

## **50/50 project launch by EU Ambassador**

Dear Chair, Her worship the Mayor, parliamentarians, Distinguished Guests, ladies and gentlemen.

In 2016 the EU presented its Global Strategy for the EU's foreign and security policy. One of its key goals is for the EU to uphold the strength and values of democracy and champion a global order that is based on rules.

The EU places human rights at the centre of its relations with all third countries, including its strategic partners. While firmly based on universal norms, the EU's policy on human rights is carefully designed for the circumstances of each country, not least through the development of country human rights strategies.

For this the EU created a specific funding mechanism called the Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), which supports projects in the area of human rights, fundamental freedoms and democracy outside the EU. Specifically, this instrument is designed to support civil society to become an effective force for political reform and defence of human rights.

The EIDHR is rights-based, encompassing all human rights, whether civil, political, economic, social or cultural and it is for this reason we are here today.

As part of our electoral support to Sierra Leone, recommendations from the EUOM report identifies the need for improving the rights of women in the decision making process. Women comprising of more than half the national population and playing a major role in economic activities are faced with limited participation in politics, legal barriers and limited gender mainstreaming by political parties.

This project is therefore a direct response to the recommendation which serves to catalyse results, build on momentum, and respond to stakeholders' key recommendations, ensuring buy-in and strengthening of local level capacity for sustainable engagement.

In that respect we identified 50/50 Group, a non-partisan organisation, advocating and campaigning for increased political participation and equal representation of women in decision-making processes and initiatives at all

levels in Sierra Leone. Their experience through trainings and advocacy has empowered women and young girls in playing active roles in civic life. Over the years they have built a strong partnership with Search for Common Ground, another EU implementing partner, who are one of the largest conflict transformation organisations in the world.

Over the next 36 months, the proposed action with a budget of € 820,000, targets 225 women politicians including current MP's and councillors, members of the All Political Parties Women Association (APPWA), the female wings of political parties and the leadership of political parties in the three project districts of Kenema, Kambia and Tonkolili.

To ensure we achieve the objectives, the project aims to improve the capacity and confidence of women to participate actively in political and public life; and to create an enabling environment for increased participation and leadership of female members of political parties as decision makers in the political structures.

In concluding, let me congratulate you on the ambition of the project and wish all the partners and their stakeholder's successful implementation that will make real inroads into gender equality, women empowerment and ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels respectively.

It is now my pleasure to officially launch this project.

Thank you.