

STATE OPENING OF PARLIAMENT 1



GOVERNMENT OF SIERRA LEONE

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

DELIVERED BY

HIS EXCELLENCY, BRIG (Retd) DR. JULIUS MAADA BIO, GCRSL,

*President of The Republic and Commander-In-Chief of the Republic of
Sierra Leone Armed Forces*

**On the Occasion of the State Opening of the Third Session of
the Fifth Parliament of the Second Republic of Sierra Leone**

In the Chamber of Parliament Building

Tower Hill, Freetown

On Thursday, 28th May 2020 At 10:00am

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Mr. Speaker.

Honourable Vice President.

Honourable Chief Justice,

Ministers of Government,

Honourable Members of Parliament

Your Worship, The Mayor of the Municipality of Freetown

The First Lady,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we assemble in this Great Hall that symbolizes our unity in diversity, I would ask that we rise and observe a moment of silence for our compatriots and all other citizens of the global community who have succumbed to the COVID-19 Pandemic. May their souls and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the Mercy of God/Allah rest in peace.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members of Parliament, today's event is taking place in a sombre atmosphere. It is observed amidst the ravages of COVID-19, not only in Sierra Leone but also the world over. That notwithstanding, I am confident that like the trials of our immediate past, this period provides yet another opportunity for all Sierra Leoneans, irrespective of religion, ethnicity and region of origin to come together for the sake of our common destiny and for the sake of humanity. While it is my prayer and hope that together with the global community, we shall combat and eliminate this global pandemic, it is equally my prayer and hope that the opportunity created for, and by our coming together will engender us to build a Sierra Leone that works for all of us. I salute our Healthcare service providers and all other frontline service providers who

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are working under challenging circumstances to ensure and assure the safety of their compatriots. May God/Allah bless your endeavours.

Mr. Speaker Honourable Members of Parliament

About a year ago, I addressed this Assembly, outlining progress made, major challenges and plans for the next one year. I used that occasion to canvass all Sierra Leoneans to come together to move this country to the next level of admiration. Since that time, considerable progress has been made. We have placed human capital development at the centre of our development imperatives. Two million children, including girls, now have equal access to Free Quality Education, free teaching and learning materials, expanded healthcare services, school buses, and free school feeding in some areas. We have commenced preparation for a national dialogue on purposeful education this country needs for our future development and competitiveness in the global market.

We have strengthened the Sexual Offences Act and introduced tougher penalties for rape and gender-based violence. Guided by my Government's policy of inclusive development, we have broadened financial inclusion and social protection for women and vulnerable populations, and we have put more women at the centre of governance, the security forces, and in the justice sector.

We have recruited and trained more healthcare workers; built and refurbished more healthcare centres and hospitals; introduced a dedicated means of delivering healthcare service delivery across the country.

While challenges persist, we are expanding energy access throughout the country, constructing more roads and bridges at far lower costs than

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before this time, and providing more water treatment and supply facilities in all areas of the country.

Mr. Speaker Honourable Members of Parliament

My Government has launched the medium-term National Development Plan, increased domestic revenue mobilisation, eased tax burdens on businesses, and introduced business-friendly policies and processes. We are also reviewing agreements and laws that will maximise benefit from our natural resources. Since COVID-19 struck, our Quick Action Economic Recovery Plan has ensured the provision of essential commodities and support for SMEs and vulnerable populations.

We have undertaken extensive public sector and governance reforms, including merit-based recruitment of Civil Servants, without regard to tribe, region of origin or religious belief.

Mr. Speaker and Honourable Members, we have established a solid foundation for building a strong and productive Sierra Leone.

Economic Planning and Development

Mr. Speaker Honourable Members of Parliament

Our Medium-Term National Development Plan for 2019-2023 highlights our integrated commitment to transform the Sierra Leone economy. It is a commitment to deliver on the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals and the 7 Aspirations of the African Union Agenda 2063.

We have developed monitoring and evaluation mechanisms that will enhance transparency and accountability and Government will strengthen its public performance management and service delivery mechanisms

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Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, we thank our Development Partners for supporting development financing and service delivery in the country. As a result of our largely productive partnerships, we have been able to record some favourable welfare indices and increased our ranking in the United Nations Human Development Index.

The Economy

The Ministry of Finance continues to implement bold economic policies and public financial management reforms to stabilize the macroeconomic fundamentals, tackle structural impediments, and boost economic activity.

