

Sierra Leone



**Statement by the Head of Delegation, Vandi Chidi Minah, Deputy
Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the
Republic of Sierra Leone to the Review Conference of the
Rome Statute for the International Criminal Court**

Mr President,
Honourable Ministers,
Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,
Representatives of non-governmental organisations,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am honoured to address this Review Conference of the Rome Statute for the International Criminal Court on behalf of the Republic of Sierra Leone. Sierra Leone fully subscribes to the statement made on behalf of the African Group. At the outset, we would like to reiterate Sierra Leone's firm support for the International Criminal Court, our commitment to cooperate fully with it and to help further its ongoing development. In this regard, we are pleased to report that draft implementing legislation for domestication of the Rome Statute is now with the Attorney-General's office, awaiting discussion in Cabinet, for ultimate introduction in Parliament.

It is a special privilege for me to address the Review Conference, which is taking stock of the Rome Statute system, because the experience of Sierra Leone and of the Special Court for Sierra Leone is now part of that system. It is significant that the Review Conference is taking place in the ICC's first situation country, in the home of our brothers and sisters in Uganda. If the ICC had been in operation when we requested the establishment of the Special Court, perhaps we would have been the first situation country and I might have had the privilege of welcoming His Excellency President Museveni and all of you to the Review Conference in Freetown. As it is, I am honoured to be here, together with my delegation and representatives of Sierra Leone civil society, and to bring to this Conference's deliberations the special perspective of my country.

Mr President, the Republic of Sierra Leone is committed to the effectiveness of the international criminal justice system at all levels: national, regional and international. For the International Criminal Court, this Review Conference is a watershed event in its young life; it is an important step in the process of reinforcing the Rome Statute system as a means towards peace, justice, deterrence and redress.

The success of the Review Conference rests primarily in the hands of us, the States Parties. The preparations that have taken place over the past months and years have placed us in an excellent position to ensure that success. We recognise with gratitude the tremendous work of various parties to that end, particularly our host the Government of Uganda; the Coordinator of the Special Working Group on the Crime of Aggression; the Focal Points on the four different stocktaking issues; and the Bureau, especially the President of the ASP Ambassador Wenaweser.

Sierra Leone is committed to playing its part in ensuring the success of this Conference, both for the proposed amendments, particularly on the crime of aggression, and for the stocktaking; we also support the potential inclusion of the crimes of drug trafficking and terrorism.

We view the discussions on stocktaking to be an important element of our reflections on the international criminal justice system and how we can all work to make it stronger and more effective. The issue of complementarity is of particular interest to my delegation: in Sierra Leone, the Special Court has not only made tremendous contributions to accountability through its legal and judicial achievements; it has also developed our national capacity, particularly for our law enforcement and legal professionals, to investigate and, where appropriate, prosecute those alleged to have committed crimes under international law; and it has contributed to restoring confidence in the institutions of State and the rule of law. Capacity building is of critical importance for the principle of complementarity: at the time the Special Court was established, Sierra Leone was willing but unable to address those crimes. We were fortunate to have the support of the international community in establishing the Court to assist us to ensure that impunity would not stand.

We welcome all efforts that facilitate effective, efficient and, above all, timely action when crimes under international law are allegedly committed, as an important pre-requisite for accountability, redress for the victims, the healing of a State and her people and for achieving peace through justice. In this respect, we would like to acknowledge and recognise the welcome developments in relation to the Justice Rapid Response, particularly the establishment of a deployment ready Roster,

which I am proud to say includes five Sierra Leoneans from our national army and police force.

Mr President, another area of importance to Sierra Leone is the Court's field presence. We welcome the focus of this Review Conference on the presence of the Court in the field, closer to the populations affected by its work. Our own experience tells us that the stronger the Court's field presence, the more effective and efficient it will be in the long term. Based on that experience, we have consistently highlighted the importance of outreach and the Court's outreach officers having a very visible presence in the field. We welcome the ongoing improvement of the Court's outreach work and encourage the Court to develop plans for early implementation of outreach in places in which the ICC is or will be working, to engage populations affected by their work, and to develop a robust public information and communications strategy to help raise the Court's profile throughout the world.

We firmly believe that it is not only outreach, but all aspects of the Court's work that would benefit from an increased presence in the field. We therefore welcome the efforts of the Registry to maximise the Court's field offices and encourage the Court as a whole to continue to focus on this issue and to make it a strategic and operational priority for the coming years.

In this respect, it is not only the Court that must deepen its understanding and strategic planning: States Parties also need to support the Court in this regard, including during our deliberations on the budget and, of immediate relevance, on the four stocktaking themes. The Court's field presence and its ability to insert itself into the national consciousness have a tangible impact on each of those themes. Sierra Leone takes the plight of victims very seriously, as evidenced by the establishment of a Reparations Committee as recommended by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. We therefore welcome the focus of this Conference on victims.

While we celebrate the successes of the Court to date, let us rededicate ourselves to a practical, credible and defensible outcome to this Review Conference. Mr President, before concluding I would like to reiterate the support of the Republic of Sierra Leone and her President, His Excellency Dr Ernest Bai Koroma, to the ICC and to justice, which together with peace are the twin pillars of sustainable development and a prosperous future.

Thank you for your kind attention.