



ECOWAS PARLIAMENT



SIERRA LEONE COUNTRY REPORT

MEMBERS OF THE SIERRA LEONE DELEGATION

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Introduction

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, I bring to you warm felicitations from the Government and people of Sierra Leone. Let me at this stage on behalf of my Delegation thank the Speaker and Bureau Members for choosing our Country to host the first Extra-Ordinary Session for 2021. Indeed, it was a great honour and a life-changing experience for our country to host such an important occasion.

This Report will cover the following thematic areas:

- **Political Situation**
- **Security Situation**
- **Human Rights Situation**
- **Economic and Social Situation**
- **Environment and Climate Change**
- **Status of Ratification and Implementation of the Community Texts and Protocols**
- **Status of Implementation of Community Programs and Projects**
- **Performance on the Macroeconomic Convergence Criteria**

A. POLITICAL SITUATION

Sierra Leone has continued to enjoy peace and political stability. The increased political tension and violence which followed the 2018 general and presidential elections led to the National Dialogue on the Consolidation of Peace and National Cohesion Conference and a parliamentary leadership retreat which gave birth to the Bo Declaration, all in 2019. These two initiatives and many others have helped to promote unity and national cohesion, and a culture of tolerance and inclusion in political discourse. The National Dialogue, known as Bintumani III, gave a clear and overwhelming mandate to the Government to establish an Independent Commission for Peace and National Cohesion. The bill proposing the establishment of the Commission was passed by Parliament in December 2020.

The Commissions of Inquiry (COI) which were set up to investigate public officials of the previous administration presented their reports to His Excellency President Julius Maada Bio in September 2020. Government released a White Paper and assured citizens of its commitment to the full implementation of the recommendations of the COI. With the expiration of the deadline for appeals, Government is set to implement the recommendations of the COI as documented in the White Paper. Government has constituted a Technical Team to review the White Paper on the Justice Cowan Constitutional Review Committee. Key provisions that strengthen our democracy and protect the human and constitutional rights of citizens will be duly considered.

The Midterm Census Order, 2021 has been passed into law. The Midterm Population and Housing Census will show progress made and challenges to be addressed in the overall development of the country since the last census in 2015. The exercise will also help the country to update base maps and delineate enumeration areas ahead of the 2023 elections.

On 6th May, 2021 the National Electoral Commission (NEC) officially launched its 2020-2024 Strategic Plan which is geared towards supporting transparent and credible elections within international best practices. NEC has expressed its commitment to reviewing candidates' nomination fees and the 12-month timeline for the resignation of public officers who wish to participate in parliamentary and presidential elections.

B. SECURITY SITUATION

The Sierra Leone Delegation observes with deep concern the increased instances of incursions by Guinean troops in the Yenga area, which is the undisputed sovereign territory of Sierra Leone. The issue remains unresolved and our Guinean counterparts have continued to encroach on Sierra Leone's land and sea borders. During the 58th Extraordinary Session of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government, in January this year, President Bio urged the regional body to urgently create a special committee to look into the unresolved Yenga matter between the two countries through diplomatic engagements with a view to finding a lasting solution to this long-standing dispute.

According to a UNDP assessment, COVID-19 pandemic has led to an increase in food insecurity from 53.4 per cent in August 2019 to 63 per cent in June 2021. The COVID-19 restrictions triggered violent incidents especially between the youth and security institutions. There were reports of increased armed robbery and sexual violence during curfew hours. Armed security night patrols and other measures have helped to put the situation under control.

In order to address the increasing rate of high-tech crimes, including fraud, the use of social media to incite violence and to transmit hate, insulting and defamatory messages, Government introduced the bill entitled the Cyber Crime Act, 2020 to tackle crime and boost safety and security on digital platforms. The bill is currently at the Committee Stage.

C. HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION

In March 2020, President Bio declared a 12-month State of Emergency due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Parliament approved the measure which granted the President broad powers to maintain peace and order including mandatory restrictions on movements. The State of Emergency declaration included restrictions on assembly as it banned meetings of more than 100 persons. In few cases, police used excessive force when dealing with demonstrators and used public order laws to deny requests for protests and demonstrations.

More than 400 former Liberian refugees remain without legal status in the country. Their refugee status expired in 2017 when they became "residual caseloads" under UNHCR protection. They refused repatriation and integration and demanded resettlement in a third country. UNHCR denied their resettlement citing the former refugees' contradictory statements. The group applied for local national identification documents but authorities are yet to act on the applications.

Sexual assault of children has been on the increase. In many cases of sexual assault of children, parents accept payments instead of taking the perpetrators to court due to the difficulties

involved in dealing with the justice system, fear of public shame and economic hardship. In March 2020, Government announced the immediate end to a ban on visibly pregnant girls and teenage mothers attending school. The 10-year old ban was seen as divisive and discriminatory. The change in policy has resulted in more pregnant girls attending school. In 2020, the Ministry of Education reported that approximately 1572 pregnant girls took the West African Examination Council Examinations (WASSCE) and the Basic Education Certificate Examinations (BECE).

The common cases reported to the Police and the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL) include rape, sexual exploitation of children, arrests made without warrants, congested detention facilities, lengthy pretrial detention, denial of fair public trial etc. In a recent address to Parliament, President Bio expressed his government's commitment to decongesting prisons and investing more resources in the safe, secure and human custody of inmates, and has pledged to cause the legislation of the abolition of the death penalty, which he considers cruel, inhumane, and unusual.