Before COVID-19, economic growth had recovered, and was increasing at an impressive rate. Inflation had eased down 4 percentage points to 13.9 percent by the end of December 2019, with a projected return to single digits by 2021.

Although exchange rates depreciated slightly due to low levels of exports, there is a decrease in the overall budget deficits, and an increase in Gross international reserves.

Government continues to strengthen its fiscal consolidation efforts as domestic revenues continue to increase while expenditures remain within budgetary limits. Tax administration reforms, taxpayer education; monitoring of taxpayer compliance among other reforms account for increased domestic revenues. Expenditure controls have also helped keep total expenditure within budget.

Government has also strengthened fiduciary oversight of State-Owned Enterprises and strengthened the management of fiscal risks.

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The establishment of the Wages and Compensation Commission is far advanced and the draft Bill has been submitted to Cabinet for approval. The Commission will address equity in pay and compensation and also harmonise the various pension laws in the Public Service.

The Ministry of Finance has strengthened the Internal Audit Function and has laid the 2020 Procurement Regulations before Parliament for ratification. In the medium-term, Government is working on implementing an electronic procurement system. We are now rolling-out the automation of PET forms, which will ensure significant reduction in the processing time for all MDAs. This automation will augment an Electronic Funds Transfer System that will enable real time and paperless processing of transactions between the Accountant General's Department and the Bank of Sierra Leone.

Digital Identity and Financial Inclusion

Mr. Speaker Honourable Members of Parliament

At the 74th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in September 2019, I argued the need for a singular, securitised, and serially numbered identification instrument that can be used for "governance, development planning, financial inclusion, and human rights imperatives", and also "strengthen healthcare planning, health information systems, disease surveillance and monitor public health interventions and outcomes." It will also support the registration of legal instruments, support national security and public safety, payroll data, teacher and healthcare worker recruitment, and much more.

My Government has commenced the nationwide exercise of confirming Personal Details of citizens, resident non-citizens, and the unregistered

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population of Sierra Leone. The development and maintenance of a Permanent Civil Register, will serve as foundation and primary source of information on the population of Sierra Leone. On this note, I will strongly urge every Sierra Leonean Citizen and non-citizens to cooperate with the National Civil Registration Authority.

Social Security

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, NASSIT continues to deliver on its mandate of paying out decent pensions benefits to members and their dependants. The Trust has also invested heavily in real estate, hospitality, and financial sectors of the country. To improve service delivery and enhance process efficiency, NASSIT is replacing its current integrated Biometrics Registration System (BRS) referred to as NAPOS II, with a fully functional Web-Based Integrated Biometric Pension Administration System.

Free quality basic and senior secondary education

My Government continued to allocate 21% of its recurrent budget to the education sector. Working with partners, we have built more classroom blocks and associated facilities. We launched an Education Innovation Challenge to test for creative ideas that would help us improve learning outcomes for basic literacy and numeracy. Five innovations are being piloted in 170 schools nationwide. This initiative will inform the establishment of a National Assessments Unit at the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education that will aim at further improving quality in learning outcomes in schools.

My Government has approved many more schools, recruited and trained more teachers; streamlined professional development, teacher

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attendance monitoring, and grievance-redress processes; and will soon launch a teacher registration and licensing policy. In compliance with the decentralization drive, we have commissioned all 16 District Offices of the Teaching Service Commission. We believe that by increasing our commitments to, and investments in teachers, we can increase the quality of education in our country.

Strengthening tertiary and higher education

Ten technical and vocational institutions are fully operational throughout the country, with curriculum focused on skills training and entrepreneurship education. My Government has also secured support from the Government of Kuwait to fund the construction of six Technical/Vocational Institutes in Falaba, Kerene, Makeni, Port Loko, Mattru Jong and Koindu.

Health care improvement

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, I am pleased to report that for the third successive year, my Government has increased healthcare budget allocations from 7% in 2018 to 10.5% in 2019 and 11% in 2020. We have recruited 2,500 healthcare workers and we will be hiring 3,000 more in 2020 with a focus on Midwives, Pharmacists and Pharmacy technicians, Epidemiologists, Clinical and Surgical Community Health Officers. We have instituted continuing education for nursing professionals. We have also reviewed compensation for healthcare workers right across board.

