



GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE

**74th SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE UNITED
NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES PROGRAMME**

GENEVA, 9 to 13 OCTOBER 2023

GENERAL DEBATE

STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR ERNEST MBAIMBA NDOMAHINA

**COMMISSIONER OF NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SOCIAL
ACTION**

(NaCSA)

Chairperson,

High Commissioner,

Honourable Ministers.

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to join you at this 74th Session of the ExCom meeting and address this distinguished forum on behalf of the Government and people of the Republic of Sierra Leone.

Sierra Leone aligns itself with the statement delivered by the Arican Group and we take this opportunity to make additional remarks in our national capacity.

I would like to congratulate H.E. Ambassador Kadra Ahmed Hassan on your election as President of the Bureau of the 74th session of the Executive Committee of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. My delegation would like to assure you of our full cooperation during the conduct of this ExCom session. I would also like to take this opportunity to extend the Government of Sierra Leone's profound gratitude to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr Filippo Grandi, for continued support and collaboration between

UNHCR and Sierra Leone in the protection of refugees, asylum-seekers, the internally displaced, and stateless people in the country.

Mr. High Commissioner, as you rightfully highlighted in your statement, there is a need for even greater burden- and responsibility-sharing and efforts to support people who have been forced to flee and leave everything behind, especially in light of an ever-growing number of emergencies. Sierra Leone has been a committed partner in global solidarity to provide protection to those most in need, and we are committed to continuing to strengthen this partnership.

Chairperson,

Post civil war Sierra Leone has transitioned to a host country, providing safe space to people seeking refuge in the country in line with the 2007 Refugee Protection Act and the 2009 African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (the Kampala Convention), which Sierra Leone is a state party to. Sierra Leone is a shining example for current conflict-ridden regions as they look towards the future.

Over a period of 24 years, my Government in collaboration with the UNHCR hosted over 60,000 Liberian refugees. Most importantly, all locally integrated refugees were included into the country's national development programmes, including access to land, in order to empower them to become self-reliant and respond to UNHCR Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework.

Sierra Leone successfully implemented the Physical and Legal Refugee Protection for refugees and asylum seekers which was extended to April 30, 2022. With the official close of UNHCR support to refugees in Sierra Leone, NaCSA was asked by UNHCR Multi Country Office (MCO)-Dakar, to take full ownership of the refugee programme and the asylum system in accordance with Sierra Leone legislation. With a caseload of 393 remaining refugees, a road map to a phaseout strategy was developed for nine (09) host Communities. Despite the option of Voluntary Repatriation or Local integration, a caseload of 385 refugees did not opt for either of the two feasible solutions presented to them. As of now, this makes up a protracted caseload of refugees without the relevant legal documents living in the country as ECOWAS citizens.

As part of the road map to the phaseout strategy, NaCSA and UNHCR MCO-Dakar undertook a joint assessment mission in September 2021 and identified 93 socio-economic infrastructure sub projects for implementation based on community needs under the “**Tenki Salone**” project. This includes six (06) water system sub projects piloted in six refugee host communities; an initiative focusing on strengthening local resilience and locally available services to benefit refugees and hosting communities.

Chairperson, prior to the phaseout strategy, Sierra Leone through NaCSA accomplished the following:

- Adopted the National Action Plan on statelessness on the *16th of December 2020*.
- Enacted the 2007 Refugee Protection Act (Sierra Leone Gazette vol. CXXXVIII, n° 42 30th August), with NaCSA as the implementer of the Act.
- Coordinated the issuance of 21 country of origin passports with one year residence permits to locally integrated Liberian refugees for sustainable integration in Sierra Leone.
- As of 31 July 2022, Sierra Leone hosted 10 refugees from Ivory Coast and Refugee Status Determination (RSD) was conducted for one (01) Armenian, three (03) Iranians and one (01) Afghanistan asylum seekers as well as one (01) registered Pakistan in 2020/21. These asylum seekers were provided with temporal asylum seekers certificates, with one-off cash assistance to cushion their livelihood in Sierra Leone.
- In 2019, in response to UNHCR Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF); my Government engaged in empowering more than 15 Household Heads with a population of 100 locally integrated refugees by including them into National Development Programmes. These include, the Sierra Leone Community Development Project Phase II (SLCDD II), Social Safety Net Project (SSN), the Free Primary & Secondary Education, free health care for under-five children, pregnant and lactating women, and free ARV treatment.

Despite the achievements highlighted, key challenges remain:

- The “Tenki Salon” project though piloted remains to be fully implemented. There is lack of funding to fully implement the “Tenki Salon” project that could ensure a sustainable phaseout of the remaining caseload of refugees.
- There are 385/75 House Holds remaining caseload of refugees who did not opt for any of the two feasible durable solutions (Voluntary Repatriation or Local integration) who currently lack nationality documents and are at risk of becoming stateless in the country.

- The National Civil Registration Authority (NCRA) identified 106 unrecognized Liberian refugees with expired refugee ID-cards and many other persons of concern without documentations who are at risk of becoming stateless persons in the country.
- Weak Refugee Status Determination (RSD) infrastructure and other legal instruments on statelessness is a concern.

In the face of these challenges, we are witnessing a shortage of humanitarian funding, diversion of resources and unequal supply of necessary provisions to the host countries. While significant strides have been made to ease pressures on host countries and increase self-reliance and solutions, there is still a need for more equitable, predictable, true burden and responsibility sharing.

Moving forward, Sierra Leone calls upon UNHCR to continue:

- to advocate for funds from multilateral and bilateral development partners to ensure the full implementation of “Tenki Salon” project.
- to adequately respond to protracted refugee issues in line with the Global Compact for Refugees to conclude the sustainable phaseout of the remaining caseload of refugees, and
- to support the full implementation of the National Action Plan on ending statelessness in Sierra Leone.

Finally, I would like to reiterate that despite the strong political commitment shown by small economies like Sierra Leone to increase the possibilities of durable solutions for refugees, it goes without saying that adequate, flexible and predictable financial and technical support is needed to achieve this goal and enable UNHCR to effectively carry out its mandate.

In conclusion, Chairperson, in line with the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework and the Global Compact on Refugees, the Government of Sierra Leone remains committed to providing protection and assistance to refugees, opening its doors for asylum seekers and stateless persons and helping them achieve durable solutions.

I thank you for your attention.