

**Speech by H. E. Mr. Cheng Wenju, Ambassador Extraordinary and
Plenipotentiary of the People's Republic of China to the Republic of Sierra
Leone at the Symposium to Mark the 35th Anniversary of the Establishment of
Diplomatic Relations between China and Sierra Leone
(July 28, 2006)**

Hon. Chairman,
Hon. Vice President Mr. Solomon Berewa,
Hon. Cabinet Ministers and Members of Parliament,
Members of the Diplomatic Corp and International Organizations,
Representatives of the Chinese Community in Sierra Leone,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, I'm very pleased to get together with my friends here to celebrate the 35th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Sierra Leone. First of all, please allow me to extend to Hon. Vice President Mr. Solomon Berewa and every distinguished friend here the sincere greetings and best wishes from the Chinese government and people. I would also like to take this opportunity to express my heartfelt thanks to those who participated in the preparation for this symposium, particularly the task force consisting of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Sierra Leone-China Friendship Society, and the Chinese Embassy.

On July 29th, 1971, China and Sierra Leone formally established diplomatic ties. Since then, the relations between our two countries have been developing steadily. Hon. Resident Minister of East Province Mr. Fillie-Faboe has witnessed the historically significant occasion of signing the documents for the establishment of diplomatic relations. After listening to his vivid retrospection on this important event and the excellent speech by the former Minister Mr. Dumbuya, I could not help thinking of the developing process of Sino-Sierra Leonean relations, all sorts of feelings coming up to my mind.

Chinese government and people will never forget that in the year 1961, 10 years before our establishing diplomatic relations, Sierra Leone voted in the 16th session of the UN General Assembly supporting the resolution of restoring the People's Republic of China's legal rights in the UN. And in 1971, as one of the 23 co-sponsor countries of the resolution, Sierra Leone together with other African countries made remarkable contributions to China's regaining its seat in the United Nations. In the 35 years, the Sierra Leonean government has firmly upheld the 'One China' policy, resolutely resisted Taiwan's attempt to enter any international organization that allows only sovereignty countries, strictly opposed any means of Taiwan independence, and strongly supported China's reunification. In the latter part of 1989, China encountered a serious political turbulence known as 'Tian'anmen Square Incident'. At that critical moment Chinese people facing difficulties and sanctions from outside, your esteemed government determinedly sent a special envoy of President to China to express Sierra Leone's support, which in great extent helped the Chinese people break sanctions. We will never forget that, many leaders of Sierra Leone have paid visits to China, no matter President Stevens, President Momoh, or President Kabbah. All of them have contributed to the traditional Sino-Sierra Leonean friendship. Certainly, never will China forget the valuable support and assistance rendered by the government of Sierra Leone on international affairs.

In China, there is an old saying, 'Give good wine in return for a peach', which means to return present for present. In the 35 years, the Chinese government and people always remember the true friendship with the Sierra Leonean government and people, and have been endeavored to provide assistance without any political string to our Sierra Leonean brothers and sisters. During 1970s and 1980s at a time when China itself had severe economic difficulties, Chinese people would rather scrape and save by ourselves than stop assisting Sierra Leone. 11 years civil war has not only taken away many innocent lives of Sierra Leone, but also badly damaged its infrastructure. As a result, the national economy stood still, and Sierra Leone became one of the least developed countries, which in some way unfavorably influenced the development of Sino-Sierra Leonean relations. However, even during that

abnormal period, China overcame difficulties and continually provided assistance in its power to Sierra Leone, including military assistance, which was believed to have played an important role in the consolidation of the current power. As the Permanent Member in the UN Security Council, China has resolutely safeguarded the basic interests of Sierra Leone on resolutions concerning with Sierra Leone. And China has also assigned military observers participating in the UN peacekeeping operation in Sierra Leone.