Mr. Speaker, in line with my commitment to establishing an ultra-modern diagnostic facility in Sierra Leone, I am pleased to announce to this House

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that Cabinet has approved \$19.8 Million for the construction of a National Diagnostic and Radiotherapy Cancer Treatment Centre with modern facilities. This will substantially reduce costs on our overseas medical expenditure and broaden access to more Sierra Leoneans.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, my Government rapidly activated all Emergency Operations Centre pillars. We have instituted international best practices in contact tracing and surveillance. We have deployed science, technology, and innovation in data and call collection, including a telephone based self-diagnostic tool. Other healthcare directives have helped us largely curtail and protect against large scale community infection of COVID-19.

Social protection

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, my Government's commitment to social protection and expanding opportunity is evident in our sustained social cash transfers to extremely poor households; livelihood security and financial support through micro grants and loans; providing entrepreneurship training and start-up capital, youth employment through cash-for-work programmes for vulnerable youths; and peace consolidation through the payment of rehabilitation grants to war widows and victims of sexual violence nationwide among others. In partnership with World Bank financing, we have successfully launched Phase II of the Social Safety Net Project with expanded coverage.

Social Welfare

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Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, the National Task Force on Human Trafficking Secretariat, which is located in the Ministry of Social Welfare, recently secured 2 convictions in the High Court in Freetown – the first ever since the enactment of the Anti-Human Trafficking Act of 2005. The Ministry Social Welfare is providing psychosocial and reintegration support for returning migrants.

My Government remains firmly committed to the protection of the child and fourteen of the sixteen districts are currently using the child protection information management system to document, report and provide guidance on preventing and responding to child abuse cases and other related issues.

Improving the productivity and commercialization of the agricultural sector

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, I noted in my last address to this august body that Agricultural development continues to occupy a strategic position in the Nation's development agenda. It remains a key pillar in the attainment of economic diversification and Social economic development. Over 60 – 70% of our people depend on some sort of Agriculture for their livelihood. We are therefore aware that if we get agriculture right, we will see an immediate multiplier effect in almost every other facet of our development nexus.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, with support from the Boosting Agriculture and Food Security Project, has finalized the development of Cocoa, Coffee and Cashew Policies to support the advancement of the tree crops sector.

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In 2020, Government will support the Ministries of Youth Affairs, Defence, as well as the Correctional Services and the Local Councils to establish institutional farms across the country as part of the drive to boost rice production and productivity in order to achieve rice self-sufficiency in the country.

Another major area of intervention in the agricultural sector is the promotion of animal production which will improve nutrition and provide increased incomes for livestock farmers. Government has renovated the Teko Central Veterinary laboratory and equipped same with modern laboratory facilities for the diagnosis of a majority of the endemic animal diseases prevalent in the country.

Improving the productivity and sustainable management of fisheries and the marine sector

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, my Government is meeting its commitment on instituting effective fisheries management and governance, meeting sustainable biodiversity and conservation goals, and implementing a long-term viability and management plan. To that end, Government has strengthened the policy and regulatory framework through the enactment of the new Fisheries Regulations 2019 and the 2018 Fisheries and Aquaculture Act. This has increased revenue in the sector to an unprecedented Le 100.5 billion.

Government has also developed, validated, and is currently implementing the National Plan of Action to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing. With the support of the Government of the People's Republic of China, the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources is also conducting a comprehensive fish stocks assessment in

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Sierra Leone for three years. Based on precautionary and management principles, The Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources has, for the first time, implemented a one month 'Closed Season' (1st -30th April 2019) for industrial fishing vessels. This conservation measure is part of the Management Plan contributing to the rebuilding of declining fish stocks.

Government has improved the monitoring, control, and surveillance of our territorial waters and continues to monitor all licensed fishing vessels through an upgraded 24-hour Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) and the Automatic Identification System (AIS).

We have effectively engaged the EU Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety in order to facilitate the export of fish and fisheries products.

At the local level, Government, with support from partners, has commissioned improved smoke ovens, raised platforms, cold rooms and WASH facilities for various fishing and other communities right throughout the country.

Revitalizing the tourism sector

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, my Government has identified tourism as one of the clusters for increasing national revenue and job creation, and for achieving economic diversification. To compete as a unique and attractive Tourist destination, we have proclaimed new National Heritage Sites, restored existing sites, constructed jetties at riverine natural/cultural sites and declared several natural and cultural assets as protected areas, sites and property. An Ultra-Modern entertainment complex will soon be constructed to showcase the talent of our artists.

