

Attached is an advance copy of the **Ninth Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone** for the information of the members of the Security Council.

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**Ninth Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding
Office in Sierra Leone**

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolutions 1886 (2009), 1941 (2010) and 2005 (2011) in which the Council requested me to submit a report every six months on the activities of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office of Sierra Leone. The report covers the period from 1 March to 31 August 2012.

II. Major developments

2. During the reporting period, the presidential, parliamentary and local council elections, scheduled for 17 November 2012, continued to be the main focus of political activities in Sierra Leone. In a spirit of constructive dialogue and national ownership of the political process, the country's major stakeholders, including the ten registered political parties signed a "Declaration on the 2012 Elections" on 18 May 2012, committing themselves to peaceful, free and fair elections. Preparations for the elections have also reached a critical final stage with the completion of the biometric voter registration exercise and the announcement by the National Electoral Commission of timelines for the key phases of the electoral process, including the nomination of candidates and the beginning of the campaign period.

A. Political developments

3. The overall political situation in the country was dominated by preparations for the forthcoming elections, with political parties, particularly the ruling All Peoples Congress (APC) and the main opposition party, the Sierra Leone Peoples Party (SLPP), intensifying their electoral activities throughout the country. While no incidents of political violence were reported during the period under review, the relationship between the ruling party and the major opposition party continued to be characterized by mutual mistrust and intense rivalry. The Political Parties Registration Commission has so far authorized ten political parties to contest the elections.

4. On 23 March, the Government released the White Paper on the report of the Shears-Moses Commission of Inquiry, which investigated incidents of political violence that occurred in Freetown, Bo and Kenema in March 2009. The Government accepted a number of recommendations made by the Commission, including the need to encourage political tolerance in educational institutions and to ensure the application of principles of impartiality in the country's security sector agencies. It also agreed with the Commission's recommendation that the Independent Media Commission needs to improve its monitoring procedures. However, the Government has yet to take steps to comply with the Commission's recommendation to ban the public officials who were implicated in the violence from holding office.

5. The Government has also taken initial steps towards the establishment of an Independent Police Complaints Committee, as agreed by the ruling party and major opposition parties in a joint communiqué signed on 2 April 2009. However efforts need to be accelerated to finalize the development of the terms of reference and draft legislation governing the complaint mechanism.

6. Following concerns expressed by various stakeholders, including the SLPP, over the Government's purchase of heavy weapons for the Sierra Leone Police, on 3 April the Government transferred these weapons to the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) to be used for military operations both domestically and in international peace operations.

7. During the reporting period, the criminal prosecution of APC and SLPP members, charged with offenses related to the political violence in Bo and Kono in September 2011, continued. Also, on 21 May 2012, two members of the SLPP were convicted by the High Court in Freetown for public order offences committed during a local council election in Freetown in January 2012. They were each sentenced to a five-year jail term or alternatively to pay a fine of 25 million leones.

8. On 18 May, a national conference focusing on the need for political tolerance and the peaceful conduct of the November 2012 elections was jointly organized by the Political Parties Registration Commission and UNIPSIL with the support of the UN Peacebuilding Fund. The conference was attended by the senior leadership of the ten registered political parties, as well as by representatives of the Sierra Leone Police, the National Electoral Commission, the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists and the Guild of Editors, the National Human Rights Commission, paramount chiefs and traditional authorities, the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation, the National Commission for Democracy, and women and youth groups. At the conclusion of the conference, participants adopted a declaration underscoring their willingness to effectively discharge their responsibilities in the 2012 elections and reaffirmed their commitment to political tolerance and non-violence. Under the auspices of the Political Parties Registration Commission, a follow-up mechanism was created to ensure the implementation of this declaration. Meanwhile the National Commission for Democracy continues to disseminate the declaration at the regional level.

9. On 23 May, a Security Council mission, co-led by the Permanent Representatives of the United Kingdom and South Africa, visited Freetown, Sierra Leone. The main objectives of the mission were to assess the progress achieved by the national authorities and people of Sierra Leone in the peacebuilding process, as well as become acquainted with the preparations for the 2012 elections. The delegation met with President Ernest Bai Koroma, who gave assurances that the 2012 elections would be held in a free, fair and peaceful environment. The delegation also met with representatives of various political parties, who pledged their commitment to the peaceful conduct of the elections. The Council was briefed by the senior leadership of the security sector agencies, the National Electoral Commission, the Political Parties Registration Commission and the Independent Media Commission on preparations for

the elections and on the readiness of the various national institutions to discharge their responsibilities towards successful elections.

10. The Sierra Leone Configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) organized a meeting on 22 June in New York that was attended by the Chairperson of the National Electoral Commission, to discuss the status of preparations for the November elections. Briefings were delivered by my Executive Representative, the Sierra Leone Inspector-General of the Police, the Political Parties Registration Commission, and other senior Government officials. The Peacebuilding Commission commended the various actors on the ongoing technical preparations and on their efforts towards the prevention and management of election-related violence. It also reiterated its call to national actors, particularly political parties, to do their utmost to ensure free, fair and peaceful elections.

