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

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STATEMENT

by

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at the

First Biennial Meeting on the Implementation
of the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons

New York, 8th July 2003
Madam Chair:

The signs of success of this First Biennial Meeting of States began to emerge long before yesterday's opening session, thanks to your skilful leadership in the preparatory process over the past several months. For this, my delegation would like to commend you, Madam, and to assure you of our continued cooperation for the successful completion of our work.

As a country which over ten years endured the bitter experience of the devastating human, socio-economic and other consequences of the illicit trade and proliferation of small arms and light weapons, Sierra Leone had very high hopes for the outcome of the 2001 United Nations Conference. We saw the adoption of the Programme of Action as an important step forward in what has become a struggle to eradicate the scourge of these small but deadly weapons. In spite of the controversy over the issue of private ownership of weapons, and the transfer of small arms and light weapons to non-state actors, Sierra Leone was encouraged by the inclusion of two positive provisions in the Programme of Action. These are (a) the need for close international cooperation and assistance, and (b) specific procedures for effective follow-up to the 2001 Conference.

Madam Chair, let no one underestimate the international nature and dimension of the problem of the illicit trade and proliferation of small arms and light weapons. It is indeed a global phenomenon.

While my delegation maintains, in principle, that manufacturers and suppliers have a special responsibility for taking appropriate measures for combating and eradicating it, we subscribe to the affirmation in the Preamble of the Programme of Action that stresses the urgency of international efforts and cooperation aimed at combating this trade, simultaneously from both a supply and demand perspective. It is therefore not surprising that virtually all of the statements we have heard so far on national implementation of the Programme of Action contain elements of cooperation with other states and regional organizations.

Madam Chair, Sierra Leone is in the process of completing its national report, which reflects a number of measures it has taken, within its limited capabilities and resources, to implement the UN Programme of Action. Meanwhile, and for the purpose of this phase of the First Biennial Meeting, I
should like to highlight five components of our forthcoming national implementation report.

1. National Commission on Small Arms

We have already established a coordinating agency, an interim National Commission on Small Arms, to act as liaison between Sierra Leone and other states on matters relating to the implementation of the UN Programme of Action and the ECOWAS Moratorium on the Importation, Exportation, and Manufacture of Small Arms and Light Weapons. Comprising representatives of relevant government Ministries and agencies, as well as civil society, the Commission has already, among other things, prepared a proposal for a training-of-trainers workshop for personnel in security services and other stakeholders. It has also identified consultancy services to develop a comprehensive National Plan of Action. Incidentally, the regional Programme for Coordination and Assistance for Security and Development (PCASED), has provided some technical support for the secretariat of the Commission.

With the support of the Commission, a number of civil society organizations have formed an action network called the Sierra Leone Network on Small Arms (SLANSA). Affiliated with the West African Action Network on Small Arms (WAANSA), and the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA), the Sierra Leone Network was officially launched a month ago.

2. Legal and other measures for criminalizing possession of arms

The Firearms Licensing Bureau of the Sierra Leone Police has been reviewing the licensing procedures with a view to updating the Arms and Ammunition Ordinance. A draft of the updated legislation has been prepared and forwarded to the Ministry of Internal Affairs for subsequent consideration by the State Cabinet. The major objectives are for the Government to exercise effective management and control over the importation of small arms; establish direct, transparent and accountable mechanism for monitoring arms at ports of call, transit locations, and storage in both public and private warehouses; specialized training of customs officers in handling of weapon imports; and the establishment of stricter sanctions, penalties and fines for violation of the new legislation and administrative/custom procedures.
3. DDR and the Community Arms Collection and Destruction initiative

Madam Chair, Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) is not only an instrument of peace in countries emerging from conflict, such as Sierra Leone, it is also a means of combating the illicit trade and proliferation of small arms and light weapons. The experience of Sierra Leone in the area of DDR is well known. I should mention that the experience predates the 1999 Lome Peace Agreement and the 2001 UN Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons. Under the auspices of its National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilization and Re-integration (NCDDR), the Government succeeded in disarming over 3,000 ex-combatants between August 1996 and June 1999.

Five months after the adoption of the UN Programme of Action, and following the successful DDR programme under the Lome Peace Agreement, the Sierra Leone Government took the initiative of launching a Community Arms Collection and Destruction Programme (CACD).

Conducted by the Sierra Leone Police with the assistance of UNAMSIL, about 9494 assorted small arms and light weapons, including shot guns, pistols and revolvers, AK-47s, AK-58s, RPGs and SA rifles were collected and destroyed. Almost 35,000 rounds of ammunition, including hand grenades and RPG bombs were also collected and destroyed.

The Government, in cooperation with UNAMSIL, made every effort to ensure the safe keeping and maintenance of accurate records of the weapons collected in the exercise. The weapons were placed in three categories: Licensable, Licensable but not safe, and Non-licensable. UNAMSIL was given the responsibility of preparing the final inventory of all collected weapons – their make, manufacturer, country of manufacture and serial number.

4. Arms for development programme

Beyond the Sierra Leone Police Community Arms Collection and Destruction Programme, the Government with funding and collaboration from UNDP is engaged in the implementation of the preparatory assistance phase for a Community Arms Collection and Development Programme. This
involves the establishment of pilot projects at the Chiefdom level in which small arms and light weapons are successfully collected on a voluntary basis by community members in exchange for grants in aid for community development projects of their choice. These do not only throw light on the extent of small arms proliferation in the country, but also help to eliminate these weapons from the community, while meeting some of the development needs of the community. Hopefully, the four pilot projects will be replicated in the rest of the 145 Chiefdoms in the country.

5. Development and promotion of public awareness activities

The success of both Community Arms Collection and Destruction Programme by the Sierra Leone Police was due primarily to an effective public awareness and sensitization campaign. The following activities were undertaken and/or coordinated by the Police: Interagency consultation, radio and TV discussions and phone-in programmes, distribution of leaflets, handbills and posters related to the exercise, interviews with local tabloids, the holding of community workshops at the District level, and the production and airing of jingles over local FM radio stations.

Madam Chair, these are highlights of some of the measures we have taken to implement the wide-ranging provisions of the UN Programme of Action of the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in all Its Aspects. As I described them, and as our national report will indicate, what we have achieved so far was a combination of our own initiative and capability, buttressed by cooperation with other States, regional and international organizations, governmental and non-governmental, as well as civil society.

The successful implementation of the Programme of Action will depend largely on the quality and extent of international cooperation and assistance in facilitating the resolve of the international community to reduce the human suffering caused by the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects.

My delegation looks forward to the thematic discussions and general exchange of views on some of the issues pertinent to effective implementation of the Programme of Action.

Thank you Madam Chair.