Position Paper for the World Food Programme

The issues before the World Food Programme are: Emergency Food Assistance in Response to Manmade and Natural Disasters; The Use of Food Aid to Promote Sustainable Development; and Greater Food Security Through International Cooperation.

I. Emergency Food Assistance in Response to Manmade and Natural Disasters

The Republic of Sierra Leone fully respects the right to food as a basic right of every human being as emphasized by The Rome Declaration on World Food Security 1996 (WFS 1996), the Declaration of the World Food Summit: five years later 2002 (WFS 2002), Article 11, Section 2 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, deploring the fact that over 800 million people worldwide suffer from hunger.

Sierra Leone recognizes manmade and natural disasters as major contributors to food insecurity. A manmade disaster has severely damaged our own country’s food security, with over one million people displaced within the country and over 300,000 refugees who fled to neighbouring countries during the rebel war. From its experience, Sierra Leone stresses the importance of the direct involvement of internally displaced persons (IDPs) during all phases of displacement. Hence, Sierra Leone supports the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and urges all countries to commit themselves to those principles.

Sierra Leone notes that most of the time emergency situations are restricted to certain areas of a country. If this is the case, Sierra Leone suggests buying food from safer areas in the same country or region, helping to increase the local food production. In addition, the useful employment of possible future combatants in conflict situations can prevent the spillover effect of war into neighbouring areas and countries.

Although the Sierra Leonean government highly supports the WFS 1996 and the WFS 2002, it notes with deep concern the way they focused much more on the production of food rather than on the determination of persons entitled to food and the means to distribute it. Sierra Leone feels that both summits failed to tackle the difficult international and inter-agency issues, believing that coordination of the several organisations providing food aid is essential in order to be more effective and thereby helping more people in need, especially in emergency situations. Therefore Sierra Leone recommends establishing a coordination program through which all provided food assistance should be channelled.

II. The Use of Food Aid to Promote Sustainable Development

Our government is fully committed to the Declaration of the WFS 2002, highlighting Article 4, which stresses that food security strategies should also try to increase agricultural productivity, food production and distribution. Food security is a key priority for the Sierra Leonean government. We are working towards self-sufficiency in food production by the year 2007, making the agricultural sector a key pillar of our economic development. Sierra Leone, classified both as a least developed and low-income food-deficit country (LDC/LIDFC), has made good progress after the devastating effects of the rebel war and managed to produce 50% of its cereal requirements in 2002. Nevertheless our country is ranked at the bottom of the UNDP Human Development Index 2003 as the poorest in the world and remains dependent on food aid. Therefore our government will continue to reduce food insecurity and poverty in the shortest possible time, in accordance with the World Food Summit Plan of Action. Improved governance and economic growth build an environment of peace and stability and our government is deeply convinced that hunger and poverty are often the reason for political turmoil and armed conflict. Sierra Leone also believes that using food aid for the promotion of the role of women in development will increase productivity and improve rural incomes since most African women are farmers.

Sierra Leone is fully aware of the fact that WFP is the major agency supplying food aid in Sierra Leone and that its programs have helped in the rehabilitation of infrastructure. Furthermore food aid facilitated the resettlement of IDPs and returnees which is of the highest importance in order to regain our agricultural productivity. Sierra Leone thanks WFP for its support and welcomes its decision to continue its Food-for-Training (FFT), Food-for-Agriculture (FFA) and the Community-based Primary School Feeding Project among other programs in our country in 2004, especially in regard to the further resettlement of Sierra Leonean refugees.
Nevertheless we must address the inadequacy and unsuitability of the provided food: rice, the staple food of Sierra Leone, made up less than 20% of the total cereal food aid supplied by WFP. Many food rations contain food not common in our country which leads to dissatisfaction and even health problems like indigestion. In order to prevent these and similar problems, Sierra Leone suggests that WFP and other organisations supply food aid-receiving countries mainly with its staple food.

The FFT Program should also be improved since in some communities there are a great number of young people trained in the same skill. There is an urgent need to also support IDPs or refugees living in host communities near the Liberian border, which currently represent a larger group than those in camps. The host communities are often poorer than the refugees and they should be provided with food aid as well in regard to conflict prevention.

Having had bad experiences with some non-governmental organisations (NGOs), Sierra Leone would like to emphasize that the goal of aid agencies should be to get countries out of emergencies and set development goals that will promote sustainable development. Therefore our government urges donors to support only credible NGOs in the distribution of food and highly recommends supporting the WFP.

As reported in WFP/EB.3/2003/8/, the WFP is now responsible for food distribution in six camps in our country which had been managed by other agencies before. This has allowed standardization and improvement of food delivery and the cost-effectiveness of the help provided. Hence the Republic of Sierra Leone suggests WFP to establish a lead agency in order to coordinate the food-for-work projects of all agencies and NGOs in the same area which allows improved assistance and maximizes the effectiveness of the aid provided.

III. Greater Food Security Through International Cooperation

The Republic of Sierra Leone strongly believes that hunger poses one of the biggest global problems since it is still the number one risk to health worldwide and that greater food security can only be achieved through international cooperation. Therefore Sierra Leone highly welcomes the cooperation of the international community in the UN Millenium Declaration and their commitment to reduce world hunger to 50% until 2015. Sierra Leone further welcomes and supports the target set at the World Food Summit 1996 to reduce the number of undernourished people by half no later than 2015.

In order to achieve those targets, Sierra Leone is fully participating in the Intergovernmental Working Group (IGWG) for the elaboration of voluntary guidelines for the progressive realization of the right to adequate food and supports the first draft of those guidelines (IGWG RTFG 2/2). Sierra Leone strongly urges all states to commit themselves to those guidelines in order to achieve a high level of food security. Furthermore Sierra Leone is a proud member of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS).

While our government is currently working on the establishment of a Right to Food Secretariat, Sierra Leone remains dependent on food aid distributed by the WFP and NGOs like World Vision and the International Red Cross. Sierra Leone expresses its thanks to the WFP and the NGOs for their assistance and emphasizes the great cooperation between our government and both WFP and NGOs. The Republic of Sierra Leone encourages other states to cooperate in the same manner to their own benefit and that of the hungry.

Sierra Leone is deeply convinced that the issue of food security is of highest importance for Africa. Hence, Sierra Leone fully supports the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) and welcomes the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed between WFP and NEPAD on 19 November 2003.

The Republic of Sierra Leone developed an Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (I-PRSP, March 2003) which provides the framework for the restoration of basic needs such as safe drinking water, food and primary education in the context of a longer-term development vision. The latter is to be found in the Sierra Leone Vision 2025 which was instituted in 2000 and emphasizes the cooperation between its signatories, the UNDP and the government of Sierra Leone. Furthermore our government has committed itself to increasing the percentage of our national budget devoted to food security issues. Sierra Leone is a shining example for the promotion of food security and we encourage other states to initiate similar national and international projects in order to help the hungry and the poor.

The international community is encouraged to assist the Republic of Sierra Leone in achieving its sustainable development goals. The Sierra Leonean government notes with deep concern that according to the Human Development Report 2003, the Millenium Goals will not be achieved unless developed countries keep their promises to provide financial and technical assistance for development. In this context, Sierra Leone urges rich countries to keep on improving the removal of their agricultural export subsidies and to speed up the debt relief programmes for highly-indebted developing countries.