

CITATION
to
HIS EXCELLENCY, THE PRESIDENT OF SIERRA LEONE
ALHAJI DR. AHMAD TEJAN KABBAH
ON INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY, 8 MARCH 2007
(celebrated on 20 March 2007)
by
Dr. Mrs. Nemata Eshun-Baiden
on behalf of all the women of Sierra Leone

Your Excellency, the President of the Republic of Sierra Leone
Your Excellency the Vice President
Cabinet Ministers
Honourable Members of Parliament,
Your Excellencies and Members of the Diplomatic Corps
My dynamic sisters in the search for equality
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

It is with deep pride and a sense of great privilege that I stand here to make this citation to you - our beloved and distinguished President and Defender of the Rights of the Sierra Leonean woman. Your government has done what previous governments have failed to do for the women of this nation. You have embraced our cause. Your desire to put us in positions of power has had a great impact on the political scenario in Sierra Leone.

Our dear Pa Kabba, as you are fondly known by all, it for these qualities, and the steps you have taken to bring women into prominence in this country that we the women are honouring you today We, the women of this country, salute you with the utmost fervour and the highest regard!! We consider you to be the greatest champion of the cause of women that Sierra Leone has ever known!! Your compassion and understanding of the needs of women, not only in Sierra Leone, but in other places, such as Lesotho and Tanzania, where you worked as a UN official are legendary. In the UN system, your hard work, professionalism, and caring humanity endeared you immeasurably to the people of Lesotho where you served as the first black UN representative. You so impressed your hosts with the panache and efficiency

in which you executed your duties that steps were taken to effect an unprecedented extension your regulatory 3 year term. You however did not take up this offer because you believed that when one has reached one's height of achievement that was the time to go. Unlike some leaders in Africa, you have decided to go at the end of your term in this government.

You gave us your fullest support in 2001 when you personally launched the 50/50 Group at the State Hall of Parliament. While others were not even bothering to find out exactly what we were trying to do and instead derided us and dismissed our vision as unrealisable, you referred to us as, and I quote: "*The most courageous women in the world.*" You showed your appreciation by saying, again I quote from your speech at the Launching: "*That Sierra Leone is a budding democracy today is due largely to the drive, determination, resourcefulness and creative qualities of the women of this nation.*"

During our International Women's Day Celebrations in 2002, after figuring out the power of women, you started your address with the following slogan: *Woman! Power!!* On that same day, you facilitated the process of donating a piece of land to us for the construction of an office. Again, in Bo, during the International Women's Day Celebrations in 2006, you urged SALONE women to unite with another slogan - *Women unite! You are a force to reckon with!!* And, indeed, you did not renege on your resolve to "conduct our national affairs in such a way as to put a high premium on recognising individuals with quality, particularly women". This is made evident by the fact that since you took up the mantle as leader of this country in 1996 you have worked steadfastly to increase the number of women in political and leadership positions. For instance, your Government of 1996 to 2002 included 9 women: 2 Cabinet Ministers, 2 Deputy Ministers. At this time, there were only 5 women Members of Parliament. In the five years spanning 2002 to 2007 you increased the numbers to: 3 Cabinet Ministers and 3 Deputy Ministers. By this time, the number of women Members of Parliament increased to 18. Thank you for helping to create the climate for women to feel able to participate in the electoral process,

Your Excellency Sir, I make so bold as to say that in terms of according Sierra Leonean women the recognition, equality and inclusion they rightfully deserve, your government is like no other government before it. Not only are

there more women MPs and Cabinet Ministers than this country has ever known but you have also appointed or made it possible for women to hold such high level positions as Head of the National Electoral Commission, Head of Immigration and Head of the Independent Media Commission, 58 female judges, 2 female ambassadors, 2 Assistant Commissioner of Police and 1 female deputy speaker - all of which were previously male preserves.

Sir, we cannot but duff our hats to you for putting on your gender spectacles and, by example, encouraging others to do so. Mr. President, thank you for acknowledging, by your actions, that the peace achieved through the blood, sweat, tears and humiliation of our women should not just be left to the men to manage. Inasmuch as we women made such sacrifices for peace, we must walk and work side by side with our men to manage that peace in our beloved country! That is what the 50/50 Group is all about and that is what we all are asking for.

Sir, you once recalled that your late wife, who worked assiduously towards the empowerment of women, used to say: "A man of quality must not be afraid of a woman in quest of equality." In the ten years since you have held the reigns of leadership in this country, you have proved beyond every reasonable doubt that you are a man of quality. You did so by joining forces with the women of Sierra Leone in their quest for equality - and it is for this reason that we are honouring you today with this CITATION.

This is just a token of our appreciation for all you have done for us and high esteem in which we the women of Sierra Leone hold you. .