

STATEMENT BY

HONOURABLE JOSEPH KOROMA, MINISTER FOR PRESIDENTIAL & PUBLIC
AFFAIRS

REPRESENTING **HIS EXCELLENCY DR, ERNEST BAI KOROMA** PRESIDENT
OF THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE AT THE WORLD SUMMIT ON FOOD
SECURITY

ROME, ITALY

16 – 18 NOVEMBER 2009

Mr. Chairman

Excellencies the Heads of State and Government

Heads of other Delegations

Distinguished Guests

It is indeed a great privilege and honor for me to represent, at this World Summit, His Excellency Dr. Ernest Bai Koroma, President of the Republic of Sierra Leone. The Summit coincides with an important national event with direct bearing on the subject before this august Summit.

Mr. Chairman,

Our Summit on World Food Security is taking place on the eve of consultations

between Sierra Leone and our Development Partners both traditional and new. The two-day meeting takes place in London starting tomorrow 18 November 2009 and will provide the Forum to launch our Government's Agenda for Change, which is the second generation of Sierra Leone's Poverty Reduction Strategy. Our Agenda for Change is a strategic choice to transform Sierra Leone from a post-conflict country to one of peace consolidation and sustainable development. But what is of greater importance and significance to this Summit is that the Agenda for Change resolutely flags Agriculture and Food Security as the number one priority followed by Energy, Infrastructure and Human Development.

Mr. Chairman

The reasons for making Agriculture and Food Security our Government's top most priority are perfectly clear: Sierra Leone is endowed with immense natural resources, but the decade-long civil war severely devastated the country's economy and infrastructure and caused large-scale human suffering. In 2008, Sierra Leone ranked 84 out of 88 countries in the Global Hunger Index and was last out of 179 countries in the Human Development Index.

But since 2002 when the war was officially declared over, the overall situation has significantly improved. The subsequent return of displaced rural populations to their homes has helped agricultural recovery, which is taking place across most of the country such that the agricultural sector currently contributes to over 45 percent of Gross Domestic Product and to about one-fourth of export earnings. Agriculture thus constitutes the pillar for the country's economic growth and poverty reduction efforts.

Last year, with the support of our Development Partners including FAO, we embarked on a Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development (CAADP) process that led to the formulation of a "National Sustainable Agriculture Development Plan (NSADP) to support our Agenda for Change. The Plan is geared towards making agriculture the 'engine of socio-economic growth and development'" through commercialization and the promotion of the private sector, including farmer-based organizations. We strongly believe that farmers and farmer-based organizations should be the bedrock of the private sector in agriculture because, given the enabling environment, they can make and even maximize profits from their investments in agriculture just as any private sector. This is why my Government has made a strong commitment to

link farmers, agro-processors and agro-dealers to markets through improved road networks, affordable transportation and post-harvest infrastructure such as drying, milling and storage facilities. Infrastructure development and the establishment of better policies to promote the private sector are therefore part of the Plan.

We greatly appreciate the financial support from our development partners although we are keenly aware that we ourselves need to invest in the sector. Therefore, beginning in 2010, agriculture will receive 9.9% of our national budget, which is almost in accordance with the commitment of African Heads of State and Government under the Maputo Declaration of 2003 to allocate 10% of Government budget to the sector.

We have made significant strides to increase food and export crop production but many people still lack the means to access sufficient nutritious food throughout the year and especially during the hunger or lean season, which usually coincides with the peak of the rainy season. This is due to low economic capacity, high food prices and lack of individual skills, including Rural Non-Farm Activities. Low literacy and poor access to radio and television also contribute to the slow pace of change from traditional ways

that keep people poor to modern and more productive ones. Modern methods need to be promoted to improve people's lives. Our people need to learn, for example, how to improve home diets, implement better cultivation practices, access finances and establish strong farmer-based organizations to help better bargain in the market and improve their lives.

Mr. Chairman,

It is evident that endemic poverty is a fundamental cause of global food insecurity. Therefore, the support we give to the achievement of food security in our respective countries cannot be left to increases in production alone. We also need to add value to our raw materials in order to generate more income for our rural population, create more employment followed by improvement in the nutritional status of our populations, including pregnant and lactating women, infants and disadvantaged segments in our societies.

I thank you.