In January 2002, the civil war of Sierra Leone eventually came to an end, with peace restored and rehabilitation started. Sharing with the Sierra Leonean people the joy of the victory, the Chinese people actively took part in the post-war reconstruction of Sierra Leone. Chinese companies renovated and managed Bintumani Hotel and Magbass sugar complex by lease, and became some of the earliest foreign companies investing in Sierra Leone after the civil war. The Agricultural Technical Team and National Stadium Maintenance Team were rapidly sent to Sierra Leone, and soon many buildings, such as RSLAF Headquarter, Youyi Building, and Parliament House, started renovation. In terms of backing the Food Security Strategy advocated by President Kabbah, the Chinese government donated some tractors and agricultural machines, and prepared to send agricultural technicians to Sierra Leone under the framework of tripartite cooperation. Chinese companies are encouraged and supported to invest in Sierra Leone, initiating the industrial and trade zones and participating in the high-tech cooperation. Nowadays, many Sierra Leonean telecom companies all rise to contend for domination. Two Chinese corporations named 'Huawei' and 'ZTE' have been cooperating with Comium, Millicom and Datatel by supplying advanced technologies and equipments. The Chinese participation has enriched the telecom services in Sierra Leone, and caused the drop of mobile phone charges, benefiting local consumers. In 2004, Chinese and Sierra Leonean governments signed the agreement on China's according zero tariff treatment to 187 kinds of products from Sierra Leone. Till the end of 2005, Sino-Sierra Leonean trade volume arrived at around thirty-two million US dollars. China has become the third biggest trade partner of Sierra Leone. Since the establishment of diplomatic ties, the Chinese government has sent 12 medical teams, totaling 169 doctors and

nurses, who have been contributing a lot to the development of medical services in Sierra Leone. At the beginning of this year, I advocated and funded the 'Project of Brightness', which has helped over 70 patients with cataract eye disease and brought brightness to them.

The competition among countries, in the final analysis, is the competition of human resources and national qualities. In order to ease the severe shortage of professionals in Sierra Leone, China has helped train over 200 personnel of various professions in recent two years. This year, besides enrolling 6 Sierra Leonean students to study in Chinese universities, another 10 Chinese governmental scholarship quota is granted to Sierra Leone. Every year, more than 40 Sierra Leonean students study in China.

In short, in the past 35 years, China has helped Sierra Leone with some concrete things. A lot of friends frequently mention this, and I, as the successor, often feel proud of this. Take the Youyi Building where we gather today as an example, it's one of Chinese aid projects. In Sierra Leone, we can see Chinese aid projects here and there as the National Stadium and Dodo Hydroelectric power station, which have become landmarks and witnesses of Sino-Sierra Leonean friendship.

Hereby, on behalf of the Chinese government and people, I would like to convey to former president Mr. Stevens, Mr. Momoh and President Kabbah the highest regards for their remarkable contributions to the development of bilateral relations. My heartfelt thanks also go to the Sierra Leonean government officials, Parliament members, political parties, and friendly people from fields of education, business and so on, who care and support the friendly cooperative relations between China and Sierra Leone. I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to the Chinese people and overseas Chinese who devote themselves to the construction of Sierra Leone and to the friendship between the two countries.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Sino-Sierra Leone friendship stands the test of time and changes in the world

situation for 35 years, and sets a good example for South-South cooperation. The friendly relations between our two countries are mutually beneficial. China and Sierra Leone have become all-weather friends, sincere partner in cooperation and like-minded brothers. Maybe some friends will ask, what are the reasons and secrets of the steady development of Sino-Sierra Leonean relations? Why does China, an oriental big power, come thousands of miles to develop relations with Sierra Leone? Toward these questions, President Kabbah and many other friends have already given wonderful answers on different occasions, but I would like to take this opportunity to seek for answers together with all of friends here from the following two aspects:

First of all, the sound development of Sino-Sierra Leonean relations cannot be achieved without the independent foreign policy of peace consistently pursued by the Chinese government. China adheres to the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, and advocates equality among countries, be it large or small, rich or poor. China respects the sovereignty and territorial integrity of African countries, respects their independent choices of the road of development, respects African people's national dignity and emotion, and provides all along assistance without any political precondition, which has won the praise and appreciation from African brothers and sisters. The reason that China prefers to do so is that China shares similar historic experiences with Sierra Leone. Chinese people are keenly aware of the suffering and disaster brought by colonialism and long-term civil war, and thus we truly understand and sympathize the current situation and difficulties of Sierra Leone. As early as more than 2000 years ago, an ancient Chinese philosopher Confucius, once put forward a famous saying, 'do not impose on others what you yourself do not desire'. Similarly, Chinese will not impose its own will or developing model on other countries, nor will China pursue the so-called 'neo-colonialism' at any place in the world.