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Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, you will agree with me that the recent “finish line” for the Budapest- Bamako-Freetown Rally coupled with increased tourist arrivals is sufficient indication that the perception of Sierra Leone as a tourist destination is changing for the better.

Oil and Gas Exploration

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, even though the oil and gas industry is experiencing its worst recession in recent history, the Petroleum Directorate ran a robust licensing round for Sierra Leone's open offshore acreage. The process, which attracted 6 international oil and gas companies, was commended by the international oil and gas industry as open, transparent, and credible.

Two companies (Cluff Energy and Innoson Oil and Gas) were selected and awarded provisional Petroleum licenses, after meeting the technical, financial, and commercial requirements set out for the issuance of exploration license for operating in Sierra Leone's deep water basin. My Government will continue working to optimize Sierra Leone' oil and gas potential.

Management of Mineral Resources

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, I am pleased to report that Sierra Leone has completed its first ever nationwide airborne geophysical survey that has provided high resolution airborne magnetic and radiometric data. Supported with funds from the World Bank, Sierra Leone has also

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formulated a comprehensive Geodata Management policy that has been adopted by cabinet.

The Ministry of Mines and Mineral Resources, in collaboration with the National Minerals Agency, has also reviewed standard procedures for all negotiations and agreements between mineral rights holders and local communities through a model community development agreement. More artisanal licenses have been issued with the impact of increased productivity and employment. In addition to the large-scale mining licenses granted, it is expected that operational mines will provide jobs for over 15,000 Sierra Leoneans by the end of 2020.

Overall, we are now formulating the Mines and Minerals Development Act 2020). The new act contains strong provisions for Local content, Community benefits, value addition and other linkages to the mining sector, establishment of metals and precious mineral training houses (owned by the Government of Sierra Leone), Artisanal Mining Area development scheme and more.

Energy

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, with current energy access at 18%, my Government will pursue its overall policy objective of providing adequate, affordable and sustainable power supply nationwide, to stimulate economic development through the consolidation, improvement, and expansion of existing and potential energy supply infrastructure.

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With support from the World Bank under the Energy Sector Utility Reform Project, government is improving the transmission and distribution network in Freetown and its environs and rehabilitating five sub-stations in Brookfields, Congo Cross, King Tom, Lumley and Blackhall Road. Of these substations, three are already completed. The 11KV overhead lines and the old Ring Main Unit, which contributed greatly to line losses, are being replaced. The erection of poles to link these sub stations is also underway. The completion of this project will improve network stability and reduce technical losses in Freetown.

With funding from the Abu Dhabi Fund for Development and my Government, the 6 Megawatt (MW) Freetown Solar Park Project at Newton is at an advanced stage of construction and is expected to be commissioned in September 2020. Similarly, with joint funding from the Department for International Development (DFID) UK and the African Development Bank, government has recently launched projects to rehabilitate, improve, and expand the Transmission and Distribution networks in the townships of Bo and Kenema. The project will replace the ageing distribution network in these cities and also upgrade the 33KV line between Bo and Kenema to a 66KV line for the evacuation of power from the CLSG substation at Teloma in Kenema. The completion of this project will help connect the main communities along the Bo – Kenema highway (Blama, Jembeh, Baoma Station, Yomandu and Gerihun).

Under the Regional electrification project, three CLSG sub stations have been completed in Teloma – Kenema, Binkongo substation at Bumpeh in Kono, and Bumbuna. Construction of the remaining two sub stations at Fadugu and Kamakwie is ongoing. The CLSG project will also connect 39

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rural communities across seven districts along the TRANSCO line under the rural electrification component of the CLSG.

Government is also finalizing arrangements with the International Finance Cooperation of the World Bank Group to establish the Floating Storage Regasification Unit Terminal at the Freetown Harbour. This Terminal will serve both domestic and the regional market for gas supplied to potential users of LNG for power generation at a cheaper rate.

Similarly, government is currently negotiating with a Chinese Firm called SINO HYDRO for the development, construction and commissioning of a 160 Megawatt hydro at Bikongo in Kono District.

