

The role of Parliamentarians in Enhancing Arms Control and Human Security – Promoting Regional and International Instruments

Presentation by Honorable Ibrahim Sorie, Chair of the Parliamentary Network on SALW in the Parliament of Sierra Leone and Deputy Chair of the Legal and Judicial Affairs Committee of the ECOWAS Parliament.

Mr. Chairman

Distinguished VIPs

Conference Participants

Colleagues, Members of Parliament

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

It is indeed a great opportunity to be invited to this conference as a participant and panelist to present a paper on **The role of Parliamentarians in Enhancing Arms Control and Human Security – Promoting Regional and International Instruments.**

I would like to join earlier presenters in thanking both the organizers and sponsors of this regional conference for the very good initiative taken in organizing such a regional conference in the home where the initiative for small arms control was born. Bamako, Mali, which hosted in 1994 a peace conference during the Presidency of Alpha Oumar, in which the idea of arms control was initiated and proposed a moratorium on the import, export, manufacture, stockpile and transfer of small arms and their ammunition and related parts in the West African sub-region, which came into being in 1998. We were also told yesterday by the Chairman of the National Commission of Mali, that Mali established their Commission in 1996.

Thus, the venue chosen for this regional conference is appropriate and has given us the opportunity to discuss, compare and share our experiences with Mali's arms control and enhancing human security. Mali, also being the Headquarters of ECOSAP, has the expertise and experience to enrich the deliberations and outcome document of this conference on the way forward in enhancing arms control and Human Security in the ECOWAS sub-region.

Mr. Chairman, this paper examines small arms control and state building practices in Sierra Leone since the end of the 10 years conflict which devastated our country. In doing so, I will highlight the role of Parliament in ensuring peace, including the control of small arms and enhancing human security.

This paper also argues that the ten years civil war opened a window of opportunity, enabling us, as a country to continue dealing with security as a development issue through integrated peace and state building approaches with a security agenda that encompasses not only the overlapping agendas of peace, security and development in support of conflict prevention, conflict management and resolution, post conflict reconstruction and state building, but also human security with global

campaigns for effective control of the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, campaigns to ban anti-personnel landmines and the use of cluster bombs, the creation of the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the establishment of special tribunals such as the Special Court for Sierra Leone, Yugoslav and Rwanda/Arusha Tribunals to try war criminals in post-conflict states. Human Rights, justice, reconciliation, humanitarian protection, good governance and the rule of law have increasingly been accepted as important dimensions of enhancing human security.

1. How has Sierra Leone Parliament contributed to peace and state building, small arms control and enhancing human security?

Mr. Chairman, the answer to this can be found in the role the Sierra Leone Parliament played before, during and after the war period. Sierra Leone once known as the Province of Freedom and the Athens of West Africa had, at her independence in 1961, a vibrant democracy, the first country in Africa for an opposition party to win general elections and ushered in a change of government in 1967.

Despite what could be described as a glorious past, Sierra Leone has had her own fair share of the experience of going through state instability and collapse largely due to:

- Bad governance and economic mismanagement
- Series of military coups and counter coups
- One Party System of Government
- A protracted 10-years civil war
- Uncontrolled proliferation of small arms

Mr. Chairman, prolonged bad governance in Sierra Leone led to the outbreak of the civil war with small arms availability contributing to the atrocities and prolongation of the war and led to:

- The uncontrolled spread of small arms
- The emergence of Child Soldiers
- The use of Blood Diamonds to fuel and prolong the war
- Massive Human Rights violations
- Display of impunity
- Massive displacement of the population
- The production of refugees and internally displaced persons

Indeed we have, since independence in 1961, tried all systems of governance namely – multi party democracy, military rule, one part system of governance, military interregnum and today a return to multiparty representative democracy under a hybrid system of governance, combining both features of Westminster type and the Presidential System of governments.

As part of our nation building efforts, especially during the civil war, we have also tried several types of electoral systems:

- First Past-the Post (single member constituency) electoral system

- Proportional Representation Electoral System, by national list system and district block system.

