potential of dramatically changing the country's economic, social and political landscape. This applies in particular to the mining agreement for the large Tonkalili iron ore deposits. If official pronouncements are correct, the financial turn-over this mining operation alone would dwarf the financial and organizational capacities of the Government itself.

Therefore, it is incumbent on all concerned, in particular the Government of Sierra Leone, to make all the necessary efforts to ensure that its new emphasis on extractive industries is put on the right track from the very beginning. Concerns about the mining agreements, especially about their compliance with Sierra Leone's mining law, about the transparency of contract negotiations or concerns about how much economic power has been given to a single external investor should be taken seriously. Further, concerns about the influence that such huge

commercial interests could have on the integrity of an underpaid public service, the media and civil society will require attention.

I am convinced that even large-scale mining contracts can be managed in a way that both, the international investor as well as the country will emerge as winners. On this background, I welcome the assurances given by H.E President Koroma of his determination to ensure that all mining agreements will be compliant with Sierra Leone's laws and with international practices, to increase transparency in the mining sector and to seek external assistance in beefing up national capacities to deal with the challenges of large-scale mining concessions. I also wish to express gratitude to the World Bank, the AfDB, DFID and, closer to home, UNDP for their offers of assistance to enable the Government manage this critical aspect of Sierra Leone's development.

### Preparations for the 2012 Elections

Mr. President, the next nation-wide elections in Sierra Leone will be held in the later part of 2012 – that is two years from now. Despite the remaining time gap, it feels as if the electoral campaign has already started. Press statements, interviews, relatively unimportant bye-elections and even certain other social events take the form of early electoral campaigns. Regrettably, the main political parties accuse each other of bad intentions and the opposition expressed increasingly mistrust in the impartiality of key state institutions. There are fears that each side could try to prevent the other to campaign in their respective political strongholds. Recent bye-elections for parliamentary and local council seats also witnessed similar incidents, as well as violence or the threat of violence.

All indications are that the 2012 elections could be very challenging and complex. This is partly due to the fact that the country will run three nation-wide elections at the same time: presidential, parliamentary and local council elections. But also other factors such as an electoral system of "the winner-takes-all", a likely two-party contest each with their regional strongholds, temptations to exploit regional and ethnic differences as well as the newly found wealth from recent mining contracts could all contribute to highly contested and potentially difficult elections.

Mr. President, to mitigate conflicts in the run-up and during the 2012 elections, it is critical that the institutional framework responsible for conducting the elections are accepted by all sides as being professional, credible and, even more importantly, as being impartial. This applies in particular to the two main electoral bodies: the National Electoral Commission and the Political Party Registration Commission. Other national institutions such as the Sierra Leone Police, the Independent Media Commission and the newly established Independent Broadcasting Corporation also have very important roles to play. In view of that, serious efforts should be made to address all outstanding issues involving electoral management bodies and other relevant institutions well in advance of the elections.

In this context, I would like to urge the National Electoral Commission to do more to alleviate fears within the main opposition following the re-appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner. At the same time, I call on the main opposition party to show greater flexibility in discussing their electoral concerns without getting unnecessarily entangled in personality conflicts. Although much work has been done in strengthening the Political Party Registration Commission to carry out its important regulatory and mediation functions, its effectiveness is hampered by the fact that its Chair has been vacant for over two years.

We are pleased to note that the Sierra Leone Police and its leadership have committed themselves to regular dialogue with political parties and to protect the operational impartiality and professionalism of the force in providing security during the electoral process. The police should also increase its capacity in non-lethal crowd control techniques and refrain from any temptation to use of assault weapons in social disturbances. An early establishment of an Independent Police Complaints Committee, as envisaged in the Joint Communiqué will also greatly enhance confidence in the police. The role of the media in the electoral process will be critical and the Independent Media Commission is expected to protect the media from undue political and commercial influences. In this context, the creation of the Guild of Editors of the major newspapers is a very welcome initiative. Equally important is that the newly created Sierra Leone Broadcasting Cooperation establishes itself in time as a reliable and impartial national radio and television station.

If the 2007 and 2008 elections or recent bye-elections are any indication, ethnicity and regional divisions may play a much greater role in the up-coming elections. As experience in other parts of the world suggests this could add a dangerous dimension into elections. I hope therefore that more efforts would be made by all political stakeholders to defuse this potential for conflict well in advance of the election. This should also include greater efforts by the Government to create a better regional balance in appointments of senior political and civil service positions.

Finally, we are concerned about the Government's intention to hold an inquest into the 1992 extra-judicial executions by the former military Government (NPRC) that ruled the country from 1992-1996. This action by the Government could be misunderstood by many in the opposition as an effort to influence the 2012 elections and could open the way for demands for all sorts of new inquests into past atrocities. Would the Government proceed with the inquest; it should make its intentions much clearer in order to alleviate misinterpretations later.

#### Developments in Guinea

Mr. President, it may be no surprise to you that Sierra Leoneans look with apprehension at developments in its large neighbor, Guinea. There is much at stake for Sierra Leone. Should Guinea manage its democratic transition well, it would make the sub-regional more stable and give Sierra Leone wider options in solving sub-regional problems including cross-border trading and sub-regional security concerns such as illicit drug trafficking and illegal fishing.

However, should the democratic transition in Guinea stall or the process even reverse could have serious negative consequences for Sierra Leone. The ethnic, cultural and geographical links between the two countries, the long border with a number of yet unsolved issues as well as the large quantities of small arms weapons in Guinea could all make any trouble in Guinea be felt also in Sierra Leone.

On this background, I feel that we should all commend President Koroma and his Liberian counterpart, President Shirlief Johnson for their careful approach in support of the democratic transition in their fellow neighboring country.

Finally, let me use this opportunity to share with this Council some concerns about our own integrated peacebuilding mission in Sierra Leone:

When the Secretary-General visited Sierra Leone, he wanted also to draw attention to a successful UN intervention and in particular to the new model of an integrated peacebuilding

mission that could serve other UN interventions as example. We have been able to prove that it is possible to draw down from one of the largest peacekeeping missions into a much smaller and purely civilian mission while maintaining a credible political and development engagement in the country. As I mentioned before, the new peacebuilding mission costs member states only 2.2% of the previous peacekeeping operations.

Unfortunately, all of these successes and savings have not translated into any increase in UN financial resources for development purposes, a key factor in our peacebuilding strategy. In fact, funding to UN operations is steadily declining. This is a worrying trend as it will no doubt jeopardize the UN's work and credibility; it would also jeopardize the integrated approach to peacebuilding. I intend to discuss this issue in more detail at the Peacebuilding Commission meeting this afternoon but would appreciate your continued support.

Mr. President, Sierra Leone may today no longer be one of your major concerns. And this is good so. But would urge you not to abandon Sierra Leone in your own interest: it is a potential success story not only for Sierra Leone but also for the Security Council. Sierra Leone will continue to need you as we will continue to need Sierra Leone.

Thank you for your attention,

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