The path China embarks upon is the one of peaceful development. In essence, it means that China seeks to develop itself by working hard to sustain a peaceful international environment and promote world peace through its own development. China mainly relies on its own strength, reform and innovation to

achieve development. At the same time, it remains open to the outside world. China conducts exchanges and cooperation with other countries on the basis of equality and mutual benefit for the sake of common development. China's history and cultural traditions, its need for development and the global trend all determine that China should unswervingly pursue the path of peaceful development. This is by no means expediency. Rather, it is a fundamental choice and solemn commitment made by the Chinese government and its people.

Nowadays, some media mislead that China's developing relations with Sierra Leone aims at grabbing natural resources of Africa, reproaching China for impeding African countries' endeavor in democracy, human rights and good governance. In my opinion, all these censures are groundless. These view-holders should come to Sierra Leone to learn the history of Sino-Sierra Leonean relations. Only after listening to the real feelings of the Sierra Leonean government and people, could they come to a conclusion. After all, 'facts speak louder than words'. Whether a country will pose threat to the world does not lie on its economic and military power, but lie on its foreign policy. Sino-Sierra Leonean cooperation is open, transparent, equal and mutually beneficial. China's effort to develop friendly relations with Sierra Leone is not targeted at any third country, nor will such effort undermine any other country's interests. China sincerely hopes that Sierra Leone will make more friends in the world, and the international community will render more care and support to Sierra Leone's efforts in rebuilding its country. We hope the Sierra Leonean people will enjoy the right for survival and development, and live a decent and better life just like the other peoples do in the global village.

Some people are worried that China may scramble for energy and resources in Sierra Leone. I am afraid they worried too much. There is no need of reticence that China is in need of energy and resources, but it is trying every possible way to obtain that in the international market through a normal channel. Till now, China has not mined even one carat diamond or rutile or any other mineral product in Sierra Leone. Both Chinese and Sierra Leonean friends feel regret for this. As an old Chinese saying puts it, 'just as distance

tests a horse's strength, time will show a person's sincerity'. What on earth will China do in Sierra Leone and where will the bilateral relations go, time will give the correct answer.

In the current world, the connections of mutual cooperation and competition, mutual independence and reliance have reached an all-time high. Therefore, to strengthen the mutually beneficial cooperation between China and Sierra Leone is in keeping with the trend of the economic globalization. I would like to share with every friend here some messages: according to incomplete statistics, China currently has approved the establishment of over 500,000 foreign-financed enterprises and has used 270 billion US dollars of foreign funds. To date, corporations from 190 countries and regions worldwide have invested in China, including 450 of the Fortune global top 500 multinational corporations. By the end of last year, foreign-funded companies in China had employed over 2.4 million Chinese people. Since 1990s, foreign corporations have recorded more than 200 billion US dollars in post-tax profits in China. By comparison, China's overseas investment is too trivial to mention, still less is that in Sierra Leone, indeed nothing to be surprised. Both Ambassador Sahr Johnny and I should feel regretful for not having introduced more Chinese companies to invest in Sierra Leone.

Secondly, the steady development of Sino-Sierra Leonean relations benefits considerably from the friendly policy advocated by the Sierra Leonean government and the sincere friendship cherished by the Sierra Leonean people.

The decision made by the former President Mr. Stevens to break off diplomatic bonds with Taiwan, and establish diplomatic relations with China, fully demonstrated his foresight and wisdom as a statesman. This wise decision has surely brought good fortune to later generations, exerting a far-reaching influence. Since the establishment of diplomatic relations, no matter what changes are there in the international arena, or no matter how the national situations vary, there has been no swing on the One-China Principle by every Sierra Leonean government and leader. Since President Kabbah assumed

office, he continually sticks to the friendly policy towards China, and counts China as the true friend and important partner of development. Bilateral cooperation has been consistently expanded, and the relations between our two countries have entered a new stage. On the issue of China's reestablishing diplomatic relations with Liberia, President Kabbah and Vice President Berewa have made special contributions, which Chinese people will always bear in mind, and history will forever cherish.

