



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

**Statement**

by

**H. E. DR. ALIE KABBA  
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE**

On

**Agenda Item 86 "Rule of Law"  
at the National and International Levels  
Delivered in the Sixth Committee**

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336 East 45<sup>th</sup> Street, New York NY 10017  
Tel: (212) 688 1656 - FAX (212) 688 4924 email: [sierraleone@un.int](mailto:sierraleone@un.int)

**Mr. Chairman,**

The Republic of Sierra Leone respectively aligns itself with the Statements delivered by South Africa on behalf of the African Group and the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Sierra Leone is pleased to take the floor on agenda item 86 – “the rule of law at national and International levels”, at a time when it appears the rule of law is under stress. Let me at the outset thank the Secretary-General for his report contained in document A/75/284, a précis on the United Nations (UN) rule of law activities at the national and international levels in the past 12 months, highlighting in particular the coronavirus disease (Covid-19) pandemic and rule of law nexus and context.

We express appreciation to the UN in the implementation of aspects of our national rule of law programme as contained in the Secretary-General’s report, specifically on legal aid related to gender-based violence UN assistance in Sierra Leone, and the carrying out of residual functions by the Residual Special Court for Sierra Leone as it continues to monitor the enforcement of sentences of persons convicted by the Special Court for Sierra Leone, and in providing support services to protected witnesses and address requests for assistance from other national authorities.

Sierra Leone continues to demonstrate commitment to the strengthening of the rule of law at the national and international levels, taking concrete incremental steps to implement the rule of law and good governance goals in our Medium-Term National Development Plan (2019-2023) which is aligned to the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (in particular Goal 16) and the African Union Agenda 2063 (Goal 11).

**Mr. Chairman,**

Notwithstanding the challenges associated with the Covid-19 pandemic, Sierra Leone is pleased to give due account of the resilience of our rule of law commitment and work at both the international and national levels. With SDG 16 one of two SDGs accelerators, Sierra Leone continues its leadership role together

with Argentina and the Netherlands on the Pathfinders Justice Taskforce, and the subregional “accelerating people-centered justice for all” strategy at the Mano River Union basin. Following the successful hosting of the second annual showcase in 2018, we continued our commitment to cooperate with partners in the SDG 16 Plus Forum in learning and sharing best practices to advance peaceful, just and inclusive societies during the third annual showcase held in Dili, Timor-Leste in November 2019. Sierra Leone continues to Chair the Group of Seven Plus Justice Taskforce, working to implement the “Access to Justice for All in Conflict Affected Countries Declaration and Joint Action Plan” adopted in the Hague, Netherlands in June 2019.

At the national level, in the past 12 months we have witnessed the further strengthening of the independence and effectiveness of the Judiciary. The Judiciary continues to collaborate with bilateral and multilateral partners to employ innovative solutions to address access to justice problems including the use of data and technology, namely the justice app. (a mobile application) and a judgment writing tool to ameliorate judicial delays and inefficiencies in case management. Public trust is being enhanced, especially on adjudications in high profile cases, where the public hitherto may have resigned to predictable outcomes on perceived political and other biases. Outcomes on high profile cases have been largely commended and accepted by the public. However, the measure of an effective and independence judiciary is not entirely on its handling of high-profile cases, but mostly on broadening and advancing access to justice. In this regard the Office of the Attorney-General and Ministry of Justice has initiate a study on the restatement of customary law to ensure certainty and predictability of customary law, the bedrock of the justice system in Sierra Leone. A needs survey for poor and marginalized communities has also been commissioned by the Ministry of Justice with the goal of using the results to design effective access to justice policies and for the effective use of the informal justice mechanisms.

In February 2019, the President of Sierra Leone, H.E. Julius Maada Bio, declared a state of public emergency against rape and sexual violence. The Presidency was gravely concerned over the spate of rape and sexual violence and declared the state of emergency acknowledging the urgency to take action. In September 2019 a new legislation, the Sexual offences (Amendment) Act 2019, was enacted stipulating a minimum sentence of 15 years for a rape conviction. Measures

for psycho-social support, protection of victims and witnesses were either introduced or enhanced in the 2019 amendment. In July 2020 the first Sexual Offences Model Court for rape proceedings was launched. This special court is part of the diverse approach the Government is employing to fight Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) with emphasis on rape. With part of the strategy being criminal deterrence, there have been 152 convictions since the proclamation of public emergency against rape and sexual violence, with 64 convictions following the establishment of the Sexual Offences Model Court.

