

**Address by His Excellency Dr. Ernest Bai Koroma, President of the Republic of Sierra Leone
at the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) IV Yokohama,
Japan, May 28th, 2008.**

Mr. Chairman, Your Majesty, Excellencies and colleagues, distinguished delegates,

I would like to begin by expressing, on my personal behalf and that of the people of Sierra Leone, our sincere gratitude to the Government and people of Japan for the exceptional hospitality accorded us since our arrival and for hosting this TICAD IV summit.

Mr. Chairman, Japan's initiative to organize this high-level policy dialogue to discuss the threats, opportunities and challenges facing African governments in addressing poverty and human suffering and, to mobilize support for African development initiatives is most welcome.

This is a clear manifestation of Japan's commitment to promoting African security and sustainable development in the spirit of this TICAD conference. Excellencies, Colleagues and Distinguished Delegates, Peace and development are mutually interrelated and reinforcing.

There is a strong link between the two - no development takes place in the absence of peace and stability. Experience and extensive studies have proven that conflict thrives at the instance of poverty, social, political and economic exclusiveness.

Many of Africa's conflicts, including ours in Sierra Leone, were largely ignited by the post-colonial legacies of arbitrary boundaries, authoritarian governance, scarcity of land and water resources, and centralization of political and economic power and politicization of ethnicity. When conflicts end, it is incumbent upon all actors, local and international, to engage in actions that will help to consolidate the peace and prevent a recurrence of violence.

These involve measures such as the disarmament, demobilization and re-insertion of ex-combatants, the reintegration and rehabilitation of refugees and internally displaced persons. It must also involve the strengthening of national democratic institutions, restoration of law and order, the promotion of human rights and the provision of basic social facilities.

A review of our experience reveals that implementation of such actions and interventions require a considerable outlay of human, material and financial resources. Though responsibility for peace and stability lies primarily with individual member states, the role of the international community in conflict transformation is critical for setting the stage for sustainable peace and development.

Mr. Chairman, Your Majesty, Excellencies, distinguished delegates It is with respect to the above issues and in pursuit of our national post-war priority of consolidating our hard-won peace and establishing sustainable governance that we embarked on a number of significant measures since the civil conflict formally ended in 2002.

The government of Sierra Leone in collaboration with the International Community embarked on a broad programme of governance focusing on rebuilding a democratic political system, improving the legal system and combating corruption. We have also emphasized the promotion of human rights, enhancing grassroots participation in national development and the reduction of poverty. Africa is making considerable efforts to reverse the image of gloom and doom and to bring about positive change on the continent. Some successes are being achieved in addressing the causes of conflict.

However, poverty, endemic diseases, the current global market realities and the unsustainable debt burden on many African countries continue to mar efforts in improving the quality of life of our populations and the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These further compromise the circumstance of fragile states and countries emerging from conflict.

In such circumstances, rebuilding basic infrastructural facilities and empowering local communities through capacity building can only be accomplished through partnership and sustained engagement of the international community.

Though secure in our conviction that we should not be entirely donor dependent, we remain highly appreciative of the assistance received from our development partners.

In Sierra Leone for example, TICAD-sponsored projects have included support to peace consolidation, youth development and community empowerment, model projects in agriculture, education, water and sanitation as well as training and development of agricultural experts. We have received support from the Government of Japan for various activities including elections, improvement in electric power and rural health.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, helpful as these interventions have been, they are not sufficient by themselves to lift our compatriots out of poverty. We need increased investment in infrastructure, agriculture, mineral resources and research; and the scientific capability of our citizens needs to be raised to appreciable levels.

There is no doubt that the returns on such investments in these sectors will attract further financial inflows and foreign direct investments. We therefore hope that our Japanese partners will embrace the challenge and help in developing economic infrastructure for sustainable development.

Excellencies, Building and consolidating peace and the transformation to growth require a considerable level of political will from the stakeholders, such as the countries themselves and the international community to undertake and support reforms for good governance and democracy. In all of these, the role of women and the civil society as drivers of change is crucial in this process.

Mr. Chairman, It cannot be denied that with the support of the international community we in Sierra Leone have made significant progress in our post-conflict recovery. Key among our achievements are two peaceful parliamentary and presidential elections and one local government election since the end of war in 2002.

We have also undertaken the reform and restructuring of certain institutions such as, the Police, the Armed Forces, the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), and other state organs supporting the democratic process, good governance and the rule of law. We are also reviewing our constitution in line with the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

All of these are a practical manifestation of our determination to make Sierra Leone a model for war-to-peace transformation in the West African sub-region and beyond. Mr. Chairman, Despite these achievements, there are still numerous challenges owing mainly to the lack of resources needed to implement the required reforms.

The low level of development and the capacity of our citizens to take advantage of economic opportunities also continue to hamper the development of the private sector in order to create employment opportunities for the country's youthful population. Indeed, the pace of attainment of our development aspirations has yet to match the strides we have achieved in our political maturity.

Mr. Chairman, your Majesty and Excellencies, the recent increase in food prices have resulted in the leaders in Africa taking another look at the unique opportunities the soil and climate conditions present.

If there is one region in the world that can contribute towards agricultural development and feeding the world, that region is Africa and this presents a challenge for the nations with funds to work together with the nations with the natural resources for the mutual benefit of all.

I believe Mr. Chairman that this is what the cooperation between Japan and Africa is all about. In concluding therefore, we expect that this conference would be able to come up with a road map on how to approach issues in Africa, adopt the declaration and implement the follow-up mechanisms agreed upon. Let us take the challenge!

I thank you all.