Preparations for the 2012 elections

i. Voter registration and other processes

11. The data capture phase for the biometric registration was successfully concluded on 26 March. This was followed by the consolidation of data; de-duplication analysis; printing of voter cards; production and display of the Provisional Voter Register and the distribution of voter cards.

12. The Provisional Voter Register was displayed in all 2,998 voter registration and exhibition centres from 30 June to 16 July. During the period from 30 June to 4 July, registered voters were able to check their details on the Register and collect their voter cards. From 19 to 20 July, the National Electoral Commission conducted an inquiry into cases of objections, rejections and inclusions to the Voter Register. In accordance with the electoral laws, the Commission included and re-registered approximately 106,000 individuals on the Register. It also made 33,000 corrections to the details of those already registered. As of 30 July, 2,425,027 of the 2,663,746 provisionally registered voters had received their voter cards and the Commission has made arrangements for the distribution of the remaining cards.

13. The National Electoral Commission has also taken steps to address cases of multiple voter registrations, which resulted in 794 cases being referred to the Police for further action, of which 70 persons were charged. Criminal prosecutions were also launched by the Police against minors suspected of attempting to register during the data capture phase of the biometric registration exercise. Following the arrest of these minors, the National Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone expressed concern over the Police handling of these cases and urged the authorities to respect and protect the rights of children. It also called on all political actors to refrain from manipulating children to register to vote in the elections for their own political gain.

14. Meanwhile, the NEC continued to engage with political parties, including the SLPP, particularly through its Political Parties Liaison Committee, in order to increase the

confidence of key stakeholders in the electoral process. In an effort to ensure transparency and credibility throughout the electoral process, the NEC allowed political party representatives to observe both the de-duplication phase of data captured during voter registration and the NEC administrative inquiry into cases in which objections had been lodged following the display of the Provisional Voter Register, which identified cases of fraudulent registration during the de-duplication analysis of data captured in the registration process.

15. On 30 July, the NEC announced increases in the candidate nomination fees for the November 2012 elections, which, however, were widely criticized by almost all political parties. The fees, which will only be confirmed following parliamentary approval, required presidential candidates to pay 100 million leones, compared to 1 million leones in the 2007 elections; parliamentary aspirants, including ordinary and paramount chieftaincy candidates, to pay 25 million leones, compared to 100,000 leones in the 2007 elections; and local council chairs and mayoral candidates to pay 5 million leones. The NEC justified the increase on a number of grounds, including the high cost of elections. Nevertheless, civil society organizations objected to the proposed increases stressing that they were too high and would adversely impact the participation of youth and the women, as well as persons with disabilities in the electoral process. The National Human Rights Commission characterized them as disproportionate and inconsistent with several international human rights instruments to which Sierra Leone is a party. The SLPP and several political parties alleged that it would only benefit the ruling party and on 3 August issued a joint communiqué calling on Parliament to reject the NEC's proposal and maintain the existing nomination fees.

16. The ruling APC did not sign the communiqué, while the United Democratic Movement agreed to the communiqué, but limited its objection to the nomination fees prescribed for parliamentary and local council candidates. In response to these developments, the Commission further consulted with political parties and issued a press release on 10 August announcing a reduction in the nomination fees for members of parliament, including ordinary and paramount chieftaincy candidates from 25 million to 10 million leones, as well as local councillors' fees from 2 million to 1 million leones. However, the fees for presidential candidates remained unchanged. On 13 August, during a meeting with my Executive Representative, the SLPP and five other political parties reiterated their objections to the revised fees and questioned the neutrality of the NEC. They cited concerns that the new fees would not create a level playing field in the upcoming elections and that they would have insufficient time to raise funds. My Executive Representative encouraged the parties to utilize the democratic processes and work closely with the Political Parties Registration Commission in resolving the matter. In the meantime, on 10 August, the NEC released the timelines for the submission of approved political party candidates.

ii) Dispute resolution mechanisms

17. On 19 July, the Chief Justice of Sierra Leone inaugurated the Electoral Offences Courts, which is an important dispute resolution mechanism for the elections. There will

be six such courts; three in Freetown and one in each of the regional headquarter towns of Makeni, Bo and Kenema. On 3 and 4 August, UNIPSIL and the Government of Sierra Leone conducted training for judges, prosecutors, police investigators and other paralegal staff.

iii) Electoral legislation

18. During the reporting period, President Koroma assented to the Public Elections Law, which consolidates all electoral legislation into a single text. Prior to its passage in Parliament on 1 May, the SLPP had raised a motion that the draft bill be submitted to a Parliamentary Committee for further scrutiny. However, this motion was defeated. On 25 May, the Supreme Court of Sierra Leone refused an application made by the SLPP for an extension of time to serve a notice of appeal against the High Court judgment that affirmed the results of the 2007 presidential elections.

