

*Introductory Statement*

*by*

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Deputy Minister of Social Welfare, Gender  
and Children's Affairs and Leader of Delegation

*at the*

38<sup>th</sup> Session of the Committee on the Convention of All forms  
of Discrimination against Women

*on*

Consideration of the Combined Initial, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Periodic Report of  
the Republic of Sierra Leone in pursuance of its obligation under Article 18 of  
the Convention for the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against  
Women

New York, May 17, 2007

*Please check against delivery*

Madam Chair,  
Distinguished Members of the Committee,  
Distinguished Delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am highly honored and delighted to head a delegation that is looking forward to discuss with the Committee the Combined Initial, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> periodic report of the Republic of Sierra Leone as it borders on the implementation of the Convention and to adequately respond to your questions. Let me however convey greetings from the government and people of Sierra Leone.

Madam Chair we feel gratified for this opportunity to give account of the status of women in Sierra Leone and policies put in place for the implementation of the Convention.

Let me first of all acknowledge the immense support that the Ministry received in putting together this report. The United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women must be singled out for the great advocacy role it played both with Government and the International Community. This was reinforced by training opportunities and other capacity building measures for the Ministry. In this regard the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs was invited to a Training Workshop on Reporting on the Convention held in Arusha, Tanzania in September 2003. At that forum, the Sierra Leone delegation was reminded that the war was over and peace restored to the country thereby providing the ideal situation for reporting on the Convention. In October 2004, the Division sent a high powered delegation to Sierra Leone that met with heads of all line Ministries and the United Nations Country Team to remind them of Sierra Leone's reporting obligation and to generate support for the reporting process. In April 2005 Experts from the Division organized training for gender focal points from the various line Ministries and representatives from the Civil Society on CEDAW reporting and implementation. In June 2006, the Division again supported us in reviewing our draft report. Finally in October 2006 a member of the Committee of Experts and a Staff of the Division attended the National Validation Workshop held in Freetown.

The Ministry also acknowledges the financial and technical support of the United Nations Country Team in Sierra Leone. With the support of the UNIFEM Anglophone West Africa Regional Office, a proposal was articulated as a strategy for addressing the peculiar constraints and challenges of Sierra Leone in the preparation of the Combined Initial, 2<sup>nd</sup> – Fifth CEDAW

Country periodic report. The UN continued to provide financial and technical support for the process.

The Government of Sierra Leone, especially our President Alhaji Dr. Ahmad Tejan Kabbah and his cabinet, must be commended for their commitment to women's empowerment. The Government provided the first grant for the writing of this report and cabinet has followed the process to its final conclusion, including review of the list of issues and questions raised by the Committee of Experts and responses prepared by the Ministry. They eagerly await the concluding comments of this Committee.

Sierra Leone's Permanent Mission to the United Nations is also acknowledged for their interest and support for us to comply with our reporting obligation.

Madam Chair, in response to the vacuum created by non-reporting on CEDAW by Sierra Leone over a period of sixteen years since ratifying the Convention, the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs held several nation-wide consultation on the need to redeem the image and classification of Sierra Leone as violating its international obligations and commitment.

As all of you are aware, Sierra Leone is emerging from an eleven (11) year civil war that destroyed most of the country's social, economic and physical infrastructure resulting in a break down of civil and political authority. Rebuilding the country's economic and social infrastructure to provide security and livelihood while guaranteeing the promotion and protection of rights for its citizens is a daunting challenge.

### **The Report Preparation Process**

- Proposal and Work plan Development.
- Setting up of CEDAW Technical Secretariat.
- Situation Analysis on the Status of CEDAW Implementation.
- Training of Gender focal Points, staff of the Ministry and critical stakeholders on CEDAW reporting.
- Recruitment of Consultant and CEDAW program officer.
- CEDAW Data Collection and Mini Studies: - In order to bridge the dearth of data and information, and in line the Terms of References (ToRs), the Consultants and the Ministry staff embarked on broad-based consultations to generate the required quantitative and qualitative data.
- Validation of Findings on CEDAW Articles harmonized into a composite report.

- In April 2006 my Ministry in consultation with UNIFEM engaged an international Consultant to work with local Consultants and Gender Ministry officials in consolidating the composite report into first national draft report for scrutiny by a technical peer group, preparatory to a national consensus and finalization of the document.
- Technical Peer Review and Assessment Meeting.
- National Stakeholders Finalization and Adoption Workshop. Stakeholders included government functionaries, civil society organizations, United Nations Country Team, Women's groups, Human Rights Organizations, Media and Academia.

