

Tuesday, December 9, 2008

MESSAGE FROM THE COMMISSIONER OF ANTI-CORRUPTION COMMISSION TO MARK INTERNATIONAL ANTI-CORRUPTION DAY 2008

Once again we observe International Anti-Corruption Day. The 9th of December every year has been designated as "International Anti-Corruption Day" by the United Nations General Assembly in its Resolution No. 58/4 adopted on 31 October 2003. The date commemorates the High-Level Political Conference held in Merida, Mexico, on 9-11 December 2003, during which the landmark United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) was first opened for signature.

The UNCAC represents a universally-accepted comprehensive platform for fighting corruption. The Convention which entered into force in December 2005 is the first legally binding, international anti-corruption instrument and provides a unique opportunity to mount a global response to a universal problem.

In observing the International Anti-Corruption Day, we in Sierra Leone join other nations of the world in re-affirming our commitment, as a State Party, to adhere to the provisions of the UNCAC and to actively take part in the work of the United Nations in furthering the implementation of this ground-breaking Convention.

Across the globe many events and campaign will be held to help raise awareness of corruption and its negative impact on individuals and society, as well as to promote the UNCAC.

In Sierra Leone, the Anti-Corruption Commission and the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone decided to join forces to celebrate the day and also to celebrate international human rights day which fall on the following day - 10th December. This year's commemoration of international human rights day is particularly important as it marks the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

The struggle to promote human rights and the campaign against corruption share a great deal in common. As has been pointed out a corrupt government that rejects both transparency and accountability is not likely to respect human rights. The struggle to protect and promote human rights and the crusade to combat corruption and are inextricably linked and inter-reliant and both the eradication of corruption and the strengthening of human rights require a strong integrity system. Corruption causes massive human deprivations and creates sudden and extreme income inequalities; corruption leads to discrimination and arbitrariness in decision-making, established rules, regulations and procedures put in place to act as checks and balances become pointless.

The ACC has been taking the necessary to execute its mandate which is to prevent, eradicate and suppress corruption and corrupt practices in Sierra Leone. This is been done based on its three pronged approach of prevention, education and investigation. The setting up of the Commission in 2000 emanated from the desire of the Government of Sierra Leone to ensure that good governance prevails

in Sierra Leone after an eleven year old war. The extent and nature of corruption was widely regarded to have been one of the reasons that made the conflict in Sierra Leone inevitable. Corruption made it impossible for the citizens to enjoy the socio-economic benefits which has in turn, created an environment in which conflict can thrive.

Tackling corruption ranks amongst Government's top priorities. His Excellency the President, Dr Ernest Bai Koroma, has therefore promulgated a policy of zero tolerance to corruption and recently revised, adopted and launched the National Anti-Corruption Strategy (NACS). The NACS is an accentuation of government's efforts to provide a policy framework to address this menace in a more systematic and holistic way. The Strategy has two objectives: One is improved delivery of social services in terms of quality, quantity and process while the other is a public service that is effective in preventing and confronting corruption without compromising peace and security and playing a leading role in providing the courage for citizens to regard corruption as destructive and therefore avoid being a party to it.

The ACC as the lead institution in the fight against corruption is working towards achieving the objectives of the NACS. The Vision of the Commission is "a corrupt free Sierra Leone which will ensure that the socio-economic needs of its citizens are met" and the Commission's Mission is "to lead the fight against corruption in partnership through public education, prevention, detection and compliance for the benefit of all citizens".

In 2008, the Commission can point to number of successes.

The Anti-Corruption Act (ACA) 2000 was repealed and replaced by the Anti-Corruption Act 2008. The amendments in the 2000 Act include creating new offences such as illicit enrichment, abuse and misuse of office, providing adequate protection for whistleblowers and informers, making it compulsory for all public servants to declare their assets and making adequate provision for international cooperation in the fight against corruption. The amendments will ensure that our national legislation is in tandem with the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC), which Sierra Leone has ratified.

Also in 2008, Sierra Leone ratified the African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption and Related Offences.

Many public officers, including His Excellency the President and the Honourable Vice President declared their assets, income and liabilities for the first time in the history of this country. The compulsory asset declaration is to encourage integrity in public life.

An amendment to section 64(3) of the 1991 Constitution which removes the exclusive power of the Attorney General and Minister of justice, and the Director of Public Prosecution in prosecuting state offences in the court of law made it possible for the Commission to have prosecutorial powers. This means that the ACC will now investigate and prosecute its cases without reference to the Attorney General and Minister of Justice.

As part of its decentralization programme, the Commission's office in Makeni commenced operation on the 1st September 2008, its first regional office in the North of Sierra Leone. The Official opening was

done on the 30th October 2008 by H.E Dr Ernest Bai Koroma. Plans are afoot to open an office in the Eastern part of the country.

Despite these small steps, the challenge ahead remains daunting. The Commission will require your full support to be able to discharge its daunting mandate. We trust we can count on it for without we will find it very difficult to achieve our mandate.