



**Government of Sierra Leone**  
**Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

*Sierra Leone to Host ECOWAS Conference on Autonomous Weapons Systems*

**FREETOWN, [29<sup>th</sup> February 2024]** -The Government of Sierra Leone will be hosting an ECOWAS Regional Conference in Freetown on 17-18 April 2024 focused on advancing the global conversation on fashioning a legally binding instrument on the use of autonomous weapons. There is a growing call to finalise negotiations on a legally binding instrument to regulate autonomous weapons systems, particularly the latest UN Secretary-General's policy brief on a new agenda for peace launched in July 2023 that calls for negotiations to be concluded by 2026. Following this, Sierra Leone along with a group of like-minded champion countries drafted and tabled the UN General Assembly resolution 78/241 on autonomous weapons that was adopted after 152 countries voted in favour on 22 December 2023. The resolution recognizes the *“serious challenges and concerns”* raised by *“artificial intelligence and autonomy in weapons systems,”* and supports the UN Secretary General's call by creating a process for all states to submit their views and suggest pathways towards the launch of international negotiations.

Sierra Leone's active participation in regional and international forums, coupled with its commitment to upholding international agreements, including the Arms Trade Treaty in 2021, has been hailed by many countries. The conference, occurring at the onset of Sierra Leone's tenure as an elected member in the non-permanent category of the UNSC for the first time since 1971 under the leadership of His Excellency President Dr. Julius Maada Bio, is an opportunity for Sierra Leone to advocate for a multilateral rules-based world order to advance global peace and security

“Drawing from our experience, which mirrors the experiences of many African countries that have suffered and continue to suffer the scourge of armed violence and internal disturbances due to inadequate regulation of international weapons systems, Sierra Leone has become a champion country advocating for the effective implementation of national, regional, and international weapons control efforts,” notes Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Mr. Musa Timothy Kabba.

With the theme, Peace and Security Aspect of Autonomous Weapons Systems: an ECOWAS Perspective on a path forward towards the negotiation process of a legally binding instrument, the

---

initiative for the conference was spearheaded by Sierra Leone's Permanent Mission in Geneva. The mission successfully secured funding for the event, paving the way for critical deliberations on the pressing issues surrounding autonomous weapons systems within the ECOWAS framework.

The development of autonomous weapons has been described as the third major revolution in warfare, following gunpowder and nuclear weapons, and will have profound consequences for all of humanity. Beyond military use, there is a concern that terrorists and criminal nonstate actors may employ autonomous weapons to create mayhem and undermine state authority. African states with weak security infrastructures are particularly vulnerable. International regulations governing the development and use of autonomous weapons are currently lacking.

The high-level conference in Freetown will be organized in collaboration with the Freetown-based Centre for Accountability and Rule of Law, which will provide logistical support to the GoSL. Serving as a platform for candid discussions among ECOWAS Member States and observers, the conference will delve into the implications of autonomous weapons on global security, human rights, and international humanitarian law. Its objective is to encourage Member States to prioritize substantive human control and generate momentum towards a common position on an international agreement for the regulation of these weapons. The conference will convene senior government officials from member states, heads of multilateral and regional institutions, leading civil society organizations, and field experts. It will further showcase the country's leadership and commitment to regional and global peace and security.

Stay tuned for additional information and regular updates on the conference.

-END-

---