

I am delighted to be able to join you in commemorating an important day set aside to increase awareness, fight prejudice and improve education on HIV and AIDS. I also join the Chairman and his Lordship the Mayor to warmly welcome you all to today's historic gathering which marks the continuation of our effective collaboration and common agenda for addressing HIV and AIDS in Sierra Leone.

In my address to the nation to commemorate World AIDS Day this morning, I spoke about the achievement made by my Government in receiving a United Nations Millennium Development Goal Award for the National leadership, commitment and progress made so far in achieving the Millennium Development Goal of halting and beginning to reverse the spread of HIV in our country by 2015. This award would not have been possible without the support and collaboration of all us gathered here today. I urge all Sierra Leoneans and friends of Sierra Leone to continue to demonstrate the same commitment in the next five years of 2022-2015.

We are today engaged in fighting a war that has the potential to wreak havoc and to derail all the gains we have made so far as a nation. It is the war against HIV and AIDS.

I must hasten to say Sierra Leone is in a hurry not only to improve the welfare of her people, but to live up to the realization of all commitments agreed upon at the targeted date of 2015. My Government will continue to create the enabling environment for team spirit and team work for us to realize our dreams of containing the spread of HIV and AIDS. Much has been done and in many ways, more can still be done.

The National Strategic Plan we are about to launch today is as a result of the involvement of any stakeholders – Government, the private sector, civil society, people living with HIV and AIDS joined by our key development partners. The Plan describes the unique challenges that HIV and AIDS pose to Sierra Leone's economic and social development and how it will be addressed. Though HIV and AIDS services are provided at no cost to the population, there still remain challenges in the area of prevention, treatment, care and support.

This Nation Strategy Plan is closely aligned with the country's Second Poverty Reduction Paper 2008-2012 (Government's Agenda for Change). The Agenda for Change recognizes existing socio-economic conditions as factors that are contributing to increasing vulnerability and risk of transmission of HIV.

As we move ahead, Government will continue to provide the direction, through the National AIDS Secretariat to the work of all stakeholders in the field of HIV and AIDS to minimize overlaps and ensure that resources are effectively channeled towards the achievement of the goals of reducing the prevalence of HIV and mitigating its impact among our people.

My Government will continue to engage our numerous development partners on issues relating to the implementation of The Plan. It is a document I commend to all partners. You need to stand by us in solidarity as we push towards achieving Universal Access.

The Global Theme for this year's commemoration is 'Universal Access and Human Rights'. Universal Access is about ensuring the rights of all people to access HIV prevention, treatment, and care and support services without any undue hindrance or obstacle. My Government's policy on HIV and AIDS is rights-based and it provides guidelines for protecting the rights and dignity of Sierra Leoneans irrespective of their status as well as removing stigma and discrimination from our nation. My Government will continue to embrace Universal Access within the context of human rights. We have revisited the HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Act of 2007 to strengthen the human rights aspect of the Bill. What we require now is a coordinated response to the epidemic. I therefore implore all stakeholders to buy-in into this new Strategic Plan as it charts the way for achieving Universal Access and meeting the Millennium Development Goal target of 2015.

I should take this opportunity to congratulate the management and staff of the National AIDS Secretariat for the leadership role in coordinating the HIV RESPONSE.

We are grateful to our development partners including the United Nations for the committed support in our struggle. I want to assure you that my Government will continue to place HIV and AIDS as utmost priority in our development agenda as evidenced in our Agenda for Change.

To my compatriots, I call on you all to commemorate this day with renewed vigor, commitment

and determination to slow down the spread of the virus in our beloved country. It is the sacred responsibility for every Sierra Leonean to keep the country AIDS free.

On this note, I officially launch the National Strategic Plan to fight HIV/AIDS in Sierra Leone from 2011-2015.

I thank you for your attention and God Bless us all.

STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY, THE PRESIDENT ON THE

LAUNCHING OF THE NEW STRATEGIC PLAN

ON HIV/AIDS (2011-2015) AT THE FORECOURT OF YOUYI

BUILDING ON WORLD AIDS DAY

WEDNESDAY DECEMBER 1, 2010 AT 10:00 A.M.