iv) Election security

19. The implementation of the Integrated Security Sector Strategy for the 2012 elections, which was developed with the support of UNIPSIL, continued during the reporting period. With assistance from the Elections Basket Fund, 10,500 General Duty Police and 2,224 Operations Support Division personnel have been trained on election-specific issues and public order management by the Police, with technical support provided by UNIPSIL. Moreover, communication equipment and vehicles for security of the elections have been procured and mitigation measures have been put in place to address security threats identified by security sector agencies. In addition, the Government has committed an estimated \$US 4 million to the security sector for the elections.

v) Election Steering Committee

20. The Election Steering Committee, co-chaired by the Minister of Finance and Economic Development and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), met in April and June. During these meetings, the Committee, which is comprised of electoral management bodies, security sector agencies, the National Election Watch - a coalition of civil society organizations - and international development partners, emphasized the need for robust and sustained voter information and education programmes, as well as careful budgetary planning by the National Electoral Commission.

vi) Support to civil society and non-state actors

21. Supported by UNIPSIL, through the UN Peacebuilding Fund, the Political Parties Registration Commission, the National Commission for Democracy, the Independent Media Commission and civil society organisations have continued to implement projects aimed at promoting political participation, political tolerance, non-violence and national cohesion amongst non-state actors. As part of these projects, intra-party retreats

for APC and PMDC senior party executives were held in April and May on strengthening democracy and political tolerance. Trainings on conflict resolution were conducted for the National Council of Paramount Chiefs and the Inter-Religious Council by civil society. The National Commission for Democracy carried out sensitization programmes in the country's 112 parliamentary constituencies conveying messages of tolerance, and the need for increased female participation in the political process. In addition, higher education institutions engaged students and politicians on issues of regionalism and national cohesion. In line with the recommendations of the Shears-Moses Commission of Inquiry, peace clubs were formed in 20 secondary schools in Freetown to encourage issue-oriented politics and non-violence, mainly targeting first-time voters. Ex-combatants also acted as messengers of peace to the youth in short film sketches produced by UNIPSIL in April. Further engagements with the youth have continued through peace messages from presidential candidates that are being given prominence by popular music artists in the country.

B. Security developments

22. The overall security situation remained calm. On 25 July, Parliament ratified the appointment, by President Koroma, of Major-General Samuel Williams as the Chief of Defence Staff of the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF). He replaced Major-General Robert Koroma, who retired on medical grounds.

23. The Arms and Ammunition Bill 2012, which was passed during the period under review, was awaiting the assent of President Koroma. The Bill provides a framework for the regulation of gun ownership in the country and ensures that Sierra Leone complies with its commitments under ECOWAS conventions to regulate the use of small arms. It also makes provisions for the destruction of arms, which will facilitate the destruction of arms collected under the UNDP Arms for Development Programme that was completed in 2005.

24. Within the reporting period, the Government appointed coroners to investigate the circumstances resulting in the death of six persons in separate incidents involving the use of live ammunition by the Sierra Leone Police. On 16 April, during a strike by workers in Bumbuna, Tonkolili district, one woman was killed and several others injured during attempts by the Police to contain the ensuing disturbances. Two youths were shot dead by the Police in Freetown on 5 June. A bike rider died on 15 June after an encounter with the Police in the Goderich area of Freetown. Four youths suffered gunshot wounds in central Freetown on 9 July in the course of Police making arrests. In order to ensure that these incidents do not create challenges in the management of the elections, the Police, with support from the United Nations, commenced a review of its Rules of Engagement in parallel with the development of a strategy on governance mechanisms in the Force.

C. Economic and social developments and activities of the United Nations Country Team

25. The Sierra Leone economy continued to expand, with prospects for 2012 and the medium-term remaining favourable due to the emergence of new economic opportunities. Real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grew by 6 percent in 2011, partially due to increased agricultural production, mining and services. Additionally, economic growth was projected to make a one-time jump to 33 percent in 2012, mainly on account of increased iron ore production, and will average 6 percent in 2013 to 2015. In the meantime, consumer price inflation continued to moderate as the Leone stabilized and food inflation slackened. Inflation has declined from 16.9 percent at end of December 2011 to 14.1 percent at the end of June 2012. It is likely that this downward trend will continue in the second half of 2012, with the exception of the anticipated risk of higher food prices at the peak of the rainy season.

26. Notwithstanding the challenges in fiscal performance in 2011, there was some improvement in the first half of 2012, during which budget execution was consistent with the Extended Credit Facility programme. As a result, with the exception of outstanding commitments, the challenges to fiscal execution in 2012 have been minimized. Domestic borrowing has also been contained within the programme target and the Treasury bill rate has stabilized between 23 and 28 percent.

27. The overall current account deficit deteriorated to 50.6 percent of GDP in 2011 due to large imports of machinery for iron ore projects. It is however projected to improve significantly to around 15 percent of GDP in 2012 with an increase in iron ore exports. The external debt position remained at a reassuring debt-to-GDP ratio of 30 percent at the end of 2011, while gross international reserves are projected to reach US\$410 million.