With a soft loan of USD\$78 from the EXIM Bank of India, we are committed to the construction of the 225KV Transmission line of 235 Kilometres and 66KV Transmission line of about 90 Kilometres from Yiben in Koinadugu district to Waterloo. The purpose of this project is to evacuate power from the TRANSCO line to the Western area.

With funding from DFID UK, government is currently implementing the Mini Grid project in Sierra Leone. Solar PV Panels have been installed in 54 communities across the country under Work Package One and homes are now being connected. Poles and cables are also being installed in 44 additional communities across the country under Work Package Two of the same project. This project will electrify up to 98 rural communities across the country which will help increase our energy access in line with Goal 7 of the Sustainable Development Goals.

I am pleased to announce that Government, has received grant funding from the Africa Union for the electrification of the Njala University and its

surrounding communities with a hybrid power system of Solar PV mini grid and mini hydro.

Transforming transportation systems

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, my Government remains committed to implementing a National Vehicle Fleet Policy, developing a secure road worthiness test regime and Government Registered Vehicle Database, producing a master plan for ports and harbours throughout the country, exploring multi-modal transportation systems, improving air travel, and providing reliable and effective public transportation system with all relevant infrastructure to ease movement across the capital city, Freetown and the rest of the country.

My Government has started implementing the Integrated Resilient Urban Mobility Project, a \$50 million project, that will provide buses, bus terminals, dedicated bus routes, and significantly improve service quality and travel experience for commuters in Freetown.

My Government has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Regional Maritime University (RMU) in Ghana to facilitate capacity building, skills training, and other relevant technical exchanges.

The Environment

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, my Government is committed to protecting the environment. Specifically, the policy actions we are pursuing include (i) effective environmental governance, (ii) managing

forest resources, (iii) ecosystem conservation and (iv) environmental education.

Improving water infrastructure systems

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, there is an urgent need to review the 2010 National Water and Sanitation Act in order to align it with outcomes and indicators set out in Sustainable Development Goal 6. The draft reviewed policy has been developed and stakeholder consultations will be soon concluded. The policy will be finalized and introduced this year to guide interventions in the water and sanitation sector.

Eight (8) Water Regulations (complaints handling procedures, licensing rules, consumer service, quality of supply, service provider reporting rules, water codes, bottled and sachet water production regulations, certification rules) have been developed, laid before parliament, and are now maturing into law.

Pursuant to Government's commitment to monitor and regulate our water resources, the **National Water Resources Management Agency (NWRMA)**, which was set up by an Act of Parliament in 2017, is now fully operational with appreciable staff compliment and a five-year strategic plan has been developed.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, my Government is pursuing action to ensure improved water supply across the country. Government has provided funding for the reconstruction of water supply systems in six District Headquarter Towns (Moyamba, Pujehun, Kailahun, Kabala, Kambia and Magburaka). Government has provided funding for and will soon commence work on the reconstruction of the Bonthe water supply system.

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In the medium term, DFID has funded feasibility studies and detailed design on the rehabilitation of the Guma Dam, the Water Treatment Plant, Transmission Network, leakage management for distribution network, Spur Road pumping station, extension of the distribution network and refurbishment of the Allen Town water supply system. The World Bank has also funded the Freetown Emergency Recovery Project that will rehabilitate the water treatment plant at the Babadorie Dam, Regent, and the laying of a 4km distribution network in communities close to the mud slide area at Mortormeh. The Government of Sierra Leone has solely funded the Lumley–Aberdeen Beach Road Water Supply Improvement Project which provides service connections to recreational centres and businesses along the beach.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, funding has been secured from the African Development Bank and other partners for improvement of the water supply infrastructure in Freetown for increased access to sustainable water supply, sanitation services and hygiene. This project will also develop water sources in small catchment areas along the Western Peninsular for domestic use.

Additionally, a pilot project is being implemented in Kingtom and Aberdeen which will isolate and meter these two settlements to determine and understand revenue loss or gain from the water supply network. Lessons learnt from this pilot project will be applied to other areas of the city.

The Reconstruction of Water supply systems in Bo, Kenema, and Makeni is nearing completion. Residents are already accessing water from these systems. However, very few households are connected to the system.

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SALWACO is currently accelerating service connections in the three towns. This project is scheduled for commissioning this year.