Since my taking up the post, I have been living and working in a friendly cooperative atmosphere. Although the living standard here is not very high, local people are friendly and warm-hearted. So far, never do I have the feeling of loneliness. During my visit to the three provinces this May, I was received with great hospitality by local government and people. When I saw some pupils and villagers lining along the road and dancing with joy to welcome me, I was deeply impressed and moved. Once again I experienced the pure and sincere feelings from the Sierra Leonean people. Just as described, our friendship is like a towering big tree, well established and vigorously developed. The Chinese people will forever cherish the sincere friendship with the Sierra Leonean people, and will as usual, work hand in hand and shoulder to shoulder with the Sierra Leonean people, share the comforts and hardships together, and help each other in a bid to achieve common development.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since the founding of New China, especially since its reform and opening-up 28 years ago, China has scored phenomenal progress in its economic development. Historic breakthrough has been realized in social production and comprehensive national strength, and people's living standard has generally reached the level of a well-off society. Currently, Chinese people are working jointly and arduously for the grand goal of building a moderately prosperous society in an all-around way. An overall plan has been drawn up for China's future development of economy. Our major targets are as follows: by 2010, the per-capita GDP should double that of 2000, and per-unit GDP resource consumption should reduce by around 20 percent that of 2005. By 2020, China's GDP will quadruple that of 2000, reaching around 4 trillion US dollars

with a per-capita GDP of around 3000 US dollars.

Nevertheless, we are clearly aware that China remains and will remain for a long period in the initial stage of socialism that features a huge population, weak economic basis and uneven development. At present, China's gross economic volume is at the forefront worldwide, yet China has 1.3 billion people to feed up, and per-capita GDP ranks below the 100th place. Still, there are a lot of problems and difficulties on the way ahead. Being the biggest developing country, China's modernization remains a long and uphill journey that entails many years of hard work.

During the process of building our country, we will continually hold high the banner of peace, development and cooperation, firmly pursue the independent foreign policy of peace, unswervingly follow the road of peaceful development, persist with the opening-up policy of mutual benefit, and join hands with other peoples to build a harmonious world with lasting peace and common prosperity.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are delighted to note that under the leadership of President Kabbah, and with the support from the international community, Sierra Leone has made remarkable achievements in the process of post-war reconstruction. Despite the unfavorable conditions as the rising of oil price and so on, Sierra Leone's GDP keeps growing by over 6 percent in the past three years. In 2005, it even reached 7.3 percent, really terrific. On the other hand, we should objectively admit that Sierra Leone still faces great challenges in its development endeavor. Piles of problems come up especially the backwardness of the fundamental infrastructure like water, electricity and road, which has severely restricted the economic rehabilitation and social progress. Many local people are living extremely hard lives. As a consequence, social contradictions become intensified. Having the similar past, China knows well how difficult it will be to resume development and alleviate poverty under the current situation. However, time and tide wait for nobody. The one, who will not forge ahead, will surely be left behind. There is no other choice except to press forward in spite

of the difficulties. We sincerely hope that your esteemed government will unite with all the forces that can be united, bring every domestic and foreign positive factors into full play with a view to accelerating the national rehabilitation. We firmly believe that, with the assistance of the international community, the Sierra Leonean government and people will overcome temporary difficulties, eventually shake off poverty, build up fortune and win in the real sense independence and dignity, provided that the Sierra Leonean government can appropriately handle the problems of good governance and anti-corruption, further liberate and develop the productive forces, and be strongly determined to work hard for 5, 10 or even 20 years.

During this historic process, the Chinese people will as always provide assistance within our capacity. As China grows stronger, China will accordingly increase its assistance to Sierra Leone. At present and in the near future, China will keep promoting its cooperation with Sierra Leone to make bilateral relations more friendly and pragmatic in the following aspects:

First of all, China and Sierra Leone should deepen mutual political trust, and continually count each other as good friends, good partners and good brothers. Mutual political trust serves as the fundamental element of bilateral relations. We should keep the high level exchanges and other forms of close contact, and enhance the bilateral communication and cooperation between governments, parliaments and political parties, with the aim to consolidate the political basis of our friendship. In the past, China didn't interfere in the internal affairs of Sierra Leone, nor will China do so in the future. We respect the political system and development strategy the Sierra Leonean people have adopted based on their national conditions and their own wills. We will unswervingly persist in this principle, and wish Sierra Leone will peacefully and steadily realize the transmission of its highest power in the election of 2007.

