

**PRESIDENT ERNEST BAI KOROMA'S SPEECH ON THE LAUNCHING
OF THE REVISED NATIONAL ANTI-CORRUPTION STRATEGY AT
THE BRITISH COUNCIL HALL, FREETOWN- MONDAY 19TH MAY**

2008

Mr. Chairperson

Hon Vice President

My Lord Chief Justice

Cabinet Ministers

Hon Speaker of Parliament

Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps

His Worship the Acting Mayor of Freetown

Heads of International and Local Organizations

Our most cherished school going children from the 'Integrity Clubs' here present

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:

You may recall that few months ago in my inaugural speech to Parliament, I made a commitment to the people of Sierra Leone to fight against corruption. Today's launching of the revised National Anti-Corruption Strategy (NACS) is a clear manifestation of that commitment to eliminate this social menace in our society. In addition, my government has also demonstrated its commitment in approving the draft Anti-Corruption Bill which is a review to the present Anti-Corruption Act 2000 that seeks to give more powers to the ACC to carry out its work effectively.

One of the major concerns raised by many Sierra Leoneans about the independence of the Anti-Corruption Commission is the lack of prosecutorial powers. My administration also strongly holds that view and I therefore take this opportunity to announce to you that the commitment I made to the people of this country to separate the office of the Attorney General and Minister of Justice will soon be a thing of the past. Active steps have been taken by government to effect this change. My government policy is 'Zero Tolerance for Corruption' and we will not relent in making sure that corruption is minimized or eliminated in Sierra Leone.

The proposed amendments are comprehensive. They include giving the Commission legal personality; revising the role of the Advisory Board; creating new offences such

as illicit enrichment, abuse of office and misuse of office; providing adequate protection for whistleblowers and informers; making it compulsory for all public servants to declare their assets and making adequate provision for international cooperation in the fight against corruption. The proposed amendments will ensure that our national legislation is tandem with the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC), which Sierra Leone has ratified, and the African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption and Related Offences.

Chair, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, let me seize this opportunity to give notice publicly and unreservedly, particularly to my friends in the Fourth estate, that immediately following parliamentary approval of the amended Anti-Corruption legislation, I will declare my assets not only to fulfill my campaign pledge, but also to set an example for the rest of the members of my administration.

In the past the fight against corruption has been isolated and uncoordinated. This gave rise to a lot of duplication of efforts and little impact in the campaign. The National Anti-Corruption Strategy therefore is our commitment to orchestrate national efforts towards the fight against corruption and my government will remain committed to this struggle. Gone were the days when people think that the fight against corruption is the sole responsibility of the Anti-Corruption Commission. Today, the picture has changed; it is now the responsibility of every pillar of integrity within the state including our international partners to make the difference.

It needs no further telling that one of the reasons for our decade long war in this country is corruption which led to the widespread deprivation of our people. Indeed, where ever there is high levels of corruption, there will always be widespread deprivation and poverty. That is why we remain steadfast as a government in the Anti-Corruption crusade to give our people a better lease in life. This government will not tolerate any sacred cow, be they friends or relatives.

The costs of corruption are particularly high for countries in great need of inflows of productive foreign capital. Widespread corruption provides a poor environment that does not attract foreign investment and those investors likely to make long-term contributions to development. Corruption however attracts those investors seeking to make quick profits through dubious ventures. Similarly corruption in aid programmes reduces benefits for recipients and hampers continued funding. Abuse of regulatory powers and mis-procurement imposes further costs. International evidence indicates that countries with a higher incidence of corruption systematically have lower investment and growth rates and that public safety can be compromised by unsafe infrastructure.

Diversion of resources from their intended purposes distorts the formulation of public policy and the provision of services. This is as a result of bribe-extraction for delivery of services, poor quality of services and poor access to services. Petty corruption and payment of bribes have a particular impact on the poor. Public programmes such as access to land, health services and the legal system are negated if bribe paying determines the allocation of these priorities and services. It has the effect of benefiting a few at the expense of the many and reinforces existing social and economic inequalities. This in turn undermines the credibility of government and public institutions.

I am particularly delighted to note that this strategy is the work of a Technical Working Group drawn from amongst Sierra Leoneans in various sectors of society who selflessly took the challenge to review the erstwhile strategy for the good of our nation.

The drafting of the Strategy does not mark the end of our commitment. In fact it is the beginning of a long fight. The implementation of the Strategy is the biggest challenge in our hands and I entreat every member of my government to consider the implementation of this Strategy with all the seriousness it deserves. Government shall continue to seek funding to support the implementation process fully. We believe that it is only when we all come together to fight a common cause that we can win.

Finally, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to draw your attention to the fact that for far too long, our country has been classified as one of the poorest nations in the world and our income per capita is nothing to write home about. The situation is not getting better with the ever increasing prices of commodities and crude oil in the international market. For poor countries like ours, the suffering of our people can be further exacerbated by corruption. I therefore encourage every Sierra Leonean to join the fight against corruption for our own sake and for the sake of our children.

I now wish to formally launch the revised National Anti-Corruption Strategy 2008-2013.

I thank you for your attention.