Government has also completed 406 hand dug wells, 125 boreholes, 22 rain water harvesting systems, 301 public sanitation facilities, 200 rain gauging stations, and 20 surface and ground water monitoring stations across six districts (Koinadugu, Falaba, Kono, Kambia, Pujehun and Bonthe). Additionally, Government has rehabilitated 1100 water points and currently constructing 15 gravity-flow water supply schemes.

Government has made significant investments in WASH in Schools and Health Facilities nationwide. GUMA and SALWACO are aiming at increasing access to Water in Health Facilities at 50 Health Facilities from 65% to 75% and WASH in Schools interventions in about 100 Schools.

Information and communications Technology

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, my Government acknowledges the role of the media in enhancing participatory democratic governance. Journalists should hold government accountable in a responsible and professional manner. To that end, Government is firmly committed to repealing the criminal libel law. Government will also continue its subvention to the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) and to support the professional development of its membership. The Ministry of Information and Communications, in collaboration with the Ministry of Lands and Country planning, will provide land in the capital for the construction of an ultra-modern office facility for SLAJ.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, the Ministry of Information and Communications has put together a draft policy that will cover Public Records and Judicial Records and all public entities of the Republic of

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Sierra Leone that are subject to the Public Archives Act 1965 (as amended in 2015). The Records Management Policy will provide an overarching framework of accountability and responsibility for managing public records according to acceptable standards.

Ministry of Information has also put forward a draft film policy that seeks to facilitate sustained development of the Sierra Leone film industry to meet international standards.

I am pleased to announce that the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC) has extended coverage, targeting 10 community radio stations in rural communities, to compliment SLBC coverage in some areas including Falaba District. We are bringing the government closer to its citizens through monthly outreach activities including town hall meetings, district/regional press briefings, and media engagements at community levels.

Technology and Innovation

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, the Directorate of Science, Technology and Innovation (DSTI) was established to use science, technology, and innovation to support the Government of Sierra Leone to deliver effectively and efficiently on its national development plan; and to help transform Sierra Leone into an innovation and entrepreneurship hub.

One year after its launch in October 2018, the team at DSTI has led and implemented projects that provide data that informs or drives policy, and supports government service delivery. DSTI's work has promoted global partnerships, ecosystems strengthening, data collection and analysis, and has produced a National Innovation and Digitalisation Strategy.

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Among DSTI's many achievements are a Free Quality Education Data Hub, a Government of Sierra Leone USSD service, a Human Capital Development Incubator, an Integrated GIS solution for the Government of Sierra Leone, the Electronic Expenditure Management System, the National Drone Corridor, the Governance Digitization Initiative, Ease of Doing Business Tracker, and an Economic Data Analytic Tool. Clearly, the impact of all of these on various sectors of governance, service delivery, the economy, and private sector growth, has been transformative.

With respect to the COVID-19 pandemic, DSTI has been fully embedded with the Emergency Operations Centre in providing technology solutions including diagnostic USSD tools, E-passes, the Situation Room, and various information management systems.

Fostering private sector growth and manufacturing

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, my Government is committed to upscaling Sierra Leone's performance at Doing Business Reforms. Government has set up a technical committee comprising policy makers and development partners. A tracker tool has been implemented to help the Government monitor the implementation of investment climate reforms. There is also focused cross-ministry and cross-sectoral work on improving benchmarks, whether in areas of demurrage time, tax holidays and weekends, and downward reviews of duties on essential commodities.

Additionally, Government intends to engage the Chambers of Commerce on the need to restructure the private sector and to also accelerate work on automating business systems and processes.

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My Government has identified sustained entrepreneurship development as a key driver of the economy. The Ministry of Trade and Industry will further seek to explore the benefits of market access and linkages provided for in trade agreements, including the Africa Growth and Opportunities Act of the United States (AGOA) and the new Africa Continental Free Trade Agreement. To that end, the AGOA Response Strategy, The “Made in Sierra Leone Strategy”, the SME strategy, and The National Trade facilitation Strategy have been developed.

I am pleased to announce that SONOCO, a Guinean based Company, is targeting to invest over 20 Million USD in establishing a **Flour Mill** in Sierra Leone with a capacity of 2,500 metric tonnes a day. They also have a long-term goal of setting up a factory to manufacture machinery for baking.

We will simplify border procedures in collaboration with neighbouring countries in order to facilitate cross-border trade in basic commodities up to products by emerging tech-based companies. The Mano River Union is a niche market of 45 million people. We will utilize this niche for the benefit of our people.