To guarantee press freedom, the Government worked with Parliament and other stakeholders to repeal the 55-year old seditious libel section of the Public Order Act, 1965 that criminalized free speech. This demonstrated the willingness of Government to promote the freedom of press in the country

D. ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL SITUATION

Before COVID-19, economic growth had recovered, and was increasing at an impressive rate. Inflation had eased down 4 percentage points to 13.9 percent by the end of December 2019, with a projected return to single digits by 2021.

As part of efforts to contain the spread of the disease, Government, like other nations, adopted several containment measures including suspension of flights, closure of borders, restrictions on inter-district movements, partial lockdowns, night curfews, a ban on gatherings, closure of schools, mosques and churches. These measures have unintended adverse consequences on livelihoods and activities in key sectors thereby weakening growth prospects in 2020.

Like all other countries globally, Sierra Leone's economy has been adversely affected by the impact of the pandemic. Notwithstanding, Sierra Leone has recorded remarkable strides in sustaining economic stability despite the current worldwide COVID-19 pandemic. The Bank of Sierra Leone's astute monetary policy reduced inflation to single digits for the first time in six years, stabilized the exchange rate of the Leone against regional and major world currencies, and significantly increased international reserves to unprecedented levels.

The Ministry of Finance continues to implement sound economic policies and public financial management reforms that are geared towards maintaining a stable economy and addressing the financial and socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic.

Government is supporting the production, importation, and distribution of essential commodities with a Le 500 billion Special Credit Facility. Taxes due on the importation of essential commodities, especially for rice, and other health supplies have been deferred by the National Revenue Authority. Government is implementing the National Micro-Finance Programme

(MUNAFU Fund), which provides finance to targeted Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs). Government also provided cash transfers to over a hundred thousand poor and vulnerable families and informal sector workers.

E. ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Government is reviewing and updating various legislations, promoting sustainable environmental protection including national reforestation and timber management initiatives, managing and conserving wetlands, and furthering community-based environmental education.

Sierra Leone faces multiple risks from climate change that threaten key economic sectors and increase the potential for wider environmental degradation. High dependence on agriculture, and natural resources, coupled with high rates of poverty, unemployment and environmental degradation expose Sierra Leone to climate change impacts. Climate projections in Sierra Leone include increases in temperature, more extreme weather, including more intense precipitation, and rise in sea levels.

F. STATUS OF RATIFICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF COMMUNITY TEXTS AND PROTOCOLS

Sierra Leone has ratified 42 protocols and conventions.

The Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons is critical in facilitating intra-regional mobility. A number of gaps, obstacles and challenges at both the intra-regional and national levels have militated against the effective implementation of the free movement of persons. The major challenge is in the Protocol reserving Member States the right to refuse admission into their territory Community citizens deemed inadmissible under their domestic laws. This provision undermines the purpose of the Protocol through the use of restrictive domestic laws. Another challenge to the implementation of the Free Movement Protocol has been the difficulty of establishing the nationality of travellers who do not carry ID Cards or passports

To meet her obligations under the Community Levy Protocol, Sierra Leone has paid the sum of Le 14,903,320,000 for the year 2020 equivalent to US\$ 1,500,000 and has arrears totaling Le 46,509,446,719.87.

G. STATUS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF COMMUNITY PROGRAMS AND PROJECT

The foundation of the Phases 2 and 3 of the ECOWAS Logistics Depot was laid in Lungi, Sierra Leone, on 8th February, 2020. The depot will provide support to ECOWAS peace keeping operations to effectively combat violent extremism and terrorist activities in West African sub-region.

Parliament has approved a USD 32 million loan agreement with ECOWAS for the establishment of the University of Science and Technology in Kono District. The project would cost USD 34 million. The ECOWAS Bank for Investment and Development would provide the USD 32 million, while the Government of Sierra Leone would counterpart fund the remaining USD 2

million. The specialist university would admit 200 students every year and would train people in the sciences, gemology and information technology.

H. PERFORMANCE ON THE MACROECONOMIC CONVERGENCE CRITERIA

The country's position on the primary convergence criteria deteriorated as the country satisfied only one of the four primary criteria during the review period, namely: gross reserves as months of import cover. The country missed out on average annual inflation, the budget deficit including grants to GDP and the central bank financing of fiscal deficit as a percentage of previous year's tax revenue criteria. In terms of the secondary convergence criteria, the country met one secondary criterion namely: the nominal exchange rate variation criteria but missed the public debt-to-GDP ratio criterion.

Primary Criteria

Table A: Status of Rationalized ECOWAS Primary Convergence Criteria, 2014 –2020

Economic Indicators	Target	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Inflation(annual Average)	Single digit	7.2	8.1	11	18.3	16	14.8	13.4
Budget Deficit incl. grants/GDP(%)	≤ 3%	3.9	4.9	5	9	5.3	3.2	5.5
Central Bank Financing of Fiscal Deficit as % of previous year's tax revenue	≤ 10%	17.9	10.3	30.9	18.9	18.8	0.6	20.3
Gross External Reserves (in months of import cover)	≥ 3 months	3	5	3.8	3.5	3.8	3.3	5.1
Number of criteria satisfied		3	3	1	1	1	2	1

Table B: Status of Rationalized ECOWAS Secondary Convergence Criteria, 2014 –2020

Status of Rationalized ECOWAS Secondary Convergence, 2014 – 2020								
Economic Indicators	Target	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Nominal Exchange Rate Variation	± 10	-13.5	-13.4	-29.1	4.2	5.2	13.6	9.1
Public Debt/GDP (%)	≤ 70%	35.9	69.3	55.1	59.1	59.1	71.5	76.8
Number of criteria satisfied		1	1	1	2	2	0	1

Source: Research Dept., Bank of Sierra Leone

Thank You!

Merci!

Obrigado!