



**STATEMENT BY THE OAU SECRETARY GENERAL,  
H.E. DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM, ON THE OCCASION  
OF THE RETURN TO SIERRA LEONE OF  
H.E. PRESIDENT AHMAD TEJAN KABBAH,  
FREETOWN, 10 MARCH 1998**

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**HIS EXCELLENCY SALIM AHMED SALIM, ON**  
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Your Excellency, the President of the Republic  
of Sierra Leone, Al Haj Ahmad Tejan Kabbah,  
Your Excellency, the Current Chairman of ECOWAS  
and Head of State and Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces  
of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, General Sani Abacha,  
Your Excellency, General Lansana Conte, President of Guinea,  
Your Excellency, Mr. Alpha Oumar Konare, President of Mali,  
Your Excellency, Mr. Ibrahim Mainassara Bare, President of Niger,  
Your Excellencies, the Heads of Delegation of ECOWAS Member States,  
Honourable Ministers, Members of the Sierra Leone Legislature,  
Citizens of Sierra Leone,

On this most auspicious, most joyous and quite unprecedented occasion, I am deeply gratified to join all those assembled here to welcome back to Sierra Leone, President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, on behalf of the OAU and, indeed, on behalf of the entire continent of Africa. We sincerely congratulate him and the entire people of Sierra Leone on this great and widely acclaimed feat.

I wish, indeed, to underscore the significance of today's occasion which marks the return to Sierra Leone of constitutional order and democracy. It constitutes a solid victory for the people of Sierra Leone, the West African sub-region and of Africa as a whole. This is a great day for Sierra Leone. It is also a great day for Africa.

It is pertinent to recall that from the day that the collective and democratic will of the people of Sierra Leone was rudely violated by the coup d'état, Africa was the first to respond, reject it in unequivocal terms and demand the immediate restoration of the legitimate government of President Tejan Kabbah and of constitutional order.

In acting with a sense of urgency and in taking a firm stand to refuse to accord any recognition to the coup and its misguided perpetrators, African leaders through their continental organization, the OAU, meeting in Harare in June 1997, entrusted the responsibility of ensuring the restoration of the Government of President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah and of democracy to Sierra Leone, to the countries of ECOWAS, who in turn demonstrated a sense of seriousness in discharging that responsibility.

Africa and the international community were witnesses to the determined efforts which the ECOWAS countries made to achieve a negotiated solution to the crisis occasioned by the coup. Africa, through the OAU, was privileged to be a member of the ECOWAS Committee of Five and to be associated with its untiring efforts to resolve the crisis in Sierra Leone.

Thus, when, indeed, the junta made it consistently impossible to achieve a negotiated solution through stubborn acts of bad faith, Africa, and, indeed the international community stood by ECOWAS and ECOMOG when they acted in accordance with the will of the people of Sierra Leone to forcibly remove them. In so doing, ECOWAS distinguished itself through the professionalism, dedication and sacrifice which the officers and men of ECOMOG displayed. In acknowledging the important role of ECOMOG, both in Liberia and now in Sierra Leone, I want at the same time to underscore the lesson Africa should draw from this. Where there is unity and determination, Africa can effectively chart its own destiny.



I wish to pay tribute to the leaders of ECOWAS, and above all, to its Current chairman, General Sani Abacha, as well as to the Government and people of Nigeria. Through these difficult times, the United Nations and the entire international community stood by us in Africa, and to them we express our gratitude.

Mr. Chairman,

This day is important not only because we are able to celebrate our collective victory with the people of Sierra Leone on Sierra Leonean soil, but because we are enabled to send a message, loud and clear, to would-be coup plotters that Africa and the international community will not allow irresponsible persons carrying guns to deny the will of the people and disrupt the democratic process which we have set in train on our continent. We have underlined that the African people, in exercise of the responsibility which is primarily theirs, must seize their destiny in order to secure a more promising future for themselves and by creating a stable conflict and crisis-free environment which is conducive to the development of our continent.

We pay tribute to the people of Sierra Leone and President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah and wish them well in carrying out the complex tasks at hand. We are confident that as President Kabbah resumes his onerous responsibilities, he will forge ahead in a spirit of national reconciliation and unity, and of African brotherliness, thus laying down a firm foundation for the job at hand: rehabilitation, reconstruction, and general socio-economic transformation of Sierra Leone, releasing the full potentials of the country and expunging once and for all, the memory of the trials, upheavals and suffering which conflict and crisis have brought to the country.

We appeal to all in the sub-region, the continent of Africa, as well as the larger international community to give President Tejan Kabbah and

the government and people of Sierra Leone, all the necessary support – whether it be for humanitarian relief, or for disarmament and demobilization, or for rehabilitation and reconstruction – support which they so richly deserve.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Many have contributed to make this historic day possible. To all of them, we express our appreciation and gratitude. There is no doubt, however, that the most crucial contribution was made by you - the people of Sierra Leone yourselves. Men and women, the young and the old – both inside and outside the country – all united by a common cause of defiance against the illegal usurpers of power. Your courage and fortitude, your perseverance and above all your refusal to be cowed by the ruthlessness of brutal force and your determination to see to it that democracy and constitutional order is restored has been a source of inspiration the world over and a source of pride to all of us your fellow Africans. Therefore, to the brotherly people of Sierra Leone, Africa salutes you.

Thank you.