

## **Statement by the Acting Coordinator Justice Sector Coordination Office, Mr. Shahid M. Korjie on “SDG Awareness Raising and Training” in Sierra Leone**

**At the African Regional Workshop on Effective Governance for Sustainable Development: Putting Principles into Practice. November 1, 2019 – Pretoria, South Africa.**

Madam Moderator, Eminent Panellists, Distinguished Delegates, good morning. I bring you greetings from Sierra Leone.

I am honoured and delighted to participate in this Workshop and to make a statement on how the *SDG awareness-raising and training fare in crisis and post-conflict context, using my country Sierra Leone as a case study*. However, before I proceed, kindly allow me to register my gratitude to the organisers for the thought to invite me, and for the warm hospitality I have received since my arrival in this beautiful country, South Africa.

As the Coordinator of the Justice Sector Coordination Office (JSCO) in the Ministry of Justice of my country, Sierra Leone, I am delighted to be part of this deliberations and I believe we have good examples we could share on actions we have taken to raise SDG awareness and training, since the SDGs were formally adopted in 2015.

Madam Moderator, distinguished Delegates, given the limited time I have, my intervention will specifically focus on efforts made to raise public awareness, and trainings on SDG 16; which aim is to *“Promote peaceful, just and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels”*.

However, it is worthy to note that Sierra Leone has remained steadfast in its commitment to deliver Agenda 2030 and Agenda 2063. This commitment is based on the strong conviction that the country’s socioeconomic transformation will be accelerated if we focus on effective implementation of the SDGs. We have therefore been highly involved in raising awareness on the goals at both national and international levels, and also providing trainings for all stakeholders involved in their implementation.

This year, the government’s current vision for national transformation and development has been articulated in the country’s Medium-Term National Development Plan (2019-2023) entitled “Education for Development”, a plan that is highly aligned with the SDGs, Agenda 2063, and the New Deal Peace-building and State building goals.

Madam Moderator, distinguished Delegates, since the end of the 11-year civil war in 2002, Sierra Leone has made significant strides in strengthening its justice and security sectors, through democratising and effectively providing the services required by its citizens.

In the same year, the country established the *Peace and Conflict Studies Programme at the University of Sierra Leone based on the need to train security and justice sector actors alongside ex-combatants on the post-war reconstruction and peacebuilding. Most of the modules taught there are on Security Sector Reform, Justice Sector Reform, Transitional Justice, Institution Building in Post-Conflict Settings and Gender and Development.* The establishment of this programme helped raise awareness and provided training on initially the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) but now the SDGs, especially Goal 16, which has benefitted thousands of policy makers and practitioners – judges, lawyers, academics etc. in shifting to a people-centered and human security-based approach to security and justice governance in Sierra Leone.

Further to this, Madam Moderator, distinguished Delegates, *Peace Clubs* were established by the government and its partners in schools, targeting children from an early age on the need to promote peaceful coexistence in their schools and communities. The Peace Clubs are initiatives promoted by government to inculcate a culture of peace that would also contribute to peace, security and stability in the country. **As the UNESCO mantra says, “Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed.”**

Implementation of Goal 16 has been done largely through **a sector-wide approach coordinated by my office, the Justice Sector Coordination Office** in the Ministry of Justice, with other principal state actors such as the Judiciary, the Anti-Corruption Commission, the Law Reform Commission, the Legal Aid Board, the Financial Intelligence Unit (16 state actors) etc all working together towards achieving the goal (12 targets and 16 indicators).

SDG 16 has been supported by the Justice Sector Reform Strategy and Investment Plan (JSRSIP). This Strategic plan encapsulates the priorities of the government of Sierra Leone for every five years and is closely in line with global justice initiatives. For example, the current Strategy (2019-2023) is designed to address the most fundamental challenges in the justice sector. It seeks to strengthen the rule of law, democracy and further consolidation of peace and ensuring a safe and just Sierra Leone.

