

**Address By H.E. Dr. Ernest Bai Koroma
President of the Republic of Sierra Leone
On the Occasion of the Summit of the ECOWAS
Authority of Heads of State and Government**

Abuja, Nigeria. 23rd June, 2008.

Mr. Chairman,
Your Excellencies, Colleagues Heads of State and Governments,
Representatives and Delegations of Governments and International Organisations,
Mr. President ECOWAS Commission,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am delighted to be here in Abuja to attend a Summit of Heads of State and Governments of our Organisation and to bring you warm greetings from the Government and people of Sierra Leone. Let me first of all take this opportunity to thank the Government and people of Nigeria for the warm welcome accorded me and my delegation since our arrival here and to commend the President of the ECOWAS Commission and his staff for the excellent facilities that have been provided to make this summit a success.

Mr. Chairman, we are meeting here today at a critical stage in the development of our organization and at a time when our individual states and the sub-region are facing unprecedented challenges of a global nature. This has necessitated a transformation of our organization to make it more effective and responsive to these new challenges and I am pleased to note that some progress is being made in this direction. I believe Mr. President of the ECOWAS Commission and his staff deserves our commendation for their support to our efforts to transform our organization from one that has catered largely for states in the past, into one that now seeks, first and foremost, to meet the needs of our people.

As I mentioned earlier, our region and individual states are facing challenges of a global nature requiring solutions that go beyond the capacity of our individual states. This is the imperative for regional integration and partnership with the international community to meet these challenges.

However, our region is also richly endowed with natural resources whose exploitation for the good of our people will require regional cooperation as well as international partnership. The organizational transformation we are looking for is therefore one that will develop institutions that could work with national and international bodies to address global problems as well as the felt needs of our people. The transformation of the ECOWAS Secretariat into a Commission and the establishment of affiliate organs such as the ECOWAS Parliament, the Community Court and the ECOWAS Gender Development Centre are seen in the context of improving the capacity of our organization to deliver on this promise.

The task ahead is enormous but, with a strong desire to come together to promote the development of our sub-region and at the same time confront those problems that have kept our region behind, we will succeed. For our part as a new Government, we were quick to consult among our people and its leadership to determine the path we wanted to take on the road to development as soon as we assumed office. We are heartened to note that these priorities are in consonance with targets set for the achievement of the ECOWAS Vision 2020 in the last Summit of ECOWAS heads of state. These involve the sustenance of peace and security and the provision of an enabling environment for economic growth.

Mr. Chairman, as a country that suffered so much devastation from violent conflict, we want to commend the ECOWAS Commission and member states for their sustained efforts at consolidating the peace in post-conflict countries as well as preventing the outbreak of new conflicts in other areas in the sub-region.

With regard to the establishment of an ECOWAS Standby Force, the Commission decided to have a Logistic Depot located in Sierra Leone and the Government of Sierra Leone has offered Hastings Airport in the Western Area of Sierra Leone for that purpose. In connection with the January 2008 decision for the Commission to seek ways to meet the stipulated criteria required for the depot to remain in Sierra Leone, I wish to inform colleagues that the Commission and the Government of Sierra Leone have conducted an assessment of the facility and that my Government is determined to work closely with the Commission to get the depot off the ground as early as possible.

Mr. Chairman, in spite of the progress that has been made on the peace and security front, we cannot reduce poverty and develop our countries unless we grow. Growth requires that we overcome all of those constraints that have held our countries down -violent conflicts, bad governance, lack of infrastructure, poor water resource management and a weak private sector. We must encourage partnerships between the public and private sectors so that we can unleash the capacity of our people to develop enterprises and generate employment. Growth will also require massive investment in infrastructure ranging from the building of rural roads, public highways, railways and large power projects to the development of information and communications technology. It is this kind of development that can ensure the transformation of our organization from an "ECOWAS of States to an ECOWAS of Peoples".

Mr. Chairman, an assessment of the performance of our organization with reference to the achievement of its goals, will indicate that some progress has been made in this direction. The gains that have been made so far are however now in danger of being eroded by the looming global crisis of escalating cost of fuel and essential commodities, particularly rice. Today, hardly a day passes without a demonstration in some part of the world calling for some action to be taken to curb the rise in the cost of fuel and essential commodities. We should commend the Commission for convening an "Extra-Ordinary Meeting of the ECOWAS Ministers of Finance, Agriculture and Trade on the Price Hike on Food" to consider the issue of the Food Crisis. The "Regional Offensive for food production and the eradication of hunger" adopted at the meeting needs our full support and the harmonization of this offensive with the programmes of our individual member states.

In the Interim Report of the President of the ECOWAS Commission, there is an appeal for Member States to show more commitment to the implementation of Community programmes through the domestication of Commission protocols and policies and the integration of Community programmes into national development plans. Colleagues may recall that Economic groupings that have been successful have been able to do so on the basis of a number of factors such as a strong, sustained political will, a strong institutional set up depending largely on "own resources" and effective coordination of macro-economic policies. We on our part and in spite of our meager resources, have been able to ratify all of the protocols of the ECOWAS Commission including even those which entail a loss of revenue from import duties and the Free Movement of Goods and People, the Right of Residence, the Community Levy and the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme. We hope that all the member states of the Commission will do the same. For only in that way can we ensure that the objectives of our organization will be fully achieved.

I thank you for your attention.