

## **Statement by the ACC Commissioner at the launch of the National Anti-Corruption Strategy (NACS)**

Like most African countries, Sierra Leone is faced with corruption in its public and private sectors that has assumed endemic extent. Corruption has been cited as one of the major causes of the 10 years of rebel war in Sierra Leone. The TRC concluded that pervasive corruption was a central factor that produced the dire conditions that made civil war inevitable. Sierra Leone remains in the grip of pervasive corruption, which, if not arrested, will sap the country of its life force and lay the grounds for further conflict.

The scourge has led to the deprivation of the vast majority of the people such that the country is considered as one of the poorest nations in the world in spite of its rich natural resources. This has been perpetuated and consolidated by undemocratic practices, bad political governance, bad economic governance and management and bad corporate governance. The public service itself has been characterised by a plethora of problems including poor staff motivation, cumbersome and outdated regulations and procedures, weak system of accountability and transparency and an unsystematic and uncoordinated human resource development all of which created a fertile ground for the seeds of corruption to grow and flourish.

The National Anti-Corruption Strategy (NACS) is an accentuation of government's efforts to provide a policy framework to address this menace in a more systematic and holistic way. To deal with corruption effectively, it is important to appreciate the historical, political, economic, institutional, judicial and legal causes of corruption mentioned in NACS. The prevalence of these factors gives rise to an operating atmosphere in the public and private sector that is amenable to corrupt practices.

Many of our compatriots believe that there is only one way to fight corruption – prosecution and penal action only. Public demand has always advocated an enforcement based approach. However, our experience and that of similar states in the world has revealed that that prosecution is not the only way. It must also include prevention and public education. Unless the causes of corruption are addressed, and access to information is made free and the society is empowered to stand up for its rights, plus the existence of political will to take unpalatable decisions, corruption will continue unabated. Unless a comprehensive approach is used, efforts to tackle corruption will fall short. The National Anti-corruption Strategy (NACS) proposes exactly this approach.

National Anti-Corruption Strategies (NACS) and action plans and matrices are strategic tools developed to mainstream and prioritise measures and reforms to fight corruption. For any strategy to succeed, it must be nationally owned, it must be based on a careful needs assessment, the process of developing it must have been participatory, must be driven by political will to ensure sustainability and must be measurable and inform the initiation of concrete reforms.

As regards national ownership, NACS has been tailored to our country's specific circumstances and local realities. We can confidently say that this strategy originated from within Sierra Leone. We hope this will increase the potential impact and ensure sustainability of anti-corruption

efforts. The external actors and players who provided support provided technical and financial support but the process itself was directed, owned and managed by Sierra Leoneans.

We can also say that our NACS is based on rigorous data, a sound understanding of the social, legal and institutional environment as well as a realistic assessment of the corruption-related problems. It addresses the underlying causes and not just the symptoms of the problem. Significantly, it builds on ongoing anticorruption, governance, justice sector, procurement and financial reforms. The targets set are realistic and the goals measurable.

However, NACS' success will depend largely on a number of factors. There must be the continued political will. Leadership that provides political backing for reform programs is crucial for anti-corruption measures to be implemented in an effective and sustainable manner. It is crucial that every sector of government and society is engaged in the fight against corruption and this can only be achieved with the right kind of leadership and political will. Secondly, there is a need for continued technical and financial capacity and resources involved at implementation stage of the strategy. While international support may be an important source of funding for anti-corruption initiatives, reform programmes in Sierra Leone should prioritise measures that can be implemented with capacity already available, in order to ensure sustainable reform. Thirdly, civil society's participation in the implementation and monitoring of the process and oversight is a crucial part of combating corruption.

NACS, just like the fight against corruption in general does not belong just to the ACC it belongs to everyone in Sierra Leone. It calls for changing the manner in which we run the affairs of the state with the view to reduce corruption in the society and laying the basis of good governance in the country as a whole. Sustainable development will be possible if and only if we manage to eradicate corruption.

In concluding, I must acknowledge the support of the President and Cabinet for their support and speed in considering and approving this strategy. Your consistent involvement in the process was both a source of assurance, encouragement and guidance.

The Chair and the members of the Technical Working Group also deserve the maximum credit for burning the midnight oil and completing the task most ably. The untiring efforts of many others within Sierra Leone and in the international community in particular in the Ministry of Finance, DFID, GTZ, UNOISIL and civil society must also be acknowledged and appreciated.

Finally, I am also indebted to the staff of the ACC. Their readiness to work for long odd hours, accepting challenging deadlines and learning quickly has been commendable. Perhaps the biggest attribute has been the team spirit, which they managed to infuse right from the beginning of the process.

19<sup>th</sup> May 2008