

Sierra Leone

Statement by HIS EXCELLENCY PROFESSOR Septimus M. Kaikai, Honourable Minister of Information and Broadcasting on the occasion of the World Summit on Information Society at Geneva, Switzerland on Thursday 11 December 2003.

Mr. Chairman, Your Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Please permit me to express my profound thanks and gratitude to you, Mr. President, for extending the invitation to us to participate in this important conference, the impact of which will influence the developmental aspirations of the global community for years. The facilities you have made available to us speak volumes about Swiss hospitality, efficiency and effectiveness.

A little over 12 years ago, my country Sierra Leone was involved in a devastating war. It was a war that almost saw the virtual collapse of our country as a nation state. For many years before that time, very little was known about us and what little was known was negative. Our educational system nearly disappeared, agricultural production was at a virtual standstill, Health care facilities were non-functional and our road infrastructure was reduced to a death trap.

For us in Sierra Leone, the major issue of connectivity, that is connecting people, ideas, vision, aspirations, problems and obstacles became unreachable. However, our near relegation to the wilderness of non-existence suddenly changed because of the focus of the information society on us. Information is indeed power.

All of a sudden the print and electronic media recognised the human rights violations, the abuse of women and children and the malicious destruction of life and property as an affront to the civilised world.

Access to information brought our situation to the attention of the global community. With the collective effort of the political leadership in our country led by His Excellency Alhaji Dr Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, the United Nations, the United Kingdom, United States of America, Federal Republic of Nigeria, China, Guinea, our donor partners and friends and other international organisations like the World Bank, I.M.F., African Development Bank, European Union, Islamic Development Bank, ECOWAS and others, we had the largest peace-keeping force ever assembled to help stabilise our situation.

I am happy to report that when our President Alhaji Dr Ahmad Tejan Kabbah officially declared an end to the war approximately two years ago, we experienced the renaissance of a new Sierra Leone with a renewed energy, enthusiasm, vision, vitality and focus to be part of this acknowledge information society.

Our new Sierra Leone has been recently described as an “Island of Stability”. The Leadership of our new Sierra Leone has also been applauded for its steadfast political maturity, sound macroeconomic policies and prudent fiscal and monetary policies.

Mr. Chairman, Your Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, our new Sierra Leone is now significantly poised to maintain a growth rate of 6.5 per cent while containing inflation to around 6.0 per cent. We are in the final stages of completing our investment code, which will be competitive and friendly.

Mr. Chairman, Your Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, you can help us maintain the momentum toward sustainable development by helping us become full partners of the Information Society. With the accelerated pace of information technology even one-year old equipments suddenly become obsolete. If and when you become confronted with such a situation, please keep us in mind. Our schools and colleges, radio and television stations can use some of your year old equipments which will help us increase the accessibility of information technology equipments to our citizens.

With the pronouncement by President Kabbah not to have any Sierra Leonean go to bed hungry by the year 2007, our farmers will be in a much better position to achieve that goal if they are provided with agricultural information technology assistance. The Senegalese farmers are beneficiaries of this information technology and the results are positive.

I am convinced that the combination of a conducive land environment with the application of the appropriate information technology will increase the farmers productivity, adequately feed the five million Sierra Leonean population and export the surplus to earn the much needed foreign exchange required for development. It is a challenge we can collectively meet.

Your generosity will be greatly appreciated. Finally, let me take this opportunity on behalf of my President, Alhaji Dr Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, the Government and People of the Republic of Sierra Leone to extend my profound thanks and gratitude for being there for us when we needed you the most.

I hope and pray that, that symbiotic relationship will continue as we all seek to maximise the benefits of the Information Society.

I thank you for listening.