28. The significant expansion of the extractive industries is expected to sustain increased economic growth and generate significant Government revenue in the medium to long-term. However, policies need to be developed to help generate employment opportunities for the growing population. In addition, diversification of growth sources is necessary, as well as an improvement of the business environment for the private sector. It will also be important for the Government to put in place a well-targeted social safety net that supports vulnerable households. Deepening the democratic process, including through credible elections, would help achieve sustainable longer-term and inclusive economic growth.

29. On 16 August, the Government of Sierra Leone stated that a presidential taskforce had been established to deal with the cholera outbreak in the country, which was gravitating towards an epidemic. So far, as of 19 August, 216 persons died from cholera and since January 2012, 11,654 cases of cholera had been reported. In the interim, emergency financial assistance was obtained from OCHA to assist in combating the outbreak. Also, the Government, in collaboration with UNICEF, WHO, the Red Cross and civil society continued efforts aimed at cholera surveillance, medical treatment,

water chlorination and provision of safe drinking water. They are also promoting proper hygienic practices through the local media channels. In addition to supporting the response efforts of the Government to the cholera outbreak, WHO assisted the Ministry of Health and Sanitation in planning, monitoring and implementing supplementary immunization campaigns for children under five with the objective of reducing infant mortality and morbidity. WHO also supported the Ministry in carrying out district and central level performance reviews, as well as in formulating a policy and strategic plan that focuses on human resource needs in the health sector. In July, the Minister of Health and Sanitation launched blood transfusion centres that were renovated and equipped by WHO in Kenema and Bo.

30. Efforts to strengthen the delivery of essential medical supplies have continued under the Government's Free Health Care Initiative. Moreover, UNICEF and partners have supported the Ministry of Health and Sanitation to forecast, purchase and distribute essential medical supplies. Further progress was made in the area of procurement of medical supplies due to the passage of a Parliamentary Act, which establishes an autonomous National Pharmaceutical Procurement Unit. Sierra Leone's development partners were supporting efforts to build the capacity of these national institutions.

31. Ensuring access to justice and assistance to victims of conflict is integral to the peace consolidation process and a precondition for preventing future conflict. In that regard, on 25 June, the National Commission for Social Action, with assistance from the UN Peacebuilding Fund and technical support from the International Organization for Migration, commenced a new round of cash payments to the remaining victims of the civil war, who have yet to receive any reparations for gross human right violations suffered during the conflict.

32. Further to the invocation in June 2012 of the "ceased circumstances" clause in the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees pertaining to Liberian refugees in Sierra Leone, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) commenced arrangements for the voluntary repatriation of 800 Liberians to their country of origin.

III. Advancing Peacebuilding

33. The Second Joint Progress Report on the implementation of the Government's Agenda for Change, which was prepared by the Government of Sierra Leone in consultation with international partners, was published in August. The report focuses on the status of implementation, outstanding targets and remaining challenges in the Agenda for Change. The report will be discussed by the Peacebuilding Commission in September and will form the basis of the Commission's engagement with Sierra Leone over the coming months.

34. Preparations for the Agenda for Prosperity, the successor programme to the Agenda for Change, have already started. The Government has prepared the outline of the new programme, which envisages the following eight pillars: (i) Economic diversification to

promote inclusive growth; (ii) Managing mineral resources; (iii) Accelerating progress in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for human development; (iv) International competitiveness; (v) Employment and Labour Strategy; (vi) Social protection; (vii) Governance and public sector reforms and (viii) Gender. There will also be a chapter on cross-cutting issues, including Environment and Climate Change, Financing, Monitoring and Evaluation, the Results Framework and the Poverty Profile. In addition, the Government has established a technical team to coordinate this process with UNDP representing the international development partners. The Pillar Working Groups, with representation from UN agencies and programmes, are also in place to deliberate on development strategies and policies related to the pillar thematic areas, as well as the cross-cutting issues. The development strategy and an accompanying policy document are expected to be completed shortly.

IV. Main risks to peace consolidation

i) Transnational organized crime and illicit trafficking

35. The risk of illicit drug trafficking remains, though there has not been any major interdiction, since the seizure of a payload of over 700 kilograms in July 2008. UNIPSIL, jointly with UNODC, continued to provide support to the Sierra Leone Transnational Organized Crime Unit in combating illegal drug trafficking, within the framework of the West Africa Coast Initiative (WACI). During the reporting period, two vehicles and one patrol boat were donated to the Unit by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

36. In the period under review, a large quantity of *cannabis sativa* in Kambia district, Northern Province of Sierra Leone, was destroyed by the Transnational Organized Crime Unit with the support of the Government of Ireland. Meanwhile, discussions were underway to hasten the release of funds from international partners for the continuation of the Unit's operations. Funding is required for the construction of the Unit's premises and for the provision of support to the RSLAF Maritime Wing to assist them in their efforts to reduce illegal activities in the territorial waters of Sierra Leone. In the meantime, the Unit is currently investigating a case of human trafficking, which allegedly involved the smuggling of some 50 Sierra Leoneans out of the country, between April and May, on board a trawler that was apprehended by the Guinean authorities.

