

# FIRST COMMERCIAL LAW SUMMIT TO BE HOSTED IN SIERRA LEONE

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Sierra Leone is set to host its first-ever Commercial Law Summit in a bid to map out commercial law reforms to promote business growth and the country's ongoing economic development.

The event, due to take place on 14 March 2017, is being organised by Herbert Smith Freehills, Standard Chartered Bank, the UK Sierra Leone Pro Bono Network and the UK and Sierra Leone governments. It aims to bring together key decision makers to address gaps in commercial law and in the justice system in Sierra Leone, in order to assist the country with its economic growth and recovery from the effects of the Ebola crisis.

As well as a series of keynote speeches and networking opportunities, the one-day event will feature a breakout session with workshops covering seven different topics:

- Dealing with foreign investors
- Taking legal advice
- Public private partnerships
- Court process: sharing best practice
- Arbitration
- Anti-money laundering, anti-bribery and corruption
- Land tenure issues (with a particular focus on the issues arising in agricultural

investments)

Delegates from the judiciary, local government, the diplomatic and development communities, the business sector (local and foreign), and the legal profession, will be invited to formulate practical reform proposals through the workshops.

His Excellency the President Dr Ernest Bai Koroma will open the Summit with a keynote speech. He will be joined by other guest speakers including, Chief Justice Abdulai Hamid Charm, Attorney-General and Minister of Justice Joseph Fitzgerald Kamara, the Judge in Charge of the UK Commercial Court Mr Justice Blair and former UK Lord Chancellor and first Secretary of State for Justice Lord Falconer. The Summit is kindly supported by ROLE UK and UKAid.

There will also be further commercial law and justice sector events hosted across Freetown in the lead-up to the Summit including: best practice workshops for local judges and lawyers; meetings between Sierra Leonean judges and Ghanaian counterparts; clinics and resource development for local law libraries; arbitration training and foreign investment negotiation training, delivered by Herbert Smith Freehills; and David Mackie QC will follow-up his 2015 report identifying ways to improve the Fast Track Commercial Court.

The second edition of *Sierra Leone: An Investor's Guide* will be launched at a reception directly after the Summit. The guide, created by Herbert Smith Freehills, Standard Chartered Bank and Prudential, aims to improve investor confidence in Sierra Leone following the Ebola crisis by presenting an independent, private sector perspective on the country's investment landscape.

For the first time, the guide will be made available online in the form of a mobile-responsive microsite, increasing ease of access for those who are interested in deploying capital in West Africa.

This is all part of a wider long-standing partnership between Herbert Smith Freehills and the Government of Sierra Leone. For more than seven years now, the firm has provided the Government with legal assistance on a pro bono basis to help build its capacity to manage inward investment.

The firm works across a range of government departments and bodies and coordinates with development partners, including DFID, UNDP, the World Bank, and the Africa Governance Initiative. Since the firm's involvement supporting Government, more than 200 people across the firm have delivered over £3 million worth of support.

James Palmer, Chair and Senior Partner at Herbert Smith Freehills, said:

*"Sierra Leone's democratically-elected government continues the task of building the country's infrastructure and delivering economic growth and jobs, turning Sierra Leone's natural wealth into a benefit for its people. The Commercial Law Summit will actively look at ways in which all stakeholders in commercial law and justice can promote responsible and sustainable private sector growth, in line with the national Agenda for Prosperity and Ebola Recovery Strategy. Our longstanding pro bono partnership with the Government of Sierra Leone has seen our lawyers put their skills to good use in supporting the government's response to growing volumes of foreign investment in the country. I and my colleagues are all extremely proud of our partnership with Sierra Leone."*

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