### **Ratification Status**

Sierra Leone ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women on the 11<sup>th</sup> November 1988 without reservation. By ratifying the provisions of the Convention, Sierra Leone is under obligation to submit to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women an initial report one year after ratification and subsequent reports every four years thereafter.

Although it took us a very long period to meet our reporting obligations, successive Governments in Sierra Leone have demonstrated in tangible ways Sierra Leone's commitment to implement the provisions of the substantive Articles of the Convention, through policies and other measures. It was in growing recognition of the importance of CEDAW to women's empowerment that in 1988, after ratifying the Convention, the Government set up a Women's Bureau to coordinate issues relating to women's development.

In 1993, a Gender Desk was established in the office of the Chairman and Head of State of the then National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) at State House to coordinate gender and women in development activities.

Following the return to democratic civilian rule in 1996, a Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs was established as the institutional hub to promote women's empowerment. In 1997 however, the constitutionally elected government was overthrown and forced into exile. Following its restoration in 1998, the Government merged the then Ministry of Social Welfare and the Gender and Children's Affairs Ministry to form a Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs.

Madam Chair, in spite of the genuine constraints encountered by Sierra Leone in reporting on CEDAW, as a result of the war, the country has not been absolved of its reporting obligations nor given a waiver on reporting. On

the contrary, we are happy that the UN employed every opportunity to remind and support us to prepare this report.

In meeting our obligations to the Convention, the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs as the national machinery tasked with promoting and advancing the rights of women has been undertaking series of Activities including the development of two policies, the National Policy on Gender Mainstreaming and the National Policy on the Advancement of Women which were adopted by Parliament in 2000.

### **Domestication of the Convention**

The following measures have been undertaken by the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs:

- Development of the twin policies; policy on the Advancement of Women and the Gender Mainstreaming policy in 2000.
- Production of an abridged version of the operative articles of the Convention in 2002.
- Consultation and sensitization workshop for key stakeholders including Parliamentarians, Public and Private sector on the Convention in 2002.
- The Ministry collaborated with UNIFEM, International Rescue Committee (IRC) and the Law Reform Commission to identify laws and practices that are discriminatory against women. This resulted in women's Law Reform Agenda in 2003.
- The Ministry in 2004 collaborated with the Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights in holding District Consultations on the Convention primarily those related to marriage, Divorce, inheritance and property rights.
- The development of the three (3) draft gender Bills namely: registration of customary marriages and divorce; intestate succession; and domestic violence.
- The Ministry in collaboration with the United Nations Country Team held series of sensitization workshops nation-wide on the United Nations Resolution 1325.
- Sierra Leone is on the agenda of the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission and it provides an opportunity to strengthen women's engagement in peace consolidation and address challenges to their full participation.
- My Ministry in collaboration with UNIFEM organized a national women's consultation for the enhancement of women's engagement in the UN Peacebuilding Commission in January 2007 to ensure that women's perspectives are mainstreamed in the Peace Building Fund for Sierra Leone.

- The Ministry and its partners including women's organizations have put together a proposal on supporting women's empowerment in the peacebuilding process.

### **National Policy on the Gender Mainstreaming**

The Policy on Gender Mainstreaming forms an integral part of the national development process and reinforce the overall development objectives in the country. It emphasizes government commitment to gender responsive development. The policy compliments all sectoral policies and programmes and defines structures and key target areas for ensuring that gender concerns are routinely addressed in all planning activities as well as in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programme activities. It emphasizes the cross-cutting nature of gender, and seeks to integrate it into development efforts at the national, sectoral, district and chiefdom levels.

The policy provides a legal framework and mandate for every stakeholder to address gender imbalances within their respective sectors. The policy states that government shall explore the possibilities of harmonizing our laws to ensure that the principles of equity, good conscience, fair play and justice prevail, that the welfare of women and children is maintained and the economic, social and cultural development proceeds at a pace commensurate with national goals and aspirations among others.

The overall goal of this policy is to mainstream gender concerns in the national development process in order to improve the social, legal, civic, political, economic and cultural conditions of the people in Sierra Leone, particularly women.

It also sets an institutional framework for the implementation of the policy on Gender Mainstreaming. The Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs (MSWGCA) is charged with the responsibility of spearheading and coordinating gender responsive development and in particular ensuring the improvement of the status of women.

