AS REGIONAL MINISTERIAL CONSULTATIVE MEETING ON EBOLA CONCLUDES ITU LAUNCH BIG DATA AND PLEDGES SUPPORT TO SIERRA LEONE

By Abdul Kuyateh

The International Telecommunications Union (ITU) has launched the Big Data pilot project in the Sierra Leone capital of Freetown on 26th August, 2015, and pledged to support the ICT sector in the country.

Speaking at the Regional Ministerial Consultative Conference on Ebola held on 26 and 27 August 2015 at the Bintumani International Conference under the theme *"Leveraging Information and Communication Technology to Save Lives",* Dr Cosmas Zavazava, Chief of Project Support and Knowledge Management Department of ITU said "…for the next two years Sierra Leone will be provided with assistance giving priority in the areas of capacity building, infrastructure, emergency telecommunications and regulation". ITU, he added, "is committed to help the international community use information and communication technologies for disaster risk reduction and management". Dr Zavazava underscored the contribution of resilience and network redundancy to meaningful socio-economic development and effective disaster preparedness and response. The high-level event contributes to global efforts to save human life particularly by addressing emerging challenges such as the Ebola.

Dr Cosmas Zavazava, Chief of Project Support and Knowledge Management Department of ITU

Declaring the conference open, President Earnest Bai Koroma recognized the roles of key stakeholders of the conference and the contributions made by the national regulatory authority (NATCOM) and the Ministry of Information and Communications. "We applaud the Government of Japan for this singular act of coming to the aid of the world community in utilizing the power of technology to rescue mankind. We also applaud the ITU for deciding to launch this Big Data project as a pilot in Sierra Leone. It was also great that the ITU has committed itself to Sierra Leone in other areas such as emergency communication, regulatory capacity building and infrastructure."

HE the President of the Republic of Sierra Leone, Dr Ernest Bai Koroma, declaring the conference open

The Hon. Minister of Information and Communications of Sierra Leone, Alhaji Alpha Bakarr Kanu, reiterated that the Sierra Leone Government is committed to providing the means by which ICT applications and solutions are available to its citizens at affordable costs. "It is an obligation on the part of the Government of Sierra Leone to provide the enabling regulatory environment that will enhance the growth of the sector and promotion of digital literacy."

The Chairman of NATCOM, Momoh Kemoh Konte, expressed gratitude to ITU for coming to the aid of the country shortly after the outbreak of the epidemic by providing satellite communication facilities that enhanced response and corrdination efforts in otherwise un-accessible parts of the country. *"At the peak of our Ebola scourge, the ITU gave Sierra Leone hand-held satellite phones which we used to reach very remote parts of our country that were not easily accessible. This gesture saved lives and one can imagine how many more lives could have been saved through the use of Information and Communication Technologies in the fight against the EVD.*

The conference, the biggest singular event held in the country since 2014, was co- organized by the ITU and the Government of Sierra Leone in consultation with the Governments of Guinea and Liberia. The meeting provided a platform for sharing information on the Ebola affected countries and officially adopted a strategy to use Big Data and Call Data Records before, during and after the outbreak of epidemics and diseases such as Ebola.

Cross section of delegates