



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

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Statement of

**His Excellency Dr. Sylvester Ekundayo Rowe
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At

**The United Nations Conference to Review Progress
Made in the implementation of the Programme of
Action to Prevent, combat and Eradicate the Illicit
Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its
Aspects**

New York

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Mr. President:

The Sierra Leone delegation joins others in congratulating you and members of the bureau on your election.

Mr. President,

Sierra Leone welcomes this opportunity to renew its commitment to the full implementation of the 2001 Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. It is also prepared to join work with others in devising a strategy for further and strengthened implementation. As my delegation has consistently maintained, small arms and light weapons are no less deadly than what have been described as weapons of mass destruction.

Those who still do not understand or fail to understand the human, humanitarian, economic and social consequences of the illicit trade, circulation and use of these weapons, let them go to Sierra Leone. Those who see the UN Programme of Action only through the lens of arms control or disarmament let them go to Sierra Leone. Let them go there and spend a week or two with the real survivors of the rebel war, in the chiefdoms and villages of our country.

Mr. President, distinguished delegates

The Programme of Action we adopted five years ago is essentially about the life and livelihood of people. The principal objective of that document was, and still is, to address the human, humanitarian and economic and social consequences of the illicit trade in these small but deadly weapons. This Review Conference will be a success only if we ensure that the human/humanitarian dimension remains the core objective of our work; only if we ensure that the outcome document we adopt does not in any way distract us from that objective.

You will recall that last January I had the honour of serving as Chairman of the Preparatory Committee for this Review Conference. In that capacity I entreated participants to approach the review process:

“...With determination, with a focus on building on the strong foundation that we laid five years ago; with the acknowledgement that further action is required to fulfill the commitments undertaken in the Programme of Action; with the full realization of the increasing human suffering attributed to the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons; with the recognition of the urgency of eradicating, preventing and combating the scourge; and moreover, with the full realization that we are all potential victims of this scourge...”

Mr. President,

Over the last five years since the adoption of this important but non-binding document, we in Sierra Leone have tried as hard as possible to implement its provisions. With the assistance of both our bilateral and multilateral partners, we established the National Focal Committee in 2005 and have embarked upon a number of measures to complement the Government's post-DDR programmes.

We see the principal objective of the UN Programme of Action on the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in the context of the objectives of our Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). In other words, we recognize the linkage between the excessive accumulation and misuse of arms (especially illicit arms) and human security in all its aspects. We also recognize the linkage between the UN Programme of Action and our efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Following the successful Community Arms Collection and Destruction (CACD) initiative conducted under the auspices of the Sierra Leone Police Force, we have the on-going UNDP-sponsored Arms for Development Programme which has succeeded in completely disarming forty (40) of the country's 149 Chiefdoms through voluntary exchange of arms for community development projects.

With UNDP funding, the National Focal Committee now has a refurbished, well-equipped and fully functional secretariat.

Furthermore, progress has been made in strengthening our national arms legislation. The existing Arms, Ammunition and Explosives Ordinance No 14 of 1955 is being revised, and updated. It is now being considered by Cabinet and will soon be promulgated into an Act of Parliament. Meanwhile, there is still a total ban on civilian possession of all forms of firearms. The UNDP is currently helping in building the capacity of the Sierra Leone Police Force to collect, process, analyze and manage a weapons data-base by providing relevant soft and hardware components and appropriate training for the personnel.

In compliance with the ECOWAS Moratorium, we recently held a National Consultative Conference attracting delegates from civil society and other stakeholders from all over the country to draw up a National Action Plan designed to chart the way forward in controlling the proliferation and use of small arms and light weapons.

Mr. President,

The illicit trade, circulation and use of small arms and light weapons continue to pose serious cross-border problems in the West-African sub-region. My delegation is pleased to report that significant strides have been made in confidence building measures through regular consultative meetings designed to facilitate exchanges of views and sharing of experiences within the Mano River Basin. These efforts, coupled with the recent Japanese funding for the erection of joint border posts for customs, immigration and national security officials, should further contribute to strengthening the borders and controlling the proliferation of arms within the sub-region.

Also at the sub-regional level, Sierra Leone had been at the forefront in the implementation and extension of the Moratorium which has now been transformed into a legally binding Convention. Sierra Leone has signed it, and I am pleased to announce that the ratification process has already been initiated.

Mr. President

Sierra Leone continues to attach importance to the role of and contribution of non-governmental and civil society organizations in our collective effort to implement the UN Programme of Action. This contribution should be further recognized and adequately reflected in the outcome document of the Review Conference. In Sierra Leone, awareness-raising campaigns, media advocacy and similar activities on threats associated with the proliferation of small arms and light weapons have been undertaken at the national and regional levels by key civil society organizations such as the Sierra Leone Action Network on Small Arms (SLANSA).

The constraints facing the National Focal Committee are essentially financial and logistical. The Committee is severely handicapped in implementing most of its own programme of activities.

In this regard, my delegation should like to underscore the importance that it attaches to Section III of the draft outcome document of the Review Conference, namely, International Cooperation and Assistance.

Mr. President,

In the view of the Sierra Leone delegation the outcome document of the Review Conference should not merely reiterate the provisions of the Programme of Action. Its objective and strategy should be to reinforce the groundwork that was laid five years ago. In crafting it we must remember that the eradication of the illicit trade in these small but deadly weapons is a process, and not a single event. The outcome document should therefore be forward-looking. It should also be adaptable to new and emerging clandestine developments in the complex network of illicit transfers and circulation.

In this regard, Sierra Leone continues to support the Transfer Controls Initiative (TCI). We share the view that we must continue to build on the progress that has been made at the regional level. The suggestion that further work on common standards or guidelines for strengthening national transfer controls is commendable. It is consistent with the UN Programme of Action, and should be given due consideration.

Mr. President, distinguished delegates, my delegation looks forward to participating actively in the negotiations during the next several days on the draft outcome document. We enter into these negotiations without any preconditions, and would like to appeal to all delegations to do the same. Let us negotiate in good faith, and with the awareness that we are not drafting a legally-binding document.

Sierra Leone would also like to appeal to all delegations, on behalf of the millions of victims of the illicit trade and use of small arms and light weapons, not to use consensus as a weapon to deflate the expectations of the victims and potential victims of the scourge of illicit small arms and light weapons.

I thank you for Mr. President.