### **National Policy on the Advancement of Women**

The guiding principles underlying this policy are as follows:

- The Government upholds the principles entrenched in the Constitution of Sierra Leone which guarantee equal rights for men and women;
- The Government's commitment to implementing the provisions of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All forms Discrimination Against Women which it ratified on 11<sup>th</sup> November 1988, and all other

International Instruments and decisions relating to the advancement of women;

- The Government's commitment to restructuring the national economy, reorienting educational, political and social institutions so as to ensure equity, social justice, and the well being of all, through sustainable development; and
- Government's view of women's issues as Human Rights issues as well as development issues.

The policy recognizes that women's rights are Human Right and in this respect reiterates that:

- Women shall have the right to work at any level of government, from the village level to the central level. They have the right to work in positions of authority, the right to equal to pay and the right to participate in the decision-making process at all levels. The government will develop mechanisms to ensure that these rights are respected.
- Women shall have the right to equal opportunities, payment, promotion, appointment and training.
- Women shall have the right to education at all levels in both academic and technical fields; the right to study the same curriculum as men; and the right to choose any field of specialization.
- Women shall have the right to primary health care, family planning and other basic services, and they should be made aware that they have the right to demand these services and how to access them.
- Women are victims of war and man-made disasters and who due to this, become the head of households, disabled, displaced etc. shall have the right to short term assistance from the government.
- Women shall have the right to equal representation in all national, regional and international committees/commissions.

Over the years efforts put in place in promoting gender equality by various line Ministries have paid off. These can be seen in the level of participation of women in the public sector; greater gender parity in education, especially at the primary school level, increased number of women in decision making positions and increasing opportunities for economic empowerment.

As part of measures to implement the National Policies on Gender Mainstreaming and the Advancement of Women, a committee was set up, chaired by the Ministry, to work with the Law Reform Commission in identifying certain laws that discriminate against women. A Women's Law Reform Agenda was developed and included in the Work Plan of the Commission for 2004/5 among the priority issues.

## **Legal Reforms**

The Constitution of Sierra Leone i.e. Act No. 6 of 1991 in principle recognizes the equal rights of all citizens including women and men. Further in section 27 (1), the Constitution provides that subject to the provisions of sub-sections 4, 5 and 7, no law shall have any provision which is discriminatory either in itself or in its effect. Section 27 (4) however stipulates limitations to the protection from discrimination with respect to adoption, marriage, divorce, burial and devolution of property on death of the husband. The effect of section 27 (4) is that it discriminates against women on the basis of sex in relation to the matters set out in section 27 (4).

The above mentioned provision is an entrenched clause in the Constitution of Sierra Leone inherited from the Constitution of 1961. Prior to Independence Sierra Leone was a British colony with the capital, Freetown having the status of a colony and therefore British Law was applied. The rest of Sierra Leone was a protectorate where customary law of the people was applied except in matters of criminal offences. The 1961 Constitution sought to preserve the culture of the Protectorate and therefore included these key aspects of customary law in the entrenched clause of the Constitution.

To rectify this unwholesome state of affairs, the Government established the Constitutional Review Commission to address this and other provisions of the Constitution that are no longer acceptable. A revised draft Constitution has been developed which expunges 27 (4) (d).

The Law Reform Commission has made significant progress in reviewing the laws especially those relating to women's rights. Bills currently with the Attorney General include:

- 1) Registration of Customary Marriage and Divorce;
- 2) Devolution of Estate Bill;
- 3) Domestic Violence Bill;
- 4) Sexual Offences Bill;
- 5) The Sierra Leone Citizenship (Amendment Act of 1973);
- 6) The Christian Marriage(Amendment) Act;
- 7) The Muslim Marriage(Amendment) Act;
- 8) Civil Marriage (Amendment) Act;
- 9) Family Law

## **Draft Gender Bills**



The President has informed the nation that the first three Bills above commonly referred to as the Gender Bills will be presented to Parliament by a Certificate of Urgency and enacted before Parliament is dissolved for the August 2007 Parliamentary elections. These Bills are now in Cabinet for discussion.

a) Registration of Customary Marriages and Divorce

Customary marriage is one of the four (4) types of marriage in Sierra Leone; the others being Christian marriage, Mohammedan marriage and Civil marriage. The latter three will not be affected by the Bill. Clause 2 provides that no customary marriage will be valid unless:

- a) the parties to the marriage are not less than eighteen years old;
- b) both parties freely consent to the marriage; and
- c) either party is governed by an applicable customary law.