After implementing three Strategic Justice and Investment Plans, progress has been made in areas, ranging **from increased access to justice, to improved conditions of service for judicial officers.** However, significant challenges remain. **Public confidence in the justice system is still very low, there is need to expedite trials, decongest the correctional centres and expand on legal aid for remote and marginalised communities.**

Madam Moderator, distinguished Delegates, the success of the Justice Sector Strategy, which is in its fourth-generation has for example, enabled the development and implementation of the *Bail and Sentencing Regulation* which is of intrinsic significance to the rule of law. **The *Bail regulations* were promulgated as a way of providing guidelines to Magistrates and Judges across the country in the granting or refusal of bail to accused persons.** To raise awareness on its application, Magistrates, Judges and communities across Sierra Leone benefited from a nation-wide sensitisation and training on this regulation.

This is followed by community outreach and sensitization activities and television and radio programmes that target the public.

The knowledge gained by the public is helping them to understand not just the bail procedures but other aspects of the rule of law.

Another key milestone in SDG 16 awareness and training in Sierra Leone was *through the establishment and operationalisation of the Legal Aid Board (LAB)*, through the adoption of the Legal Aid Act 2012. The Board was government's response to the lack of access to accessible, timely, available and affordable justice and legal services for **low-income individuals and vulnerable groups.**

The LAB is mandated to provide legal advice and representation and legal education to its target groups. The Board uses Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanism to resolve conflicts, and since May 2015 when the Board was operationalised, 215,000 less privileged and vulnerable persons have benefitted from legal representation, advice and education. About 14% of these were females and 19% children (accounts for about 80% of ADRs through mediation). Persons on remand without indictment also benefitted significantly; their proportion in the capital city of Freetown reduced from 51% in 2016 to 35.6% by March 2019.

Thousands of seminars have been held across the country where participants are trained on their rights and responsibilities as citizens. The knowledge derived from such engagements has significantly led to the increase in the demand for justice.

As such, even people in remote and isolated communities now have increased access to justice as the community engagements and the use of grass-roots community-based approaches are helping to address the needs and aspiration of ordinary Sierra Leoneans.

Madam Moderator, distinguished Delegates, **recognising the crucial role of the Judiciary in promoting access to justice for all**, the Legal Aid Act 2012, *underscores the role of the Judicial*

*and Legal Training Institute (JLTI), an Institution mandated to provide legal education for all levels of judicial officers and for the training and certification for paralegals – who are recognised for their important contribution in promoting access to justice especially in a post-conflict country with an acute shortage of legal professionals.*

The success of the paralegal model in Sierra Leone has been widely recognised. By virtue of their familiarity with local communities, informal systems and local power dynamics, **paralegals often bridge the gap between the formal law, government institutions and customary justice systems.** Supported and supervised by a small crop of lawyers who can litigate intractable cases if necessary, they collectively provide a concrete and flexible model to advance justice to the most remote, deprived and marginalised communities.

Madam Moderator, distinguished Delegates, to effectively coordinate and ensure that benchmarks set on the SDG 16 are met, the GoSL with support from UNDP has developed a **Monitoring and Evaluation Framework that is used for the collection, analysis, management and use of data on the Goal.** The framework supports reporting to the UN. **However, the process is also meant to build the capacity of the respective actors in the sectors as they are trained and mentored on the data collection and management.**

Madam Moderator, distinguished Delegates, this year, Sierra Leone presented its **SECOND Voluntary National Review report on SDG implementation at the High-Level Political Forum in New York.** We prioritised goal 4 (Education) and goal 16 (Justice), as we perceived these two goals as most crucial towards permanently staying out of FRAGILITY, while recognizing the immense significance of the other SDGs in the process. For goal 4, for e.g., we commenced the **FREE QUALITY EDUCATION Programme.**

The success of our VNR report was as a result of the **sustained efforts by relevant government institutions, working in close collaboration with a wide range of Civil Society Organisations, local councils, universities, the private sector, and development partners.** CSOs provided the much-needed data and held consultations across the 16 districts of Sierra Leone, which is a testament to the government's collaborative approach.

