

**STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY ALHAJI DR. AHMAD TEJAN KABBAH,
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE ON THE OCCASION OF
THE LAUNCHING OF THE VISION 2025 DOCUMENT ON FRIDAY 12TH
DECEMBER 2003 AT THE LAGOONDA COMPLEX ABERDEEN, FREETOWN.**

Mr. Chairman
Members of the Diplomatic Community
Ladies and Gentlemen

Close to two years ago, I promised myself and challenged my Government that we should provide this nation with a vision. I took this bold step against the backdrop that even in the Bible it is said, "a nation without a vision perishes". At the launching ceremony in March 2001, there was apprehension over the formulation of a vision particularly when the conflict was still with us. The pessimists asked why engage in a long-term vision when your control over your tomorrow was so much unpredictable? But I was resolved that my Government with the support of our partners will bring the conflict to an end.

Having achieved peace after a decade-long destructive civil conflict, Sierra Leone indeed has enormous development challenges to grapple with over the next two decades or more. Thus, the production of a national vision at this point in time in our history is just appropriate. It is hoped that this vision will serve as the guidepost for our strategic planning efforts in designing a brighter and prosperous future for the country.

As I noted in my launching of the Vision 2025 exercise, "No vision can become real without action and responsibility". It is my fervent belief that as a nation we must have hope and confidence in building a better future. Our determination and responsibility to make this vision a reality must never wane.

I still believe in my fellow Sierra Leoneans and I know that the determination exists within us to move forward to make this vision a reality. Let me say at this ceremony how proud I am of all Sierra Leoneans, especially the grassroots and marginalized people of Sierra Leone who were hitherto excluded from the development process for their active participation in the visioning process. In striving to reach our national objectives no one should be held back, no one should be left behind. That is why the process has been designed to be participatory.

You have heard a summary of the document as presented by the Minister of Development and Economic Planning. I would like to repeat one salient commitment made by Sierra Leoneans during the visioning process, that having achieved peace after a devastating civil war, they have arrived at a consensus that never again would grievances be settled through conflict. Through the Vision 2025 process, we have learnt to engage each other through dialogue.

Through consensus we shall adopt a shared vision, which calls for a "United People, Progressive Nation, and Attractive Country". The vision underscores the point that Sierra Leoneans must see themselves as Africans with a strong community spirit. It indicates our desire to have a country that is open to the rest of the world for commerce, cultural and technological exchanges. We yearn for a vibrant society that is making progress on all fronts, while maintaining a sound and attractive environment. Let me therefore urge my compatriots to be committed and to strive for the attainment of the vision described in the document as Sweet Salone. We also call on our development partners to co-

operate with us so that we can dream this dream together and walk the walk together until we can achieve our dream.

In this same vein, as we strive to be a progressive and united people, the violent option should be buried with the past. Our best efforts must be directed at building our national institutions and capacities. In this respect the recent destruction of property at the National Stadium is most unacceptable. While we strive hard to ensure that such ugly incidents do not deter or discourage us from forging ahead, all efforts will be made to address those kinds of incidents in measured and appropriate ways.

Let me at this point pose the question, 'who are the real owners of the visioning process?' I have repeatedly stated that our youth should be the prime movers of Vision 2025 and I am repeating this again this morning. The youth must be given an important role to play in the implementation of this document. I have insisted that a programme be developed to charge the youth in the popularisation of this document. I am happy to note that this is on course with the active involvement of the Minister of Youth and Sports. The Minister of Education, Science and Technology is now encouraged to map out a strategy aimed at introducing aspects of this document into the national curriculum at all levels in the educational system.

After all, it is the youth and children of this country who will be there to see what the result of this process will turn out to be by 2025. You will agree with me that most of us might not live to see the end of this long journey of national transformation. In this regard, I heartily look forward to an extensive inter-generational dialogue between the youth and the older folks. There have been many clarion calls for a renaissance after the war. This document provides the opportunity for a real renaissance. Also it is a platform to sustain the process of empowering the youth to take control of the future leadership of the development process.

I recognise that resources to fund an action-plan for the realisation of the vision will certainly pose a challenge. In facing this challenge I will count on all our donor partners, NGOs, civil society groups and communities to play their part. On the part of government we will make the proper and prudent management of the economy and our resources imperative. We note that corruption must be tackled vigorously. The campaign against corruption must therefore be intensified and the concerted effort of all Sierra Leoneans is solicited. At the just concluded Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Abuja, Nigeria, I was charged with the responsibility of making the keynote speech on Combating Corruption. That responsibility was based on the realisation that my Government has already taken bold steps to tackle the problem of corruption by creating the Anti-Corruption Commission. Our experience in that regard is being sought by other members of the Commonwealth.

As a government, it is therefore a challenge to strive very hard in order not to disappoint our people by neglecting the collective aspirations that are enshrined in this document. We are yearning to be united once again after the horrendous experiences of the recent past; they are calling for a progressive nation to catch up with trends in other civilized nations of the world; they are concerned about the natural beauty and integrity of the environment, and hence, they are calling for the attractiveness of their country.

We must therefore make very good use of every opportunity available, both internally and externally, to embark on the rigorous journey of national

transformation towards the year 2025. Vision 2025 has provided a unique opportunity to rebuild and manage Sierra Leone over the short, medium to long term and this opportunity must not be wasted because we owe it to ourselves and to future generations.

In closing let me express my gratitude to all those Sierra Leoneans and other nationals who in one way or the other contributed to the preparation of our cherished national Vision Document. But before I conclude let me leave you with this: -

"In dreams begins responsibility," observed the great Irish Poet William Butler Yeats, for he understood that no lasting achievement is possible without a vision, and no dream can become real without action and responsibility.

A formidable writer on strategic thinking once wrote that "the years ahead should be a good time for dreamers and visionaries, for the barriers to innovation, the roadblocks to inspiration and imagination are being knocked down one by one. The years ahead will be best of all for those who learn to balance dreams and discipline. The future will belong to those who embrace the potential of wider opportunities but recognise the realities of more constrained resources and find new solutions that permit doing more with less. New solutions are essential because managing nations is being done under more pressure and with a greater international scope than ever before".

Mr. Chairman, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, it is now my pleasure to launch Sierra Leone Vision 2025 on the morning of this Friday 12th December 2003. May God Almighty guide us as we strive to achieve our national vision.

I thank you all.