Secondly, China will, as always, keep in touch with Sierra Leone on the international and regional affairs, and conduct close consultation upon important issues concerning each other's sovereignty, national security and others.

Thirdly, China will be dedicated to expanding economic cooperation and promoting common development with Sierra Leone. Economic cooperation brings strong impetus for the development of bilateral relations. Still, great potential lies in our economic and trade cooperation. Both sides should make full use of the complimentary advantages and expand the cooperation so as to open a new chapter for bilateral cooperation. China is willing to promote mutually beneficial cooperation in the fields of agriculture, energy, telecommunication, human resources and capacity building and so on. The nongovernmental friendly exchanges should be strengthened as well.

Concretely speaking, China has decided to take the following steps: the first step is to accomplish the upgrading and rehabilitation of the Dodo Hydroelectric Station with good quality and no delay to make it possible to provide more electricity to the eastern and southern provinces. Now relevant equipments are under manufacturing, and other preparation work goes on well. CNEEC promises that they will guarantee to generate power by the next rainy season on condition that the government of Sierra Leone seriously carries out the contract. By then, the capacity of Dodo Hydroelectric Station will rise from 4000kw to 6000kw, which will greatly ease the severe shortage of power in the two provinces, and definitely help the development of processing industry. If both sides agree, the second-phase project can be started. In that case, the generating capacity will be further enhanced, and the whole-year generation will be realized.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

China has suffered a lot from the shortage of electricity. Even currently, this problem is still very serious, which has greatly limited the rapid development of China's economy. Therefore, China fully understands the eager feeling and the unremitting efforts by President Kabbah and your esteemed government to totally solve the severe problem of electricity shortage by constructing the Bikongor Station. And China is willing to lend a hand in this regard. The fact that China has successfully accomplished the Three Gorges Project can absolutely prove its ability to take up this project in the aspects of technology

and equipments. And CNEEC has conducted feasibility studies on this project. However, this project may take a long time and big cost. At present, both sides have met difficulty in financing, restraining the process of this project. Towards this cooperation, China adopts sincere, pragmatic and open attitude, and would like to hold discussions with the Sierra Leonean side and other cooperative partners with the aim to find a practical and feasible solution to launch this significant project as early as possible.

The second one is related to the project of Bo stadium that China has promised to help construct. Now the design of construction drawing is nearing completion. The Chinese side will strive to commence work late this year or early next year as long as the Sierra Leonean side accordingly accomplishes the auxiliary work. Besides, the project of the office building for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation will start at the beginning of next year. In the meantime, China will continually carry out the cooperative projects now implementing in Sierra Leone, such as National Stadium Maintenance Project, and other projects in the fields of agriculture, medicine and health. I would like to take this opportunity to announce a piece of good news that the Chinese government has decided to donate a batch of anti-malaria medicines to the Sierra Leonean government as assistance, and will be responsible to send them by air to Freetown. What's more, China is actively exploring the possibilities of cooperative projects like cassava planting and processing, the upgrading and transformation of Sierratel equipments and so on.

Thirdly, China will try to bring into full play the special role of the industrial and trade zones and encourage more and more Chinese companies to invest in Sierra Leone.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The year 2006 is an extraordinary year in the history of Sino-Sierra Leonean relations for its first half has witnessed the visits of Hon. Vice President Berewa and other three delegations to China. These visits have helped push forward the development of the friendly relations of our two countries. Today, we are here together to celebrate the big event of 35th anniversary of the

establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Sierra Leone. At the start of November this year, we will expect President Kabbah to attend the Beijing Summit and the Third Ministerial Conference of the Forum on China-Africa cooperation at the invitation of Chinese President Mr. Hu Jintao. This summit plans to hold discussions on how to assist African countries to implement the new partnership for Africa's development, to realize the millennium development goals, and the development of the new-type of China-Africa strategic partnership. At that time, some pragmatic and cooperative new policies and measures will be hopefully adopted. All of this will surely bring new impetus to China-Africa friendly cooperation, and push our friendly cooperative relations to a new level. We believe the blossom of our traditional friendship will be more bright and colorful.

At the end of my speech, let us wish China and Sierra Leone long-standing prosperity and our two peoples all the happiness. May the friendship between our two countries last forever.

Thank you for your attention.