

**Remarks of Ms. Harriett Turay
50/50 Group
National Democratic Institute – Madeleine K. Albright
Grant**

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I am a woman of Sierra Leone. The story of my life reflects a reality that is both good and bad. This reality brought me to the 50/50 Group, and to this honor today. It also bears a glaring similarity to the lives of millions of other courageous and hardworking women across Sierra Leone.

Gender inequality in Sierra Leone is everything and begins even before a child is born. Families and society treat girls and boys differently, with girls facing greater discrimination and having fewer opportunities.

I am the eldest of seven in my family. In her search for a son, my mother ended up having seven daughters, always hoping that the next child would be a boy. My father's relatives pressured him until he married another woman, who indeed gave him a son.

As a little girl, I wanted to be the son my father did not have, so I did everything that boys in Africa do. I climbed trees and hunted with him. My playmates were always boys. Yet, when my half-brother was born, my father's first son, my relationship with my father changed. That affected me greatly.

My home is the Kono district in the Eastern region of Sierra Leone, the center of the diamond industry. As I

grew up, I saw girls I knew, girls my age, taken out of school and given into marriage to wealthy diamond dealers.

In Kono, women are not allowed to become Paramount chiefs, even when they belong to the ruling house. And since independence, Kono has never elected a female member of Parliament. In 1996, when the electoral system used proportional representation, I stood for election. I did not succeed: my name was put down at the bottom of the list, with all the men at the top.

I have a daughter. She has four lovely girls. I want them to have a better bargain when they grow up, better than what I had. So I engage myself in activities that promote women. Currently, I am the National Vice-President of the United Methodist Church Women's

Organisation. We work for women's inclusion in positions of decision-making in the church.

But I want future women – my granddaughters – to have a full role in the life of our nation. I want them to be ministers, Members of Parliament, active participants in government and society. And in truth, I had wanted those opportunities for myself, in my lifetime.

So I was thrilled when I heard of the 50/50 idea. I saw it as an opportunity to work with like-minded people, people who understand my life, and my hope for change.

Working with the 50/50 Group has been a wonderful experience. We are telling our story to women and to men, on talk shows and public meetings, to national officials and

local leaders. It is slow going, but I am convinced and I can see that the wheels are moving.

We are women of Sierra Leone, sharing our troubles and efforts, but also our hopes and dreams, working together, taking small steps, into our future. Your recognition and support mean so much to us. They encourage us, and let us know we are not alone. Thank you Secretary Albright, and thank you NDI.

I would now like to invite to the stage our outgoing Minister of Health and the past President of the 50/50 Group, Mrs. Abator Thomas.

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