With regard to the regulatory environment, Government has launched the Corporate Governance Code, and ratified the African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement. Cabinet has also approved the National Trade Facilitation Committee. My Government is currently reviewing relevant regulations to facilitate business and maximize our competitiveness in doing business.

Political development for national cohesion

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Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, my Government engaged a representative stakeholder group at the Bintumani 3 Conference. The Communique called for the establishment of a National Commission for Peace and National Cohesion in Sierra Leone.

Citizen engagement is underway and a draft bill will be tabled for the establishment of the Independent Commission for Peace and National Cohesion.

Fighting corruption and illicit financial flows

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, our fight against corruption will be sustained because it is good for governance, for business, and for the image of this country. Sierra Leone continues to perform exceptionally well in all global scorecards. We have passed the Millennium Challenge Corporation's indicator for corruption from 49% when I assumed office to 71% at the end of 2018 and a further 79% in 2019. Today, Sierra Leone is one of the top ten performers in the Lower Income Countries scored. The Transparency International's Global Corruption Ranking Report 2019 published early this year has seen Sierra Leone register its highest ever score since the establishment of the Global Corruption Perception Survey. We have similarly continued to do remarkably well in other global corruption perception indices like Afro barometer, The Mo Ibrahim Index, and Freedom House.

The Anti-Corruption Commission continues to pursue corruption investigations vigorously with a very high conviction rate. It has also recovered nearly Le21billion in the past 18 months under the Non-Conviction Asset Based/Asset Recovery under my Leadership. In 2019 the

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Commission recorded recoveries of total over Le11billion. This is more than the total sum ever recovered by the ACC in a single year and it eclipses the previously highest recovery in 2018 (again under my leadership). These total recoveries, within a period of less than two years, remain higher than all recoveries ever made by the ACC in its entire 18 year existence.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, in fulfilment of the declaration I made in Parliament during the State Opening of Parliament in 2018, a Special division of the High Court has now been established to try corruption cases and five dedicated judges have been assigned by the Honourable Chief Justice to hear and speedily dispose of corruption cases.

I am grateful to Parliament for supporting my call to make Corruption a High Risk and Low Return Venture and for passing the Anti-Corruption Amendment Act 2019 to which I quickly assented.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, Sierra Leone remains fully committed to its national and international obligations to interdict illicit financial flows in all sectors and will continue to support the work of Audit Service Sierra Leone in verifying and attesting reports submitted by Government agencies on the EITI process. In addition, my Government will continue its strong support for the full scope of work of Audit Service Sierra Leone as part of its accountability framework.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, as you are all aware, the Commissions of Inquiry Reports have been formally submitted to Government and the Government intends to take further action within the period permitted in law.

Public Safety and Law and Order

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Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, public safety is a necessity for peace, stability, and governance. My Government has invested in strengthening the capacity of the Ministry of Internal Affairs by establishing and supporting institutions, procedures, and policies critical to the success of its mission.

We have improved the accountability framework of the various directorates and service delivery institutions of the Sierra Leone Police. We are committed to the reinstatement of the Coroner's Office.

Defence

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, I remain fully committed to improving the general welfare of service men and women of the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF). With the support of the Government of the People's Republic of China, the reconstruction of a state-of-the-art Myohaung Officers' Mess that includes a 104-bedroom Single Officers complex is under way. Plans are also underway to construct appropriate housing and billets for young soldiers.

My government has also approved the procurement of appropriate peacekeeping equipment to enable our troops to participate in United Nations and Africa Union peacekeeping and peace support operations.

Government will support the Armed Forces Agricultural Unit with machinery and training to enable the RSLAF to support land irrigation activities and also produce sufficient rice to feed itself.

We will establish a full-scale Army Engineering Unit to not only enhance the combat engineering capacity of the RSLAF, but also to equally compete for bids for civil engineering projects for feeder roads that enable

farmers to bring their products to market. Additionally, we will expand the mandate of the Armed Forces Technical Education College (AFTEC) to integrate a teaching corps; and restructure and establish an expanded Joint Medical Service at formation level to provide quality medical services to service personnel, their dependants and the wider communities. This would require the targeted recruitment of trained and qualified health service providers.

Promoting inclusive and accountable justice institutions

Government will promote inclusive, equal, accessible and accountable Justice institutions and practices.