The provision ensures that girls under eighteen years (and of school going age) are not married off without their consent.

Clause 5 seeks to legitimize co-habiting partners who have lived as such for a period of not less than five years provided they are not below eighteen years. Such partners shall if their personal law is customary law be deemed to be married under the applicable customary law. In fact clause 6 gives a woman who has registered her marriage or divorced under this new legislation the right to seek maintenance for herself and her children.

Part III provides for the registration of customary marriages. It provides in clause 7 (1) that either party to a customary marriage may apply to the relevant local council for the registration of the marriage. Such application, according to clause 8 should be accompanied by a statutory declaration by that party which should be supported by either of the parents of the spouses, the person standing in place of the parents or a relative of either spouse.

Part 1V provides for the registration of customary divorce and such divorce shall be recorded by the local council in a register set out in the third schedule.

Clause 16 under part V empowers either spouse under a customary law marriage to acquire property, both moveable and immoveable. This is a departure from most customs wherein women can not acquire some moveable property or any immoveable property except through their husbands, and where anything they acquire, becomes their husbands' absolutely. Clause 17 of part V provides that gifts or payments made in contemplation of marriage

shall be non-refundable whether or not the contemplated marriage takes place. This means that women suffering in an unhappy or potentially violent marriage are not forced to remain in that marriage merely on the basis that their family cannot repay the dowry. This also provides security for children of such a marriage, who with the help of this clause can be moved to a place of safety.

b) Devolution of Estate Bill

The Bill provides for Intestate Succession and other inheritance related matters. The interpretation section provides several instructive definitions. For example, the definition of dual includes children born to the deceased prior to his/her marriage, children born to the deceased and his or her lawful spouse during marriage who were recognized as such and accepted by the deceased spouse as children adopted by the deceased under applicable law. The aforementioned definition is elastic enough to include illegitimate children who under the present law are disadvantaged when it comes to succession.

Likewise, the definition of 'spouse' encompasses persons legally named to the deceased as well as single persons who cohabited with the deceased as if they were married for a period of not less than ten (10) years prior to the death of the deceased. When considering distribution of the estate of the deceased person, the Bill provides that where the deceased is survived by spouse or child or both, then the said spouse or child (or both as the case may be) shall be entitled absolutely to the deceased's household chattel.

c) Domestic Violence

Domestic violence against women is in law considered normal in most communities in Sierra Leone and acceptable up to a point. Under Customary law, a husband has the right 'to administer' reasonable chastisement to his wife. According to this he can 'beat her up but not to the extent of wounding her. Currently, certain extremely serious incidents of domestic violence can in theory be prosecuted under general common law, under The Offences Against The Persons Act 1861. The police and other Law Enforcement Agencies until very recently when the Family Support Unit (FSU) was set up, they were reluctant to investigate and prosecute in domestic relationship.

In practice, domestic violence is surrounded by a culture of silence. Clause 1 provides a new and comprehensive definition of domestic violence which includes physical and sexual abuse; emotional, verbal and psychological abuse, economic abuse, intimidation, harassment and stalking, damage to property, entry into the complainant's residence without consent where they do not share address, and any confrontation, abusive or threatening

behaviour. The elderly and those living in public care institutions in family-type situations (e.g. old people's homes, boarding schools and mental hospitals and homes) are now included in the definition of those affected by domestic violence. The Bill will provide an array of tools for dealing with domestic violence; including mediation, punishment of the perpetrator through criminal law and protection of victim through civil law. Clause 7 (4) however makes it clear that family intervention/mediation shall not act as a bar to prosecution of domestic violence complaints. As long as the case does not involve aggravated assault, the Bill provides that the matter may be settled out of court, either at the complainant's request, or if the court is of the opinion that it can be amicably settled. However, if the court thinks the matter cannot be settled amicably and the complainant wants to prosecute, or if it is a matter of aggravated assault, the matter would go to court. It is important to note that this Bill is gender neutral and applies also to violence committed by a wife or woman against a husband or man.

The Sierra Leone Parliament enacted the Anti-Human Trafficking Act, 2005 (Act No. 7 of 2005) which defines trafficking in persons in key broad terms to encompass exploitation of women through prostitution. The Act provides for compensation to be paid to victims of trafficking (section 23).