We have travelled these paths with the Parliament as a significant and major player, all in the name of our national efforts at nation building. While Sierra Leone is recovering from a state of collapse, UN still classifies her as a fragile state. In this regard, Sierra Leone still enjoys UN's commitment to post-conflict and peace building program as expressed in the presence of UN Peace Building Office in Sierra Leone (UNIPSL).

Responsibility of Parliament in Peace Building and Enhancing Human Security.

Sierra Leone Parliament is the institution that is vested with the constitutional authority to make laws for peace, stability and good government of the State of Sierra Leone. Apart from its lawmaking function, it also has a representational and oversight role as provided for in our 1991 Constitution.

In Chapter II of our Constitution under the fundamental principles of state policy, Sierra Leone Parliament should:

- Legislate and work for the peace, stability and good governance of the State
- Work for unity of Sierra Leone and cater for the welfare of its people by harnessing our natural resources for the economic development of our country.

These are a few of the Fundamental Principles of State Policy which have guided and continue to guide our Parliament in its daily work, especially regarding Peace and State building, disarmament, demobilization, reintegration (DDR) and the control of the spread of small arms.

2. The Role of Parliament in the Security Sector Reform Process its engagement in small arms control and enhancing Human Security

Mr. Chairman, our experience during the war years clearly brought home to us that security is paramount. That without security there cannot be any meaningful development and that such a nation is doomed. Given this sense of awareness about the important role of security in our existence as a nation, the Sierra Leone Parliament supported the reforms initiated for the modernization of the security Sector that would engender confidence in our security forces and portray Sierra Leone as a serious and responsible nation that is stable, peaceful and prosperous and capable of meeting its own security needs.

Parliamentarians with the rest of society had witnessed the wide spread atrocities and massive violation of Human Rights, prolongation of the civil war due to easy availability of small arms, the use of small arms by criminal gangs to commit armed robberies, rapes, trafficking of drugs and persons, terrorizing our communities and the overall de-stabilization of the State propelled us as a nation to start the fight against the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. Hence, the starting point for parliamentarians was their support for a comprehensive disarmament, demomilization and reintegration program (DDR).

Mr. Chairman, Sierra Leone's Parliamentarians since the end of the war in 2002, have actively engaged in the fight against the illicit proliferation of small arms and light weapons. In the process,

parliamentarians have been able to forge valuable partnerships with government institutions, civil society and international organizations that work on small arms issues. Such partnerships are manifested today in our relationships with the Directorate of Small Arms and Light Weapons in the Office of National Security (ONS) at the Office of the President, the UNDP Small Arms Section and the UNDP Arms for Development Project (AFDP), our involvement with the DDR program, Sierra Leone Action Network on Small Arms (SLANSA) and the border strengthening projects in the Mano River Union, involving Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Cote D'Ivoire as an ECOSAP cluster of Ghana, Liberia and Sierra Leone in the fight against the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the sub-set of states in the ECOWAS sub-region.

Our engagement as a Parliament on small arms, under the tutelage and support of our international parliamentary networks on small arms and light weapons, namely PGA and the Parliamentary Forum on Small Arms and Light Weapons provided us with international links that facilitated our Parliament's participation, in most of the major national sub-regional, regional and global conferences on the control of small arms and enhancing Human Security.

Such engagements provided us with the requisite knowledge and exposure that linked our Parliament to the implementation of the 2001 United Nations Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons (UNPOA). Thus, the Sierra Leone Parliament participated in the UNPOA Review Conference held in New York, USA, in June 2006 and we hope to be in the next Review Conference in 2011. Sierra Leone Parliament was also represented at the Biannual Meeting of States (BMS) held in New York in the USA in June 2008, to assess the implementation of small arms control, focusing mainly on the thematic issues of the UNPOA.

Our international engagement in the fight against the spread of small arms has also linked our Parliament to the ECOWAS regional implementation of the UNPOA on small arms control. The Sierra Leone Parliament ratified both the ECOWAS 1998 Moratorium on the importation, exportation, manufacture and production of small arms and light weapons, and their related parts and ammunitions. In June 2007 our Parliament also ratified the ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms which effectively replaced the ECOWAS Moratorium of 1998 and its related protocols. Our involvement in the fight against the spread of small arms led us to engage with PECASSED in 1998-2006, the agency for delivering international assistance for the implementation of the Moratorium. Parliament since 2006 to present day is interacting and engaging ECOWAS small arms program (ECOSAP), the successor organization to PECASSED in implementing the ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms.