Finally, on the national level rule of law activities, a state of public emergency was proclaimed by President Bio in March 2020 due to Covid19 global pandemic and in order to take effective measures ‘to prevent, protect and curtail the spread’ of COVID19 in Sierra Leone. Since the declaration, the Sierra Leone Human Rights Commission, reconstituted in accordance with the Paris Principles, and civil society organizations have been effective in monitoring human rights and good governance situations, with the collective objective of ensuring that the public emergency measures are focused on the pandemic.

**Mr. Chairman,**

On this year’s agenda item subtopic - “measures to prevent and combat corruption”, Sierra Leone is pleased to underline the concrete actions taken to underscore our commitment in fighting corruption and strengthening transparency and accountability in the public service system. President Julius Maada Bio in his Inaugural Statement just over 2 years ago stated that:

*During my campaigns and since my election, I have said time and time again that this is not going to be the Business-as-Usual Politics and Governance of the [S]tate. My new Government is therefore launching 3 peaceful democratic wars: First, a War on Indiscipline; Second, a War on Corruption; and Third, a War on Poverty. These Peaceful democratic wars on Indiscipline, Corruption and Poverty will define my tenure of Office and I am determined to deliver on my promises.*

To deliver on the promise to fight corruption, in just over 2 years unprecedented robust actions have been taken, including the launch of a new National Anti-Corruption Strategy (NACS 2019-2023) by the Anti-Corruption Commission, the enactment of the Anti-Corruption (Amendment) Act 2019, the establishment of the Anti-Corruption Division in the High Court with 5 specialized judges, and the successful implementation of the Asset Declaration regime, especially the online asset declaration portal, to entrench integrity in public office.

The NACS 2019-2023 adopts a different approach in the fight against corruption focusing on criminal enforcement to address the pervasive “Business-as-Usual” impunity. The Anti-Corruption (Amendment) Act provides for a more efficient and manageable asset declaration regime, provisions for administrative actions that can be taken for non-compliance with the asset declaration, increased punishments for corruption offences, strengthening of the civil recovery powers of the Commission, better protective measures for witnesses and strengthened prevention mechanisms. The amendment will ensure greater efficiency in the fight against corruption and make corruption a ‘high risk and low return venture’ for public officials and persons covered under the Act.

In just over 2 years, the results in the fight against corruption are evident with unprecedented increase convictions and a 99% conviction rate. And under the non-conviction-based asset recovery, the Commission has recovered more than Leones 19.7 Billion previously lost through corruption and corrupt practices. The positive results have filtered through public perception and indexes with equally unprecedented upward mobility in the Transparency International and Afro-Barometer indexes, and the Millennium Challenge Cooperation Control of Corruption Scorecard in which we have made tremendous improvements from a failing position of 49% in 2017 to a respectable pass of 71% in 2018 and 79% in 2019.

**Mr. Chairman,**

In 2018, three concurrent Commissions of Inquiry (COIs) were established under the Constitution of Sierra Leone (Constitutional Instruments No. 64, 65 and 67 of 2018) with three distinguished Nigerian, Ghanaian and non-resident Sierra Leonean judges as Chairmen and Sole Commissioners respectively, with the

mandate to examine the assets of certain Government officials who served in high-level positions from November 2007 to April 2018; inquiring into their lawful acquisition of assets and claims of unexplained wealth. The COIs proceedings were held in public and broadcasted live on television, radio and on the internet. The COIs successfully completed their work in March 2020, and in September 2020 the Government of Sierra Leone issued White Papers on the reports of the COIs. With findings of systematic and widespread corruption, the Government is set to implement the recommendations, while noting that the persons of interests with adverse findings can appeal to the Court of Appeal as provided for in the Constitution. The remarkable completion of the work of the COIs represents a watershed moment for public accountability for previous and present high-level public officials in Sierra Leone.

**Mr. Chairman,**

What Member States, like Sierra Leone, now need in the fight against corruption is the genuine commitment and action at the international level to address the transnational aspects including unconstrained and less burdensome cooperation mechanisms to enhance mutual legal assistance in corruption investigations, prosecutions, asset tracing, confiscation and recovery. There is also the need to address the gaps and inconsistencies within the international financial system enabling illicit financial flows to persist. Further efforts to build capacities, peer learning and sharing of expertise are to be encouraged based on needs and national ownership.

In closing, Sierra Leone looks forward to the convening of the scheduled special session of the General Assembly against corruption, to be held in 2021 (UNGASS 2021). We agree that the UNGASS 2021 outcome document should be concise, focused and action-oriented. We further expect Member States to renew our collective political commitment and robust response to fighting corruption.

Sierra Leone continues to value our partnerships within the United Nations system, relevant international and other intergovernmental organizations and bilateral partners in strengthening the rule of law and particularly in the fight against corruption.

**I thank you.**