

**INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR MIGRATION
101st COUNCIL MEETING**

**STATEMENT BY H.E. MRS. YVETTE STEVENS SIERRA LEONE PERMANENT
REPRESENTATIVE TO THE UNITED NATIONS IN GENEVA**

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

It is indeed a pleasure for me to participate at this 101st Session of the IOM Council meeting here in Geneva. Let me start by congratulating the Chairman and the other members of the Bureau for their election to steer the work of this august body.

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

Migration is a catalyst for change that affects all nations of the World and impacts on society in diverse ways. Sierra Leone has gone through the experiences of migration, particularly during the civil war (1991-2002), when many Sierra Leoneans were subjected to forced migration to other parts of the world for safety and /or in search of greener pastures. It is estimated that approximately 30% of the educated nationals left and more than half a million Sierra Leoneans live in the US and UK alone. The war also forced thousands of Sierra Leoneans to take refuge in other Mano River Union States. Thus through what is commonly referred to as 'brain drain', Sierra Leone lost a large number of some of its best trained, most educated and skilled nationals depriving the country of the doctors, nurses, teachers, engineers, managers and administrators it needs to break the cycle of poverty and underdevelopment. Such losses hamper ongoing efforts to reach the targets of the Government as well as the Millennium Development Goals.

After the war, the Government recognized the need for accelerated economic development and post-war reconstruction, and it took a decision to attract Sierra Leoneans in the diaspora to come back home. As a clear indication of his commitment to engage the Diaspora in national development, President Ernest Bai Koroma, announced his Diaspora Initiative, in his *Agenda for Change* in 2008, after he came to office. This initiative aims at laying the foundation for a productive and mutually beneficial partnership between the Government of Sierra Leone and the Diaspora. The Office of Diaspora Affairs was created to serve under the Office of the President and one of the objectives of the Office is to work with the government to address critical capacity gaps in the public sector by bringing diaspora professionals and experts to deliver results in specific areas.

Some Sierra Leoneans from the Diaspora have since joined the cadre of experts providing diverse knowledge and expertise they had acquired from the diaspora. Currently, they are some of our most reliable partners in promoting social change and fostering positive contributions to the development process.

Mr. Chairman,
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Another focus of the Diaspora Initiative is attracting resources for development from the diaspora. Much of the remittances sent home by Sierra Leonean migrants have been invested to strengthen the private sector of the economy, which is currently better off than it had been over the past two decades. In addition, investments by Sierra Leoneans in the Diaspora in the Private Sector are being encouraged. Sierra Leone passed a Finance Act in 2011 which helped create one of the most attractive investment regimes in Africa.

In our quest for tackling the problems of youth unemployment, we believe that labour migration has a role to play. Cognisant of the need to have proper management of such schemes, we look forward to getting technical advice in managing initiatives in this area.

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

I would also at this stage like to brief this august body about the activities of IOM in post conflict Sierra Leone. The IOM has been resourceful in joining other organizations in the resettlement of Internally Displaced Persons (IDP's) and has also been collaborating with the National Commission for Disarmament Demobilization and Reintegration and the UN-OCHA (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs) in the implementation of the project for income generating opportunities for demobilized ex-combatants. The organization has also continued to assist with all travel arrangements and airport exit procedures for refugees in Sierra Leone resettling in the USA, Canada, Australia and Scandinavian countries, including family reunification. Through the IOM, Sierra Leone's Immigration Department has received capacity development of its staff including the introduction of Passenger Information Registration System (PIRS) at the country's main Airport and some border areas and supplies of IT and logistics equipment.

To combat the scourge of trafficking in persons, the IOM has been actively contributing in projects, with the Government of Sierra Leone. Through the Peace Building Projects, the organization has been able to rehabilitate the prisons system, supported the capacity building of Parliament and the implementation of Sierra Leone Reparations Programme. Under the Diaspora Programme, the Organization is supporting the Human Resource and Capacity Development Programme through temporal transfer of Sierra Leonean from the Netherlands to support

development of the country. It has also supported the establishment of a Labour Migration Unit at the Ministry of Labour and Social Security. IOM is currently conducting a mapping of Sierra Leonean Health Professionals working in the diaspora (mainly in the USA, Canada, UK and Germany)

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In conclusion, let me take this opportunity to thank the Director General and staff of IOM, for the contribution they are making in moving the migration agenda forward, thus contributing, in no small way to the development of Sierra Leone. I would particularly like to acknowledge the good work being done by the Head of Office of IOM in Sierra Leone, who has been most active in coordinating IOM activities in the country.

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

I trust that the results of our deliberations at this session will contribute, in no small measure, to charting the best way of addressing the fundamental challenge of developing humane, orderly and equitable migration policies that will acknowledge national sovereignty vis-à-vis population movement and at the same time respect peoples' desire to migrate, in the bid to improve their lives. In this connection, it is our fervent hope that the outcomes of this meeting will inform the ongoing processes on migration, culminating in the High Level Dialogue to be held in the United Nations New York in 2013. Given the now generally agreed importance of migration in advancing the development agenda, we believe that this should be reflected in the post MDG development goals.

I thank you for your attention.