



UNITED NATIONS INTEGRATED PEACE BUILDING OFFICE IN SIERRA LEONE
(UNIPSIL)

**Civil Society Movement Training Workshop for Women and Young People in
the 2012 Elections**

**Statement by Mr. Berhanemeskel Nega,
Officer - In - Charge of UNIPSIL - 20 September 2012**

Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Please allow me to begin by congratulating the Civil Society Movement under its able leadership for this very timely initiative aimed at promoting the participation of women and young people in the 2012 elections.

All over the world and indeed all over Africa, we see more and more women assuming key leadership positions and strengthening their participation at all levels. Recent Nobel Laureates are women from Africa. In Malawi, the continent's second female president has been inaugurated, and the African Union is now chaired by a strong female personality. The world is changing and we all have to change.

Sierra Leone is also making strides in the advancement of women and young people. Currently, Women are appointed in responsible Government positions, including ministerial and other key institutions, such as the judiciary and the security sector. This is a very welcome development, but much remains to be done. Women represent more than half of the population of Sierra Leone, and play a key role in all aspects of life.

That is why the Truth and Reconciliation Commission highlighted the importance of giving greater attention to the advancement of women, including their participation in Governance and other areas for the betterment of the nation. Studies have shown, and all of us know firsthand from personal experience, that it is women that are doing the hard work, at homes, at offices, and selling items on the street, and raising children and sustaining the family. It is no coincidence, that micro- finance institutions often target women, as investments by women are found to be better calculated, more dependable, and benefiting the family and the community as a whole, and are guaranteed to be paid back. .

As Sierra Leone continue to make progress in the consolidation of peace and its democratic transition, the issue of women's political participation and empowerment has also gained momentum. The drive for a 30% quota for women, efforts to fight violence against women, demands for economic empowerment of women, and increasing opportunities in various areas, including education and health are all encouraging developments. The Government's programme to provide free health care to pregnant and lactating women and children under five are all very welcome measures that need to be sustained and expanded. But, still more efforts and progress are to be made, and the time is now. The Gender Equality Bill needs to be accelerated and passed by parliament, political parties have to live up to the commitments they made, including in their respective gender policies, to increase the political participation and representation of women by awarding more symbols to female candidates. The time is now to live-up to those commitments.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished ladies and gentlemen

The youth is also another critical pillar of any society. The recent history of Sierra Leone and indeed other countries shows the role youth played in conflicts, both as combatants and victims. And in post conflict countries, including Sierra Leone, the challenge is to rehabilitate ex-combatants and provide opportunities to them to be productive citizens. The future of any country belongs to the youth population, and there is nothing more important than investing in the future – the young generation. In that regard, the youth have to seize the opportunity to be good citizens by resisting violence and embracing peace and development. In Sierra Leone, there is an increasing awareness of this reality, and efforts are underway, including through the establishment of national youth commission. But, much more remains to be done. The drive for greater participation of youth in political and leadership positions has gained momentum, and the time is now to make good progress. The quest for a 10 percent quota for the youth in elective and other positions has gained recognition. At the same time, this quest should not be just what one demands but also that one deserves. Indeed, the youth of this country deserve that, and even more, with their own hard work and discipline, as responsible citizens, with greater stakes in the wellbeing of the country.

Mr Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This workshop will play an important role towards promoting the participation of women and young people in the upcoming elections in particular. These elections, as we all know are critical for Sierra Leone, and their successful and peaceful conduct will further demonstrate Sierra Leone's emergence as peaceful and democratic nation, and guarantee its continued progress on that path.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Indeed, the success of the upcoming elections could be guaranteed if Sierra Leoneans of all walks of life, political, ethnic, religious and linguistic and other affiliations continue to work together, manifesting political tolerance. The political parties, NEC, the police, and all other national stakeholders, on 18 May, have signed a Declaration recognizing their responsibilities in that respect. Civil Society Groups, including the Civil Society Movement, which organized this important event, are all working together to ensure free, fair and peaceful elections, and all deserve congratulations and should stay the course.

At the UN, we are doing our part to support ongoing national efforts to ensure free, fair, credible and peaceful elections. With financial support from the Peacebuilding Fund, we are working with Civil Society Organizations, with the Interreligious Council and the Paramount Chiefs, with the PPRC and the political parties, with the IMC and the media, with artists, activists and musicians. All UN efforts take into consideration the importance of the role women and youth.

ENDS