

Sierra Leone
25 January 2001

Mr. Neewoor (Mauritius):

Mr. President, my delegation is grateful to you for having organized this important open meeting of the Council this morning.

I wish to thank Ambassador Anwarul Chowdhury of Bangladesh for the important briefing he has just given us as Chairman of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1132 (1997) concerning Sierra Leone. Thanks to his able stewardship of the Committee, we have before us today a comprehensive report by the Panel of Experts on Sierra Leone Diamonds and Arms, as mandated by Security Council resolution 1306 (2000). The preparation of this important report no doubt required enormous courage, determination and dedicated hard work by the Panel. We are grateful to the Chairman and all the Panel members for this and thank them very warmly for their highly professional, well-researched and bold report and for the important recommendations they have proposed. We welcome the presence of the Panel members in our discussion today.

As I speak on the Panel's report, the image that comes to mind is that of numerous children, women and men who have suffered cruel death or have been severely maimed and disabled in the senseless conflict that has gripped Sierra Leone for several years now. It is not without a sense of revulsion that we note from the Panel's findings that the misery inflicted on the people of Sierra Leone is not really for a legitimate political, social, economic or humanitarian cause championed by the rebel forces, but actually for the self-enrichment of individuals and their friends, at home and elsewhere, utilizing the natural resources of the country and diamonds from Sierra Leone in particular. It is indeed outrageous that the lives of so many innocent Sierra Leonean children, women and men have been extinguished and so many others have been condemned to live miserably for ever with vital limbs cut off simply because a powerful few have entertained a sinister dream to amass unlimited wealth through illegitimate means. It is our firm belief that the collective conscience of mankind, represented here in the United Nations, must demand answers from all those who stand accused of involvement in the heinous crimes against the people of Sierra Leone.

The nexus between unbridled political ambition, weapons trade and diamonds was established earlier by a similar panel on Angola, where again a meaningless civil war, financed through the illegal exploitation of diamonds in rebel-held areas, has left countless dead or maimed for life.

Sierra Leone was the next victim of such a nexus, and now we have another panel investigating the same phenomenon in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The international community cannot afford to allow the diamond-arms-politics nexus to cross yet another frontier, be it in Africa or elsewhere. This deadly phenomenon is too costly in every respect. It is extremely costly, in particular, in terms of human suffering. It also drains national and international resources, which normally should be allocated to the development agenda. We have seen that civil conflicts — as in Sierra Leone, Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo — spill easily across frontiers, and whole sub-regions get embroiled in them one way or another. I wish to commend the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) for its tireless efforts to help resolve conflicts in the West African sub-region despite the meagre resources of the member countries.

The international community, through the United Nations, has invested heavily in peacekeeping operations in Sierra Leone, as in other conflict situations. The sanctions regime put in place by the Security Council for Sierra Leone is for the purpose of ending the civil war in the country as soon as possible. The fact that the sanctions have been violated, and the conflict has thus been prolonged, is reprehensible and needs to be condemned most vigorously.

It is already well known that the Sierra Leone sanctions are being violated with impunity by vested interests in the illicit diamond trade and by suppliers of arms to the rebels. The report of the Panel has not only confirmed this, but has also identified the guilty in many cases.

The Panel has also proposed a number of measures for the Security Council to take to better enforce the sanctions regime. We have examined the recommendations carefully and believe they are appropriate. We welcome in particular the recommendations of the Panel to establish a global certification scheme to regulate all trade in diamonds. Such a measure will help put an end to illegal trade in diamonds and to the consequences of this nefarious practice. We also welcome the Panel's recommendations aimed at controlling the flow of arms. In this regard, we believe that the greater onus must rest with the countries where the arms originate. We also support the proposal that a proper mechanism be set up within the United Nations system to better enforce sanctions imposed by the Security Council.

We have no doubt that before making its recommendations the Panel researched the issues fully and pursued every lead to its logical conclusion. We also believe that if any party feels aggrieved, it should have the opportunity to explain its position — backed by proper evidence and within a specified time frame — to the Security Council. In this regard, we wish to underline the need for the Council to take action as quickly as possible on the Panel's recommendations.

The role of Liberia in sanctions-busting, as well as in destabilizing its neighbors, is clear and beyond any doubt. My delegation has taken note of the draft resolution under consideration to further strengthen sanctions against Liberia. We propose to support the draft resolution, and we shall participate actively in its finalization so that it can be adopted by the Council.