

**Statement by the Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs at the Ministerial –
Level Conference on the Validation and Adoption of the Regional
Plan of Action to Eradication of Statelessness in West Africa**

Mr. Chairman

His Excellency the President of the Commission of ECOWAS

His Excellency the President of the Gambia

Members of the High Table

Distinguished Invited Guests

Kindly allow me to extend special thanks and appreciation to the Commission of ECOWAS, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and to all Ministerial representatives of the ECOWAS Member States for their continued support and commitment to prevent and eradicate statelessness within the West Africa Sub-Region and the World.

Since the endorsement of the Abidjan Declaration of Ministers of ECOWAS Member States on Eradication of Statelessness by His Excellency the President Dr. Ernest Bai Koroma and his colleagues in the ECOWAS Region during the 47th Ordinary Session of ECOWAS summit in Accra, Sierra Leone is fully committed in the fight against statelessness.

Mr. Chairman, His Excellency the President of the Commission of ECOWAS, His Excellency the President of the Gambia, Ladies and Gentlemen, Statelessness is a governance and social issue that is posing serious challenges to the achievement of the global Sustainable Development Goals. This is so because it fails to guarantee someone an identity to a State and the enjoyment of the benefits that go with nationality.

To ensure that all individuals residing in Sierra Leone enjoy these rights, the Ministry of Internal Affairs in collaboration with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and its partners has committed itself to ensuring that, statelessness is identified, eradicated and ultimately prevented in West Africa generally and Sierra Leone in particular by 2024.

Whatsoever may be our views of the causes of Statelessness, we must acknowledge that persons at risk of statelessness are not themselves responsible and therefore every effort should be made in addressing the issue with the aim of restoring national identity to these people.

Furthermore, enthused by the shared vision of ending statelessness, we, ECOWAS Ministers, adopted the Abidjan Declaration on Eradication of Statelessness in February 2015. In that Declaration, we committed our collectiveness in achieving the following:

- a. identification of stateless persons
- b. protection of stateless person
- c. solution for statelessness and risk of statelessness
- d. prevention of statelessness through civil registration and access to nationality documents
- e. prevention of new cases of statelessness through legislative reforms

Mr. Chairman, His Excellency the President of the Commission of ECOWAS, His Excellency the President of the Gambia, distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, I am very pleased to inform this august body that, the Government of Sierra Leone has made considerable treads to wipe out Statelessness or the risk of it as espoused in the Abidjan Declaration by:

- i. the appointment of a Focal Point for issues relating to statelessness (Commitment 22 of the Declaration)

- ii. acceding to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of a Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness (Commitment 4 and 14 of the Declaration) on the 21st April 2016
- iii. incorporating a Chapter on citizenship that also addresses statelessness and accords equal rights to men and women in conferring nationality to their spouses and off springs and to foundlings(Commitment 2)
- iv. intensifying Civil Registration Reforms including the mandatory provision for registration of births in order to eliminate situations of statelessness (Commitment 6 of the Declaration)
- v. intensifying sensitization campaigns to command public attention to civil registration reforms which includes civic education on procedures for the acquisition civil documentation. In addition, series of events were organized in commemoration of the first anniversary of the Abidjan Declaration on Statelessness, such as Press Conference, Radio and Television Programmes, Screening of Statelessness Movies, all geared toward increasing awareness on Statelessness (linked to Commitment 10 of the Declaration).
- vi. in August 2016, the Ministry led the delegation from UNHCR and NaCSA to the border areas of Kailahun and Pujehun bordering Guinea and Liberia on a fact finding mission to identify groups and/or individuals that might be at risk of being stateless. (Commitment 1 of the Declaration)

As we reflect on these achievements, let also take this opportunity to inform this noble meeting that the Sierra Leone Government with support from UNHCR and other stakeholders will develop its National Action Plan during the course of 2017 as per commitment 24 of the Declaration.

To conclude, I wish to assure you that the Government of Sierra Leone will continue to work with the UNHCR and other stakeholders to ensure the eradication of statelessness in the Worldwide by 2024.

Thank you all for your attention.

Delivered by:
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