Building public trust in state institutions

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, My Government believes that the National Decentralisation Act (2010) and the Local Government Act (2004) should be reviewed to reflect the development aspirations of Sierra Leone. Accordingly, we have commenced work on reviewing relevant laws and policy documents. This will include resuscitating and pursuing work on the National Constitutional Review process.

Youth employment and Youth entrepreneurship

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, My Government sees young people as key drivers of development. We regard Youths as “partners today and leaders of tomorrow.” Government has therefore increased the participation of young people in decision-making processes and leadership roles. To that end, my Government has established 190 Chiefdom and 16 district Youth Councils nationwide.

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Government has developed capacity and entrepreneurial skills with a skills development project and a skills development fund component, a graduate internship programme, youth demonstration farms, youth business groups, and the setting up of a youth entrepreneurship and employment project.

Government has also established opportunities for thousands of youth with the construction of Car wash centres, youth farms, fisheries projects, and the youth service schemes.

Sports

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, my Government reactivated football after years in limbo and committed Le3.5 billion in start-up funding. The Premier League generated employment and revenues in excess of Le1.7 billion. The National Sports Authority which is mandated to develop sports in Sierra Leone has also been fully constituted. Government also supported the Zizo Under 14 football club as it participated in Spain in 2019. Our teams also participated in the All Africa Games in Rabat and the West African Football Union for Men and Women. Several national sporting opportunities in football and volleyball have also been activated.

Foreign Policy

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, my Government has focused on strengthening external relations and heightening Sierra Leone's integration into the global arena as a viable and respected partner. It is a **foreign policy outline** aimed at ensuring the realization of our core national interests, whilst reaffirming our commitment to continue serving as a credible member of the international community.

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We will build and strengthen our bi-lateral relations as well as fully recognize and participate in multi-lateral institutions.

Expanding our presence abroad is a pivotal element of our National Development Plan. My government has established an embassy in Turkey, and preparations are in progress to do the same in Morocco as well as reopen an embassy in France. In the same vein, India, United Arab Emirates and Iceland have communicated their interest to establish embassies in Sierra Leone. As part of the expansion, the Ministry has redefined the relationship with consuls and facilitated the appointment of a Global Icon as Brand Ambassador to further external relationships.

My Government continues to amplify its presence at the multilateral platforms but most importantly, heightened engagement on the reform of the United Nations Security Council. As Coordinator of the Committee of Ten (C-10) Heads of State and Governments, the Ministry organised what has been termed as the most successful C10 Ministerial meeting in Dakar Senegal in January this year. This meeting, which brought together 7 out of 10 Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the C10 member countries, was acclaimed as the most participatory meeting and a grand success. My peers across the continent have inundated me and my team with congratulatory messages for hosting a successful international conference and for providing quality leadership in canvassing the common African Position in the reform process.

At other multilateral platforms, my Government launched the Sierra Leone ‘Walking Out of Fragility’ initiative on the margins of the High-Level Political Forum in New York in July 2019. The objective is to transform Sierra Leone into a strong middle-income economy where peace is

guaranteed, democracy is irreversible, and growth is sustained in spite of shocks from global economic crises, disease outbreaks, and/or natural disasters.

The Ministry is now in the process of facilitating the enactment of a Foreign Service law, which gives it the latitude to significantly improve and sustain the quality of foreign representation and service delivery. This Law will provide the legal provisions for the establishment of the Diplomatic Academy. Already, I am pleased to announce that the establishment of a state-of-the-art training facility for our foreign service has received cabinet approval and construction is in progress.

The welfare of Sierra Leoneans living abroad is central in my administration. Apart from the general assistance provided by the Ministry, specific support, including but not limited to repatriation, as and when required, is also extended by our embassies and missions.

In view of advisories around the unique circumstances in which we find ourselves as a nation, I wish to inform Honourable Members that a fuller version of my statement today will be tabled in this house.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable members, let me conclude with an appeal to wield the best in us for making Sierra Leone what it ought to be. Let us be focused and stay energised in a national bid to make Sierra Leone better. Let us embrace peace and lend our unconditional support to ensuring that we leave behind the dark days of strife and hatred. Let us love one another and translate that love into serving our country. Together, let us build a Sierra Leone that works for all of us, and for humanity. I pray that God/Allah will guide and Bless our best endeavours. God bless the Republic of Sierra Leone – the land that we love.