

## STATEMENT BY SLAJ PRESIDENT PHILIP NEVILLE ON THE LAUNCHING OF THE ACC STRATEGIC PLAN

Your Excellency, Chairman of the Anti-Corruption Commission, Distinguished Personalities, Ladies and Gentlemen all protocols observed. I feel very delighted and honoured to be part of this body to comment on the subject of corruption which is the basis of the strategic document being launched today. Such a document has been long overdue.

To talk on any aspect of corruption is like telling a fairy-tale which is always there to be told – a never ending episode in human behaviour. This is because corruption is endemic in society and the world over. All that can meaningfully be done is to do what is humanly possible to reduce it and by doing so minimize its effect, on governmental as well as private institutions in this New country of ours.

I refer to this country Sierra Leone as New, because we are making a fresh start to rebuild the infrastructure, the body and minds of our people after a period of nearly eleven years of war that affected all shades of life in our country. During those periods, people survived by their wits, sharp practice and deception thereby making the ground ready and fallow to allow corruption to reign supreme.

Even after the end of the war, is it no surprise or wonder why corruption could have afflicted the most advanced citizens in our society be they politicians, ministers of government, business entrepreneurs, law officers, police etc. resulting thereby in the creation of the Anti-Corruption Commission.

Let us for one moment reflect on what corruption really means, and the evil effects it has on society and then try to see how best, to reduce or minimize it as one of the most serious threats to our new-found democracy in Sierra Leone.

But first let us distinguish between corruption and theft, the latter being another bugbear in society. When you deprive someone of his/her property, whether money, clothes or anything without his/her consent and with the honest belief that if he/she knew about it he/she would not make it available to you. This is theft as defined by law. In this 21st Century period of development and democracy in Sierra Leone, corruption mainly takes the form of bribery.

Bribery in politics, in business, in law and even in medicine and medical practice. In short, corruption is present and surviving everywhere because of the existence of humanity, who has created the avenue for this invisible disease to flourish. We must admit here, that wherever there is corruption and corrupt practices society will perish and the citizens would not enjoy the fruit of good governance.

There are many ways to combat corruption and one of it is by developing standards of honour, and living up to them. In that vein, in selecting candidates for public positions we must always endeavour to select honest people with a measure of integrity. They

must be individuals who are not easily persuaded to do what they could otherwise not have done but for a little bribe.

Bribery is the greatest single element in politics that upholds corruption. From today, let there be the growing tendency, a very healthy one to regard the person who offers the bribe as equally guilty with the person who accepts the bribe. This attitude of equal disgrace and punishment for both parties will go a long way to eliminate the ugliness of bribery and influence a reduction in corruption.

In the view of the fourth Estate, Your Excellency, Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen there are has to be two sides of corruption. It is like the man who seeks the woman on the street and the woman who gives herself up to him. Both of them are guilty of the same offence and must suffer the same consequences of their actions. The speeder or traffic law breaker who bribes the policeman should equally be held responsible for corruption in the police department and the break down of law and order.

But having said all these, it is possible, in a very dramatic way, for people to prevent corruption in politics as in other areas of life? People must develop firm principles and have the courage to live up to those principles, that is to say, to stand firmly by what they believe and avoid any temptation to be corrupt or to be corrupted. This is often a painfully difficult thing to do in real life but it can be achieved and maintained. It requires unrelenting discipline and unshaken faith in certain values.

We are here this morning to join in the launching of the Anti Corruption Commission Strategic Document prepared and being presented by the Commission in which, the commission has categorically outlined ways it intends to tackle this menace in our society. How well and how long it would take to begin to realize or to fully obtain the objectives set out so lucidly in this document will depend on our cooperation as a people in a society ready and willing to accept the new concept for change of direction, change of mind and change of behavioural pattern that would open the way for the resurgence of a new society built on a sound and solid foundation of honesty and trust in ourselves and our fellow men and women for Sierra Leone to forge ahead.

I thank you all for listening.