### **Women in Decision –Making**

Sierra Leone has made modest gains in decision-making over the years. At the political front there are a total of eighteen (18) women in the current Parliament out of a total of one hundred and twenty four (124). The Deputy Speaker of Parliament is a woman and there are women heading important Parliamentary Committees in the current Parliament. The cabinet has a membership of twenty one (21) with three (03) women. There are also three (03) female deputy Ministers out of a total of ten (10). To improve on the representation of women in decision making level at the local level, the Local Government Act of 2004 provided the legal framework for Sierra Leone to return to decentralized government after three decades. In all, there are nineteen (19) Councils headed by Chairpersons and one is a female Chairperson. Four hundred and twenty five (425) Councilors were elected in the 2004 Local Government elections and only fifty two (52) are women. The Local Government Act also established Ward Development Committees in the respective Districts/Towns with a 50-50 gender balance in its composition. It is hoped that the 2007 Presidential and Parliamentary Elections and 2008 Local Government elections will provide more opportunities for women in decision making.

Women are also heading important Commissions and Departments in the country including:

- National Electoral Commission
- Immigration Department
- National Commission for War Affected Children (NaCWAC)
- Independent Media Commission
- Human Rights Commission
- Development Secretary
- Judiciary Department – 2 female Supreme Court Judges and more female judges than men in the High Court

It is also worthy to note that women are holding senior positions in the civil service, Police, Army etc. We have made gains but there is still a lot do.

### **Eliminating Gender Disparity in Education**

The Government of Sierra Leone considers education as everybody's right and this consideration has so far guided its education policies which are being implemented systematically and diligently. According to the 2004 Education Act Part III Section 3 (2) *“Every citizen of Sierra Leone shall have the right to basic education which accordingly shall be compulsory”*. The Girl Child education initiative in Sierra Leone has been inspired by the Sierra Leone Government's commitment and concern for the improvement and well-being of Sierra Leonean women. Government's intervention started in 1999 at the primary level by the payment of fees for pupils in classes 1-3. in the year 2000, free schooling was extended to classes 4-6 which led to rapid rise in enrolment.

To ensure retention at the secondary level, in the 2003/2004 academic year, government launched a Girl-Child support Education Programme. Through this programme, girls who are successful in the National Primary School Examination (NPSE) and enter the Junior Secondary School in the Northern and Eastern Regions of the country are provided with uniforms, teaching and learning materials and school fees which have the least number of female enrolment because of cultural and traditional barriers. The number of beneficiaries has soared and plans are on the way to extend the programme to the Western and Southern Province in September 2007.

Madam Chair, several other actions have been taken by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology to eliminate gender disparity and promote girls education including but not limited to the following:

- Establishment of a Gender Desk at the Ministry;
- Highlighting of the achievements of female candidates in national international examinations;

- Advocacy for the education of girls in meetings held at district and community level;
- Encouragement of women in tertiary education through the award of scholarships;
- Infusion of gender issues into curriculum;
- Construction of more schools in the rural areas so that girls have shorter distances to walk and feel safe and secured; and
- Provision of opportunities for girl mothers to go back to school and continue with tertiary education.

The above actions have yielded positive results for the girl child education in the country. Currently, more parents are in position to send their daughters to school; there has been significant increase in the number of girls accessing schooling in the Eastern and Northern Regions; there is an increase in the retention rates of girls and more girl mothers are re-admitted in educational institutions.

### **Women and Health**

- The Ministry of Health and Sanitation did a situation analysis to provide information for developing policies. The policy on the reproductive health has been developed and completed while the child health policy is ready to be sent to parliament for discussion.
- The ministry has mobilized resources to support the accelerated child survival and maternal mortality reduction, for instance World Bank has approved thirty million US Dollars, DFID has pledged Fifty Million Pound Sterling, Irish AID an initial pledge of One Million US Dollars. In addition to the above the Ministry of Health's traditional partners like UNICEF and WHO are also supporting the strategy.
- To retain its professional staff, the Ministry in collaboration with the Public service commission has presented to the office of the president a reviewed salary scale structure for Approval.
- Training centers for health personnel at district levels has been established to ensure that all health facilities have their full compliments of qualified staff.
- Cost recovery policy is to be reviewed to exempt children under five, lactating mothers and pregnant women.
- Management of drugs has been decentralized to the local councils. Currently from the supplier, the drugs go straight from the District Health Management team and the local councils.
- Village head committees are set up to monitor the running of the health centers and gives feedback to the district administration.
- Visco Virginal Fistula (VVF) is now treated at Princess Christian Maternal Hospital (PCMH) and Mercy ship Centres. A draft strategic plan has been developed to address the issue of VVF.