37. In May, UNODC with the support of UNIPSIL undertook an assessment of the criminal justice system, including prisons, under the framework of the WACI. The main objectives were to assess the needs of the system and support the Transnational Organized Crime Unit with the prosecution of criminal cases and in ensuring international cooperation concerning criminal matters. In this regard, a number of recommendations were formulated, *inter-alia*, encouraging Sierra Leone to ratify the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, to enact legislation to criminalize organized crime in line with the Convention, and to improve prison overcrowding and management.

38. In June, UNODC commenced an assessment of drug demand in Sierra Leone under its Global project “Treating drug dependence and its health consequences”. The assessment is expected to end in August and will enable the adoption of appropriate actions and interventions on drug prevention, treatment and care, as well as support the development of rapid national responses. On 26 June, UNIPSIL, in collaboration with UNODC, commemorated the International Day against drug abuse by advocating for a halt in drug-related violence, including during the 2012 election.

ii) Youth

39. To address the challenges posed by youth unemployment, as well as to harness the potential of Sierra Leonean youth, the Government, in addition to establishing the National Youth Commission, created a new Ministry of Youth, Employment and Sports. In the meantime, as requested in the Act establishing the Commission, an annual report on the situation of the youth in the country has been submitted to relevant stakeholders for validation. The report, which was prepared with technical and financial assistance from UNDP addresses a range of issues including youth in governance and will form the basis for policy formulation on youth matters.

40. Other efforts in addressing the challenge of youth unemployment were undertaken in the reporting period. Five business support centres, managed by the Youth Commission and financed by UNDP began operations in July 2012, which would provide assistance to at least 2,000 youth in establishing and growing their businesses. Simultaneously, the Graduate Internship Programme was launched in the period under review and will help 150 youth bolster their employment credentials through the acquisition of valuable and monitored work experience in selected institutions. In the meantime, UNDP continued the financing of Career Advisory and Placement Centres that provide job search assistance and soft skills training to at least 5,000 youth per year. Three additional centres will open by the end of 2012.

iii) Corruption

41. In the reporting period, the Anti-Corruption Commission continued its three-pronged approach to combating corruption based on prevention, investigation and prosecution. Through its outreach activities, the Commission noted that weak service delivery of Government departments, ministries and agencies has contributed to corrupt practices. On 7 August, the Commission reported that 552 billion leones was recovered from corrupt individuals and corporate entities in the first six months of this year. Regarding prosecutions by the Commission, as of 26 July, 17 cases had been submitted to the High Court and eight to the Court of Appeal. On 10 August, a High Court in Freetown convicted the Mayor of Freetown, from the ruling party, for corruption and a breach of procurement regulations. The Mayor was sentenced to three year prison sentence or in the alternative a fine of 170 million leones. During the first session of the Implementation Review Group, convened under the United Nations Convention Against

Corruption, Sierra Leone was selected to be reviewed for compliance with the Convention.

V. Support to Democratic Institutions

A. National Electoral Commission

42. The National Electoral Commission (NEC) continued to play a lead role in the preparation and management of the forthcoming elections in Sierra Leone. The Commission also continued to receive technical and financial support from the UNDP-managed Elections Basket Fund, which enabled the establishment of a Central Data Centre in Freetown. In addition, regional results and tallying centres will be established in Makeni, Bo, Kenema and Freetown in October. Finally, capacity-development of staff was also undertaken, including through a BRIDGE training programme on Election Security.

B. Political Parties Registration Commission

43. The former Chair of the Political Parties Registration Commission Mr. Justice Samuel Ademusu, passed away in April 2012, and Mr. Justice Tolla Thompson, was appointed by President Koroma as his replacement. The appointment was approved by Parliament on 9 August. The Commission continued, with the support of UNIPSIL, to discharge its mandate of promoting inter-party dialogue, including through the implementation of the Declaration on the 2012 elections signed on 18 May by Sierra Leone's major elections stakeholders. The Commission also continued to implement programmes supporting the activities of the All Political Parties Youth and Women Associations and the efforts of the District Code of Conduct Monitoring Committees in promoting conflict resolution as well as political tolerance and non-violence. During the period under review, the Commission mediated disputes between political parties and monitored the conduct of the voter registration process. Parliament is yet to approve a draft bill granting authority to the Commission to penalize political parties for any infraction of the Political Parties Code of Conduct.

