



## **SIERRA LEONE**

**Opening Statement by H. E. Professor David John FRANCIS  
Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation**

**THE SEVENTH CONFERENCE OF STATES PARTIES TO THE  
ARMS TRADE TREATY (CSP7)  
Geneva, 30 August – 03 September 2021  
Centre International de Conférences Genève (CICG)**

**30 August 2021 (13:00hrs)**

### **I thank you, Mr. President**

Let me commend you at the outset for your presidency of the Arms Trade Treaty leading to this Seventh Conference of States Parties. It was a singular honour for our country to be elected to this august position.

Let me also thank members of your Bureau and the Management Committee, the Chairs of the Working Groups, Voluntary Trust Fund Selection Committee and the Diversion Information Exchange Forum, the Facilitators of the sub-working groups as well as the staff of the Secretariat for the excellent work in preparing for this Conference.

The extraordinary circumstances of the COVID-19 have disrupted everything we know as normal. Yet, Mr. President, you and the entire ATT community have managed to pull together this well-organised hybrid Conference with some of us participating in-person in Geneva and others doing so online from their respective capitals or workplaces. You should all commend yourselves for such an achievement.

## **Excellencies, distinguished delegates**

My Government is very proud to have represented Africa as President of this Seventh Conference. Right from the beginning of Sierra Leone's presidency, we dedicated the highest level of political commitment and leadership towards serving the ATT community. I am addressing you today in the place of and on behalf of my President, His Excellency Dr. Julius Maada Bio who sends you all warm greetings and compliments for a successful Conference.

As a former leader during our civil war, and as a peace studies scholar, President Bio fully understands both the need for weapons systems for legitimate and sovereign purposes, and for effective global arms regulation for responsible use of those weapons. For this reason, on Sierra Leone's assumption of the leadership of the ATT, he personally authored a total of 54 letters to other Heads of State and Government across the globe urging their countries to become parties to the Arms Trade Treaty. Those letters were mostly hand-delivered by you, Mr. President, to the diplomatic representatives of those Heads of State and Government here in Geneva, and some were directly mailed to the Heads of States.

## **Mr. President, Excellencies, distinguished delegates**

Sierra Leone's recent history of civil war, disarmament and arms control made us acutely aware of the need to prevent weapons from being illicitly traded or diverted to the wrong end-users. The reality is that our world is still very much affected by wars and conflicts in which women, girls, young people and civilians are disproportionately affected. Our goal must be to end those conflicts or at the very least mitigate their impact by reducing their human cost.

We know from the work of the International Committee of the Red Cross, the International Crisis Group and similar humanitarian organisations that about two billion people suffer from fragility, conflict or violence. The forecast is that by 2030, half of those two billion people will experience extreme poverty, hunger and malnutrition, diseases, high dependence on humanitarian assistance as they suffer loss of food, water, shelter, health care

services, economic opportunities and other essential services. The irony is that 2030 is when the international community expects to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

Even stable or seemingly peaceful nations cannot escape the grim consequences of the misuse of conventional weapons. They come in the form of gender-based violence, gang violence, transnational organised crimes, terrorism, and crimes like armed robberies or other forms of public disturbances. Robust regulation of the arms trade without impinging upon legitimate trade and lawful ownership is therefore critical.

### **Excellencies, distinguished delegates**

We, the nations of the world, have always responded, and successfully so, to challenges that threaten our very existence. We have seen how our collective efforts led to the development of the principles of the laws of war as contained in the Geneva Conventions and their Protocols.

Therefore, the universalisation of the Arms Trade Treaty and its effective implementation should be actively promoted and encouraged by all nations in all our sub-regional, regional, and international engagements.

In this context, on behalf of His Excellency President Bio, I urge all States that are not yet Parties to the Arms Trade Treaty to join this Treaty. Sierra Leone believes that the ATT stands as one of the most significant achievements in international arms control and plays a key role in promoting international and regional peace, security and stability. It will help reduce human suffering, promote cooperation, transparency and responsible action by States Parties involved in the international trade in conventional arms.

With these remarks, I have the singular honour and privilege on behalf of His Excellency President Dr. Julius Maada Bio, the Government and people of Sierra Leone and on my behalf to wish you all successful proceedings of the Seventh Conference of States Parties to the Arms Trade Treaty.

I thank you all for your kind attention.