We are focused on using people-centered approaches to justice delivery; hence **we continue our work with local communities and stakeholders, as they continue to support the provision of both primary and formal justice services that are essential in ensuring that less expensive, speedy and efficient justice services are provided for Sierra Leoneans.**

On the international front, madam Moderator, distinguished delegates, for the **first time in the history of Sierra Leone, we hosted a Justice Conference in October 2018 that brought together several Justice Ministers from United Nations member-states, international**

**organizations, civil society, and the private sector to deliberate on how we can accelerate the delivery of Sustainable Development Goal 16 to ensure equal access to justice for all our people.** This singular action in itself helps raised national awareness on goal 16 and ushered in new perspectives on implementation of this goal.

Through the Office of the Attorney-General and Minister of **Justice (Dr. Priscilla Schwartz, who by the way is S/L's 1<sup>st</sup> female AG+MoJ)**, Sierra Leone continues to provide the global leadership that is required to meet the objectives of goal 16. **We co-chair the Global Task Force on Justice (alongside the Netherlands, Argentina, and the Elders)**, helped to develop the "Justice for All" Report; an initiative to accelerate delivery of goal 16 targets for peaceful, just and inclusive societies.

This global study has helped raised awareness of the world's justice needs, as it found that an estimated 5.1 billion people – two-thirds of the global population – lack meaningful access to justice. (The report said that an estimated 253 million people live in extreme conditions of injustice: 40 million people are modern-day slaves, 12 million people are stateless, and over 200 million people live in countries or communities where high levels of insecurity make it impossible for them to seek justice).

Sierra Leone is also **Chair of the g7+ group of countries leading the global agenda to address the problems faced by countries in fragile and conflict-related contexts.**

In June this year, S/L's AG+MoJ chaired a Ministerial Level meeting in The Hague on Access to Justice for All in Conflict-Affected States.

The meeting was an opportunity for Ministers of Justice of the g7+ Member States to share experience, discuss challenges and common priorities in strengthening access to justice in their respective countries.

At the end of the meeting, a Declaration and Joint Action Plan on "Justice for All in Conflict-Affected States" was adopted by the 14 (out of 20) of the g7+ member countries in attendance. The Declaration and Joint Action Plan includes specific measures and commitments **to put people and their legal needs at the center of justice systems in conflict-affected countries and to improve the quality of justice journeys for all, including women, youth and marginalized groups.** (follow-up meeting on the declaration in Dili, Timor Lest in early next month).

Madam Moderator, distinguished Delegates, we also recognised that new training methods should be adopted. That is, **people-centered justice requires a shift from training that focuses solely on legal knowledge to training that emphasizes problem solving. Important skills include active listening, conflict management, and negotiation, as well as data gathering.** The goal is changing lives, systems and making impact.

Training on SDGs for the civil service must likewise include these dimensions in order to deliver real results. **We should be trained not only about SDGs, but how to ensure SDG delivery.**

This means using SDG targets, such as 16.3 to promote the rule of law and access to justice for all, as driving forces in our daily work.

If we can do this, we can help prevent conflict, promote peaceful, just and inclusive societies and realize the goals of the 2030 Agenda and the Agenda 2063.

Madam Moderator, distinguished Delegates, let me conclude by saying that access to justice is a universal equity, but its delivery is local. This means that enhancing access to justice requires a people-centered, conflict-sensitive approach (for conflict-affected countries), embedded in local context, political leadership, information on the needs of people and communities, and sustainable financial investment.

Our experience shows that justice is indispensable for conflict prevention. We have also seen that improving the accessibility and quality of justice has a multiplier effect across the entire spectrum of objectives identified in the Sustainable Development Goals. We should therefore integrate justice considerations into peace, security, and development strategic planning.

Finally, as we work collectively to “leave no one behind”, the Government of Sierra Leone is committed to ensuring that adequate awareness is raised on the SDGs, with relevant stakeholders provided with the training they require to support the drive to meet the 2030 Agenda and the Agenda 2063.

I thank you all.