C. Independent Media Commission

44. The Sierra Leone media should play an indispensable role in contributing to peaceful elections through accurate and balanced reporting that avoids exploiting ethnic or other divisions in the country. While concerns remain in regulating the conduct of the media, the Independent Media Commission (IMC) issued, in July, a Media Code of Practice, as part of the authority granted to it under the Independent Media Commission Act of 2000. The new Code of Practice was validated by the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists, as well as several other media organizations, who signed the Code as a demonstration of their commitment. Additional, media monitoring mechanisms include through the procurement of electronic media software to assist in tracking radio stations and the issuance of the IMC Media Watch. The Commission continued to examine ways of ensuring political neutrality by media practitioners. In the same vein, the Guild

of Editors was enhancing professional standards through a peer review of some Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation radio programmes.

D. The Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation

45. The Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation is also expected to play a vital role in advancing political pluralism by ensuring that it provides equitable access to all political parties, particularly during the forthcoming elections. In the reporting period, with financial support from the UN Peacebuilding Fund and with technical advice provided by UNIPSIL, the Corporation issued a draft Elections Guideline that was formally adopted on 9 August by political parties. The Corporation has also expressed its commitment to establishing an Elections Unit.

46. UNDP and UNIPSIL engaged the Corporation on the implementation of the recommendations made by the Presidential Taskforce, as well as on external audits that focused on improving the administration of the Corporation. During the reporting period, there was an improvement in the revenue collection and financial management of the Corporation, as well as in the news production and management. The Corporation has also reactivated its regional stations. Nevertheless, there are challenges in the formulation and implementation of a well-articulated business strategy that guarantees steady revenue to the Corporation and thus secures its independence. The United Nations continued to assist it in this area and in promoting its adherence to media best practices in the sub-region as part of a South-South approach.

E. Parliament

47. With assistance from international development partners, including the United Nations, progress has been made towards improving the capacity of Parliament through support to the Parliamentary Assistance Coordination Office. Additionally, the *Hansard* Section has provided transcription and docking equipment to enable documentation of parliamentary proceedings, while consultants and trainers have been recruited to train staff of the various departments at the Parliamentary Service. This includes a dedicated Technical Advisor to Parliament for capacity building and resource mobilization. Parliament has assessed its strategic plan for 2009 to 2013, and has presented a draft outline programme of support to potential donors. In the reporting period, Parliament approved the Public Elections Act .

F. Decentralization

48. On 6 June, the European Union announced that it would co-finance with the World Bank the second phase of the Decentralized Service Delivery Programme estimated at US\$32 million. The programme, which will continue until December 2015, aims to strengthen the capacity of the central and local government to manage decentralized services and improve the availability of central government funding to the councils. On 10 July, Vice-President Samuel Sam Sumana launched the Local Economic Development programme, which is part of the Government's decentralization policy. Its

objective is to assist the economic development of local governments through partnerships with the private sector, as well with civil society and community-based organizations.

VI. Human Rights and Rule of Law

A. National Human Rights Commission

49. The Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL) began public hearings in July into the incidents in Bumbuna, Tonkolili district, where one person was killed by the Police in April during a strike by workers of the African Minerals company. The Commission will determine if any human rights violations occurred including the use of excessive force by the Police. The hearings are the second exercise of the Commission's quasi-judicial capacity. The first HRCSL public hearing took place in 2011 and considered the case of ex-RSLAF personnel who challenged their discharge on the grounds of mental imbalance, which had resulted in a reduction in their separation entitlements. The HRCSL found in their favour and ordered the Government to pay their full benefits.

50. From 30 to 31 May, the Human Rights Commission held a National Consultative Conference on Human Rights and Elections, with the theme "Making Human Rights real in the 2012 elections". Over 200 participants and key stakeholders, including political parties, attended the conference. The conference concluded with the adoption of a resolution highlighting freedoms of opinion, expression, assembly, association and movement, and other human rights. On 24 July, Parliament ratified the appointment of three HRCSL commissioners nominated by President Koroma to replace three former Commissioners whose tenure had expired in December 2011. Vacancies for the position were advertised in the national media and civil society representatives had an opportunity to provide input to the selection process.

B. Rights of persons with disabilities

51. Sierra Leone has taken important steps towards ensuring the rights of persons with disabilities by ratifying the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2010 and enacting the Disability Act in 2011, which was followed by the development of a road map for the creation of a National Commission on Persons with Disabilities in 2012. Additionally, on 15 June, President Koroma appointed the Chairman of the Commission based on nominations provided by all Ministries and organisations dealing with disabled persons.

52. On 7 June, the Freedom of Information Bill, which was one of the recommendations made during the 2011 Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process, was submitted to Parliament by the Minister of Information and Communications. The Bill aims to promote transparency, accountability and good governance. However, some parliamentarians have raised concerns about the absence of appropriate structures needed for the Bill's implementation.

C. International treaty reporting

53. The Government of Sierra Leone, with the support of UNIPSIL, submitted its first report on the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Additionally, the draft reports on the country's compliance with the Convention against Torture and the African Charter are under review by the Attorney General.

D. Technical Cooperation and Capacity Building

54. Pursuant to the Mission's mandate to build national capacity for the protection and promotion of human rights, several activities were undertaken in the reporting period, including supporting the Government in the implementation of the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Universal Periodic Review process. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), with the support of the UN Peacebuilding Fund, continued providing assistance to the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone.