Our international links in the campaign against the spread of small arms gave the Sierra Leone Parliament the opportunity to engage with the Parliamentarians of the arms producing countries as well as the arms importing countries. Thus from 2002-2010 the Sierra Leone Parliament has participated in the regional conferences in Dakar, Senegal; Bamako, Mali; Accra, Ghana; Lomé, Togo; Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso; Tblisi, Georgia; Manila in the Philippines; Tokyo, Japan; Kenya and Uganda in the Great Lakes region and Montevideo in Uruguay.

Sierra Leone Parliament was host to the Directorate of Small Arms and Light Weapons when the latter organized a one day seminar for parliamentarians in December 9 2009 on the upcoming bills for the establishment of the Sierra Leone National Commission on Small Arms (SIENCSA) and the new fire arms legislation.

Preparations for an Inter-Agency Synergy Retreat in Malceni, funded by ECOSAP, stated for March 11-12 2010. The main objective in this Retreat is to create a platform for engagement with government ministries, parliament and other stakeholders, including our development partners.

3. Good Governance – The Role of Parliament and the Legislative Agenda

Mr. Chairman, Sierra Leone Parliament, as the repository of democratic values and practices as well as guardian of democratic values, believes that the greatest protection of the people of Sierra Leone, and the effective control of small arms and light weapons, comes from promoting and implementing good governance principles and practices. Protecting the people does not stop at protecting them from armed violations, it also involves protecting them from the ravages of undemocratic practices in our states. Our great interest as Parliamentarians are the reforms on Good Governance and Democracy, the promotion of Human Rights and the Rule of Law, Public Sector Reforms and the strengthening of state institutions, especially the Civil Service, fighting corruption and promoting accountability, poverty reduction, decentralization and the reintroduction of Local Councils and reform in the judiciary, including our local, traditional or customary justice systems.

Mr. Chairman, I can confirm that Sierra Leone Parliamentarians are painfully aware of the Threat Agenda to Human Security and have demonstrated ample support for sustainable peace building efforts and preventive diplomacy by championing:

- The casue for democratic governance and clean elections
- Respect for the Constitution
- The Rule of Law
- The Promotion of Human Rights
- Doing away with the politics of exclusion, protecting the rights of minorities
- Fostering participatory democracy and decentralization
- Reducing poverty and unemployment, especially youth unemployment by encouraging economic growth
- Fighting corruption
- Ensuring the prevalence of economic and social justice
- Providing effective oversight of the Executive, ensuring transparency and accountability
- Reducing homelessness, illiteracy and disease, which were some of the root causes of the conflict and that such commitment of continued support, remain a preoccupation of our Parliament
- Embarking on addressing root causes of conflict, including abject poverty, political repression, uneven distribution of resources and lack of socio-economic opportunities
- Ensuring the existence of free and independent media

Additionally, Parliament has been supporting Government in seeking development assistance and cooperation to address inequalities in the distribution of resources of opportunities, promotion of economic growth, better terms of trade and permitting greater access to external markets, encouraging necessary economic and structural reform; and technical assistance for strengthening regulatory instruments and institutions.

4. The need for Capacity Building for Parliamentarians

Mr. Chairman, to ensure that parliamentarians play important roles in peace building, including the fight against the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, such as mentioned before, the Sierra Leone Parliament is conscious of the need for a sustained capacity building programme for parliamentarians to fully discharge their expected roles. We have always advocated for a strong and vibrant parliament; a strengthened parliament that is well resourced and with committees that are effective tools for Peace and State Building.

Thus we call for the strengthening of Parliaments in Africa by providing the requisite infrastructure such as offices, staff, communication, resource centers and well equipped library with state of the art ICT.

The forging of partnerships between African Parliaments and their international networks, the civil society and other development partners in Peace and State Building process, including the fight against illicit spread of arms and enhancing Human Security cannot be overemphasized.

Once again, I thank the organizers and sponsors of this regional Conference on Small Arms and Light Weapons.

I thank you for your attention.