



PRESS RELEASE

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PRESIDENT KABBAH JOINS UN FAMILY TO OBSERVE WORLD FOOD DAY

Freetown, Sierra Leone – President Alhaji Dr. Ahmad Tejan Kabbah and the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General (SRSG) for Sierra Leone, Ambassador Daudi Ngelautwa Mwakawago joined, on Saturday 16 October, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and other UN agencies, in the eastern provincial headquarters town of Kenema, to mark World Food Day.

Accompanied by several of his Ministers, President Kabbah said the lack of diversity in the diet of the Sierra Leoneans had led to malnutrition in the country; a trend, which he said, needed to be urgently reversed. He said global demand for rice was rising, hence the price would remain high. As a result, he had given “a directive that all government institutions should use local rather than imported rice” with a view to creating a “ready market for farmers and by extension encourage them to produce more”. Seed rice for the 2004 planting season should be procured directly from farmers rather than through contractors.

The SRSG said while there was enough food globally for everyone, more than one billion people were starving. “That reality should temper our celebration as something is seriously wrong with the way food is used and distributed,” he said. Ambassador Mwakawago lauded the Government’s declaration to ensure food self-sufficiency by 2007 and pledged the support and commitment of the UN family in Sierra Leone in achieving that objective. Linking the celebration to commemoration on the same day of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty (IDEP), the SRSG said there was the urgent need to mobilize youth and farmers. The IDEP theme this year, “Youth – a New Voice for Millennium Goals”, underscored the need for dialogue and involvement of youth in development.

FAO Country Representative in Sierra Leone, Mohamed Farah said the day placed focus on the principal issue of providing adequate supplies of safe and high quality food for all the people of the world. He also linked the occasion to another commemoration on the same day, World Rural Women’s Day, saying it underscored the important role women played in farming, ensuring food self-sufficiency and the preservation of biodiversity. Paying tribute to the role women played in farming, Mr. Farah said they contributed immensely to agriculture, forestry and fisheries “feeding the world and achieving household and national food security”.

Sierra Leone’s biodiversity was under threat. Recent studies demonstrated an “alarming loss of biodiversity that could compromise the country’s food security”, he noted. A country once dominated by forest now had less than 5 per cent of mature forest. Logging, mineral exploitation, slash and burn agriculture, wildfires and urbanization had all taken toll in the country’s forest resources and rich biodiversity. The war in the country and the loss of genetic resources from the agricultural institutions were also important factors in this degeneration. He further disclosed that FAO and the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security were presently collaborating to ensure the country grew the food its people needed.

Other speakers including representatives from farming organizations, women’s cooperatives and traditional leaders, pledging their commitment in realising food self-sufficiency, all appealed to Government and donors to empower their efforts.

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The program included a display of crops and other agricultural exhibits brought from all of the country's 12 districts. It climaxed with traditional dancing and singing with some of the songs, in Mende, lamenting the damage diamond mining had caused their communities.

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