55. UNIPSIL supported the third National Consultative Conference of District Human Rights Committees in Kenema, which covered election monitoring. It also supported radio broadcasts to raise awareness of the rights of disabled persons in the northern and eastern regions of the country. Additionally, it conducted several human rights training programmes for prison and police officers, as well as civil society organizations and traditional leaders, on the administration of justice and rule of law; economic, social and cultural rights; political participation by persons with disabilities; and sexual and gender based violence.

VII. Gender issues

56. During the reporting period, the United Nations continued its collaboration with the Government and other stakeholders on women's empowerment and the achievement of the 30 percent quota for women. The efforts of the United Nations were also focused on the implementation of the National Gender Strategic Plan, as well as on the Sierra Leone National Action Plan that are based on UN Security Council resolutions 1325 and 1820. To that end, assistance was provided for the establishment of a technical committee of the "M30 Task Force", a coalition of civil society organizations, to ensure strategic support for the draft Gender Equality Bill. The Bill has undergone a critical review by the Committee and is expected to be submitted shortly for printing, prior to the commencement of the pre-legislative process. The United Nations has also provided support to the sensitization and advocacy initiatives of civil society organizations and parliamentary groups on the proposed Bill.

57. Working with the All Political Parties Women's Association, the Council of Women Councillors and other groups, the United Nations has supported the profiling of female aspirants with the objective of identifying and building the capacity of female candidates who may be awarded symbols in the elections. The All Political Parties

Women's Association, which is also a forum for conflict resolution and mitigation, conducted its national delegate convention from 15 to 17 July. During the reporting period, the United Nations and partners conducted two training programmes on media coverage for female candidates, which were attended by over seventy participants.

VIII. Special Court for Sierra Leone

58. On 26 April, the Special Court for Sierra Leone sitting at The Hague convicted the former President of Liberia, Mr. Charles Taylor, for crimes against humanity and violations of international humanitarian law committed in Sierra Leone from 30 November 1996 to 18 January 2002. The judgment was welcomed in Sierra Leone, with the court proceedings transmitted *via* video link to Freetown and broadcast on local radio stations to enable the victims and the public to follow the trial. At a hearing on 30 May, Mr. Taylor was sentenced to 50 years. However, on 18 June, the Defence indicated that they would appeal the judgment. As a result, a revised Special Court of Sierra Leone Completion Strategy was issued projecting a delivery of an appeals judgment in the Taylor case in September 2013. Meanwhile, the Court is hearing three contempt of court cases arising from attempts at interfering with witnesses in the Taylor trial. On 15 June, a guilty verdict was delivered in one of the cases, while the other two cases remain pending.

IX. Regional Cooperation

59. In the reporting period, Sierra Leone continued to maintain good relationships with its neighbours, including through the Mano River Union (MRU), as well as the Economic Community for West African States (ECOWAS), with President Koroma attending meetings of both organizations.

60. Concerning the Yenga border issue between Guinea and Sierra Leone, President Koroma and President Alpha Condé of Guinea reaffirmed, at a meeting in June, their intention to resolve the matter peacefully. In a joint declaration signed by the two Governments in Freetown on 27 July, both sides reaffirmed their commitment to demilitarize the Yenga border area and to ensure that their respective armed forces implemented the joint declaration. On 16 August, the Government announced that a demilitarization of Yenga had taken place and reiterated its strong support for the Joint Technical Committee established by both countries to ensure a final resolution of the dispute.

61. Further to these developments, and with the assistance from the UN Peacebuilding Fund, UNIPSIL and the MRU Secretariat have commenced discussions on possible projects and activities to be undertaken in the border areas of Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia. The main objective of the projects will be to strengthen linkages and peaceful co-existence among communities in the border areas and address common cross-border challenges. A conference of the electoral management bodies of the four MRU member states, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone is scheduled to take place in

Freetown in mid-September, to exchange experience and best practices on the management of elections.

X. Observations and Recommendations

62. Sierra Leone has continued to make significant progress in consolidating its hard-won peace, and building democratic foundations. Nonetheless, a number of challenges remain and concerted efforts need to continue to tackle issues also identified by the country's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. These include: addressing unemployment, in particular among the youth; consolidating and strengthening the country's democratic institutions; promoting national reconciliation and national cohesion and a culture of political tolerance among the country's political actors; managing the exploitation of the nation's natural resources, including the newly found vast mineral riches, for the benefit of the country and its people; as well as combatting corruption. In addition, addressing the threats posed by transnational organized crime, such as illicit drugs trafficking and others would remain an important priority for the country. As the focus shifts towards the elections, continuing attention also needs to be given to a peaceful post-election period, as well as tackling effectively the root causes of the conflict, which if left unaddressed, will have a potential to reverse the important gains the country has made in the last decade.

