

SIERRA LEONE DRAFT STATEMENT: 75 ExCom - GENEVA

Madam Chair, Mr. High Commissioner, Your Excellences, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

I bring you greetings from the government and people of Sierra Leone. On behalf of His Excellency Brig. (Rtd) Julius Maada Bio, I would like to thank the High Commissioner and Team for the long and productive partnership between the UNHCR and the Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) built on mutual trust.

I would particularly like to take this opportunity to register our appreciation for the continued support from UNHCR Multi Country Office Dakar-Senegal, as we collectively work to better protect the rights of refugees, displaced persons, asylum seekers and prevent statelessness.

Mr. High Commissioner, the Government of Sierra Leone through the National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA) is committed to advocate and for allocation of funds into the national budget for the amendment of the Refugee Protection Act, 2007. This Act must be upgraded in compliance with international standards, ensure an effective legal framework in refugee protection and asylum seekers as well as a sustainable refugee phase-out strategy with an operational road map. This roadmap in its entirety, will strengthen and ensure quality, sustainable and efficient asylum system culminating into the enactment the adopted National Action Plan on Statelessness with key pledges adopted in Sierra Leone into law by 2025/26.

Mr. High Commissioner and Chairman, ECOWAS has approved the sum of USD\$ 575,787 to Sierra Leone for effective and efficient humanitarian assistance towards bridging the gap in the alleviation of the sufferings of IDPs, refugees, returnees, asylum seekers and other Persons of Concern in Host Communities in the country

In collaboration with UNHCR MCO – Senegal, the Commission participates in monthly virtual meetings, and randomly assess and support the protracted case load of refugees with expired documents that are at risk of becoming stateless. For example, 02 locally integrated Malian and Sudanese refugees for the year under review, were provided with National Identity Cards (NIN) at the same rate as other Sierra Leoneans while enjoying freedom of movement and other basic services in the country.

Irrespective of the political will to include locally integrated refugees into national development programmes, these persons of concern are unwilling to opt for any of the two feasible durable solutions; (local integration or voluntary repatriation). Either of which will enable them become ECOWAS citizens especially those that are also at risk of becoming stateless in the country. Notwithstanding, under the inclusion and empowerment strategy of NaCSA, integrated and qualified refugees were trained as Data Enumerators under the pilot Productive Social Safety Nets and Youth Employment Economic Inclusion (PSSNYE-EI) project. At least 01 was employed in the government volunteer service at NaCSA. The country reaffirms its commitment to facilitate the engagement of the others; even if temporary with other relevant line ministries and NGOs.

It is important to note that the Government of Sierra Leone continues to face financial constraints from the national budget making it challenging to prioritize funding for the effective implementation of the '*Tenki Salon*' project that would guarantee a sustainable phase-out of the refugee programme in the country. These constraints have equally contributed to the delay in the improvement of refugee protection and the legal frameworks that meet current international standards in a decentralized manner.

Mr. Chairman, in view of the above, the Government of Sierra Leone through the National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA), rigorously solicits donor support in order to effectively operationalize a sustainable phase-out as well as an effective legal refugee protection and asylum system in the country.

I thank you for your attention.