- For the reduction of mother to child transmission of HIV and AIDS, the Ministry provides niveraprin, it is free of charge and available in all centers within the country.
- To minimize stigmatization on HIV and AIDS, support has been given to civil society organizations, community leaders, religious leaders, local councils, paramount chiefs, and parliamentarians to engage in sensitization on HIV and AIDS.
- To address the problem of referral, the ministry and partners have provided motorized cats to ease the problem of transportation of women in prolonged labor from their communities to district health centers.
- A draft strategic plan has been developed to address the issue of VVF.
- Seventy three percent (73%) of pregnant women sleep under the anti mosquito permanent net in 2007 as compared to 2 percent in 2000 (Malaria Control Survey Report 2007).
- There is a massive tetanus campaign administered to women of child bearing age between 15 to 49 years and the package includes: Vitamin A, deworming etc.

### **Rural Women**

- There is a National policy and Action Plan on Integrated Rural Development developed in 1994 in collaboration with donors, civil society and traditional authorities. It incorporates gender perspectives in areas of increased participation of rural women in decision-making at home and in the community. The policy articulated support for rural women and the girl-child in health, economic development, access to credit facilities, employment etc.
- The re-introduction of Local Government and Decentralization programme is geared towards empowering local communities in order to respond to the needs of the localities and be part of the planning and implementation of projects/programmes.
- The Local Government Act 2004 created opportunities for a democratically elected local councils and Ward Committees in each ward with affirmative action of at least five women member representatives among the ten. The reason is to create opportunities for women to take up leadership functions and decision-making positions in their localities.
- The Decentralization Secretariat has also recruited a Gender Specialist to work with the Councils and partners in capacity building initiatives for these local council women.
- The girl-child education policy. The government provides free basic education to girls in the Northern and Eastern Regions of the country.

## Challenges

The Government is faced with serious challenges in implementing the provisions of the Convention, some of which include but not limited to the following:

- Sierra Leone still remains a male-dominated society.
- My Ministry receives less than one percent (1%) of the National Budget for the fiscal year which is grossly inadequate. Thus it depends largely on donor support.
- On the issue of technical staff in the Gender and Children's Affairs Division, the government in December 2003 recruited ten (10) professional staff including a Director, Deputy Director, 5 Programme Officers and 3 Regional Desk Officers. Currently the Division is understaffed by technical staff who should otherwise be represented at all Districts/Town Councils as Desk Officers.
- There is scarcity of resources and capacity. For instance, the limited technical capacity on use of gender analysis tools in both policy and programmatic interventions, particularly gender budgeting training for line Ministries. Sectoral budgets are not disaggregated to actually impact positively on women as everything is clustered in the name of programme/activity.
- Human Resource Development remains a very big challenge for the Ministry of Health and Sanitation.
- Cultural and traditional factors give priority to the boys for schooling to the disadvantage of the girls.
- Women still face prejudice in the work place for managerial positions.
- The low self-esteem of women themselves has not helped the situation.
- There are few women role models in the country, especially in the rural areas.
- Popularization the Convention to school children and making it part of the school curriculum.
- A lot of legal formulations have been made but the political will should be sustained and backed by resources.
- Our government signed the Optional protocol in 2000 but has not been ratified. However, Cabinet has approved sensitization of the populace before it can be presented in Parliament for ratification.
- The rural women even though in the majority remain disadvantaged in the areas of access to justice, education and health.

Lastly, Madam Chair, the report we have presented had the active involvement of the civil society, and no Sierra Leonean woman is a second class citizen either by policy or legislation, no matter their station or status.

Madam Chair, may I conclude by introducing the members of the Sierra Leone Delegation who are prepared to interact with you on the report.

1. H.E. Mr. Joe R. Pemagbi, Ambassador & Permanent Representative of Sierra Leone to the UN
2. Mr. Monfred Momoh Sesay, Ministry of Justice - member
3. Dr. Edward Brima Magbity, Ministry of Health and Sanitation - member
4. Ms. Isatu Kajue, Decentralization Secretariat – member
5. Ms. Pamela Williams, Ministry of Youths and Sports – member
6. Mr. Charles B. Vandi, Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children’s Affairs – member
7. Ms. Susan Sesay, Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children’s Affairs – member

And I am Memunatu M. Koroma, Deputy Minister of Social Welfare, Gender and Children’s Affairs and leader of Delegation.

I thank you.