63. Progress in the exploitation of the country's mineral resources, including potentially viable oil reserves, and its proper management would help to improve the Government's finances and enable it to sustain a requisite level of economic growth for addressing its socio-economic challenges. However, in the short to medium term, the assistance of Sierra Leone's international partners will continue to be required to address the remaining key challenges, as the country transitions from a post-conflict phase to a development stage. In particular, resources will be required from international partners for the full implementation of the Government's planned Agenda for Prosperity, as well as other major national economic programmes. The work of the Anti-Corruption Commission in combating the corruption will also continue to be crucial in promoting the confidence of the citizenry in governance.

64. The main political development in the coming months will be the November 2012 presidential, parliamentary and local council elections. The elections, the third since the end of the conflict, will be an important determinant of how much progress has been made in consolidating peace in the country. Of utmost importance is the need to ensure that the elections are conducted peacefully without recourse to political violence. I commend Sierra Leone's stakeholders, including the country's political parties for the commitments they have made in signing the 18 May 2012 Declaration, and call upon them to adhere to those commitments as they enter the crucial phases of the electoral process.

65. I welcome the release by the Government of the White Paper on the Shears Moses Commission of Inquiry and have taken note of the on-going prosecution of political party supporters implicated in acts of political violence, which will assist in deterring

such activities. I encourage the Government to continue to expedite efforts aimed at establishing the Independent Police Complaints Committee and at implementing other recommendations of the White Paper on the Shears Moses Commission of Inquiry. I reiterate my call for political parties to take national ownership of the political process and to set aside their differences in the larger national interest to ensure that the elections are peacefully conducted.

66. The success of these elections and the country's continued progress towards achieving the aspirations of its people can only be realized if all Sierra Leoneans work together, respecting the rule of law and the country's Constitution in a peaceful political process. The performance of Sierra Leone's democratic institutions in discharging their respective duties will give the elections credibility and legitimacy. I encourage Sierra Leone's security agencies that have the primary responsibility to maintain law and order during the elections, to exercise their responsibilities in a professional and impartial manner.

67. In the same vein, other national stakeholders, including political parties, civil society and, indeed, individual citizens have the duty to act within the limits of the law, and work with law enforcement agencies to create a peaceful environment for the elections. The Political Parties Registration Commission has a key responsibility in furthering dialogue with the political parties. In this context, I urge the Commission to work towards securing the full adherence of all political parties to the 18 May 2012 Declaration. I also call on Parliament to enact the Political Parties Registration Commission's reform legislation, which includes giving the Code of Conduct the necessary legal authority and thus improves the Commission's oversight responsibilities of political parties.

68. I welcome the on-going arrangements for the elections and encourage the National Electoral Commission to continue to engage in constructive dialogue with national stakeholders, particularly through the Political Parties Liaison Committee, as a forum for consultations and the exchange of vital information on the electoral process.

69. Sierra Leone's media should play a constructive role in ensuring the success of the elections, through dissemination of accurate information, educating the public and promoting dialogue. The media should refrain from spreading messages of hate, division and national discord. I urge the Independent Media Commission to play a more proactive role in discharging its regulatory functions by enforcing its Code of Media Practice. I also call on Sierra Leone's media and professional associations, in particular the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists and the Guild of Editors, to cooperate with the Independent Media Commission in the discharge of its responsibilities.

70. Enhancing the participation of women in the political process in the 2012 elections is a key objective, which the United Nations fully supports. In this regard, I welcome the increased commitment of the Government of Sierra Leone in promoting gender equality and the proactive role played by various stakeholders, including political

parties and civil society groups in ensuring the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000).

71. The international community has been instrumental in bringing and consolidating peace in Sierra Leone. I therefore urge international partners to remain seized with the peacebuilding process in the country, particularly in the run up to the November elections. The Peacebuilding Commission has a critical role to play at this stage. I wish to express my appreciation to the Sierra Leone Configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission, through its Chair, Ambassador Guillermo E. Rishchynski, for its strong support in furthering the consolidation of peace and for its critical engagement with national and international stakeholders in connection with the 2012 elections.

72. In view of the importance of the forthcoming elections and the need to assist the Government and key stakeholders in the electoral process, while taking into account critical post elections tasks, including providing support for the resolution of any post electoral concerns, facilitating the smooth transition of any newly elected Government and supporting efforts aimed at building national cohesion and reconciliation, as well as enabling the preparation of a transition plan and an exit strategy for UNIPSIL, I recommend a renewal of the mission's mandate for a further eight to nine months, during which period, I intend to dispatch an United Nations inter-agency Technical Assessment Mission to Sierra Leone to conduct a review and advise in this regard.

73. I wish to thank President Koroma and his Government for the continued cooperation with the United Nations. I am also grateful to Sierra Leone's international development partners for their generous support to the country's peacebuilding process. Finally I thank my Executive Representative, Mr. Jens Toyberg-Frandzen and the staff of UNIPSIL, the UN agencies and programmes as well as other international partners for their continued collaboration with UNIPSIL in the discharge of its mandate.