

MR. SPEAKER,
HONOURABLE VICE-PRESIDENT,
HONOURABLE CHIEF JUSTICE,
MINISTERS OF GOVERNMENT
HONOURABLE MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT,
EXCELLENCIES, MEMBERS OF THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS
DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

Let me start by thanking the people of this great country for giving me the opportunity to address this honourable House for the first time as President of the Republic of Sierra Leone. My victory is not only for myself or the Sierra Leone People's Party, but also for the people of this great nation. This historic victory demonstrates the advancement that the people of Sierra Leone has made in consolidating our nascent democracy.

2. I am here this morning to translate my campaign promises as articulated in the New Direction People's Manifesto into policy actions. The underlying principles of the New Direction are **Disciplined Leadership, Integrity, Efficiency, Professionalism and Delivery**. I am making this address against the backdrop of the worse economic situation that this country has faced since independence and characterized by double-digit inflation, low domestic revenue mobilization, high domestic debt burden, unsustainable external debt, and huge arrears to contractors. Therefore, taking tough policy actions is imperative to tackle the current serious economic situation that we have inherited.

The Economy

3. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, real economic growth rate slumped to 3.5 percent in 2017 from 6.3 percent in 2016 largely due to the slow down in mining activities especially iron ore and diamonds. Growth of the non-iron ore economy also slowed to 3.4 percent compared to earlier projection of 4 per cent owing to reduced activities in construction and trade sectors. In 2017, while agriculture sector including fisheries and services grew by 4.6 percent and 4.8 percent respectively, but mining and quarrying plummeted by 16 percent.

4. Mr. Speaker, to reduce the vulnerability of our country to external shocks, my administration will reduce its reliance on minerals. To this end, I will diversify sources of economic growth with special focus on agriculture, marine and tourism.

Agriculture

5. The recent past efforts in agriculture have not produced the desired results. Despite the large acreage of arable land, Sierra Leone continues to be a net importer of rice. The Budget Statement 2018 estimated rice import at US\$108 million for the first half of 2017. For 2018, this figure is projected to be at least US\$200 million. According to the 2015 Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis study conducted by the World Food Programme (WFP) and Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), 49.8 percent of households were food insecure in 2015 compared to 45 percent in 2010. That is, they consumed limited or insufficient food to maintain a healthy and active life. Global Hunger Index 2017 ranks Sierra Leone as the third hungriest country in the world with percentage of population that is undernourished estimated at 38.5 percent compared to 28.6 percent in Guinea and 16.2 percent in Ghana.

6. In the New Direction, the overall goal of our agricultural policy is sustainable and diversified production of food on a scale enough to feed the growing population as well as providing gainful employment. Our immediate priority actions will focus on (i) attracting and increasing investment in agriculture (ii) sustainable investment in mechanized commercial agriculture (iii) increasing food crop production (iv) increasing and diversifying cash crop production (v) increasing livestock production (vi) improving irrigation water management (vii) improving land management and (viii) improving governance and research.

7. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, investment in agriculture will largely be private sector driven. While my administration is committed to increasing budgetary allocation to the sector to a minimum of 10 percent in the next 2 years in line with the Maputo Accord, we shall rely on private investment in the sector. The political class and urban middle class must demonstrate interest in agriculture. Accordingly, effective 2019, investment in agriculture (including animal husbandry) will be a pre-condition for holding political office. The Office of the President and Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry will work out the details to implement and monitor this policy directive. Additionally, my administration will encourage local banks to lend to the private sector for agricultural purposes.

8. To increase food crop production, my administration will (i) improve the seed bank system to attract reliable private sector players (ii) support the private sector for large scale agricultural production, processing and marketing (iii) support local industries engaged in the fabrication of farm tools and supply for other farm inputs (iv) put mechanisms in place for public and private partnership in tractor management and (v) rehabilitate feeder roads linking farming communities to markets.

10. Mr. Speaker, cash crop constitutes a major source of foreign exchange earnings and job creation. My administration will focus on (i) providing support for rehabilitation of existing plantations and establishment of new ones (ii) adopting the use of improved varieties of cocoa, coffee, cashew, oil palm and non-traditional cash crops (iii) facilitating the establishment of cash crop cooperatives and providing training in processing to ensure our cash crops become competitive for export.

Marine Resources

11. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, Sierra Leone's fisheries resources are estimated to worth over US\$100 million annually. The sector provides direct employment to about 200,000 people and indirect employment to an estimated 600,000 persons along coastlines in Freetown, Kambia, Port Loko, Moyamba and Pujehun. The sector contributes nearly 10 percent to the country's Gross Domestic Product.

12. The critical challenges in the sector are the illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing and the limited accessibility to the international market. As a result, the total annual revenue loss to Sierra Leone is estimated at over US\$ 50 million. The overall policy objective of my New Direction administration is to create a profitable fisheries sector that contributes significantly to socio-economic development through sustainable management and utilisation of our fisheries resources while also conserving the environment. My administration will focus on (i) improving marine resource governance and sustainable management of fisheries (ii) reducing illegal fishing (iii) improving the quality of marine products and (iv) developing fishing infrastructure.

13. To improve on governance in the sector, the priorities of my administration will be on (i) strengthening policy and regulatory framework for the management of marine resources and (ii) promoting transparency by publicising all fisheries management information such as the revenues, license fees, vessels committing infractions and fines paid by vessels.

14. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members of Parliament, it is a necessity that we reduce illegal fishing if we are to increase revenue from the fishing sector. Therefore, the focus of my Government in this regard will be on (i) establishing an enabling legal and regulatory environment for combating illegal fishing and (ii) implementing effective and sustainable surveillance systems.

15. My administration will also take the following measures to promote the attractiveness of our fish products to European Market (i) training in basic hygiene practices and sanitary operating procedures (ii) rehabilitating existing laboratories for improving fish quality and (iii) strengthening the capacity of the competent authority to certify fish and fishery products for export. Additionally, to improve on the infrastructure for fisheries development, my administration will (i) construct a fish harbor with solar-powered cold chain facilities and (ii) construct or rehabilitate existing fish landing sites.

16. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, retailing of fish products is largely the business of women. Accordingly, my administration will facilitate micro-finance support for women engaged in fisheries.

Tourism

17. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, despite its high potential for tourism development, the tourism sector remains one of the most underdeveloped and underfunded sectors of the economy. The critical challenges include lack of a Master Plan for the development of the sector, weak policy and regulatory framework, limited human capacity, poor, infrastructure as well as unfavourable country image.

18. In the New Direction, the strategic objective is to increase revenue, provide jobs and promote the cultural heritage of the country. The specific policy actions will cover (i) improving the policy and legal environment (ii) developing historic sites (iii) developing the relevant Infrastructure (iv) promoting marketing and improving the International Image (v) skills development and (vi) diversification of tourism products.

19. Specifically, improving policy and legal environment will entail reviewing and upgrading all tourism-related laws, regulations and policies to ensure consistency with regional and global best practices, developing a master plan for the tourism sector and establishing a Tourism Information Register (TIR).

20. My administration will rehabilitate and develop historic and cultural sites, establish Public-Private Partnership to manage historic sites, designate tourist attraction areas and provide them with the needed infrastructure including water, electricity and communications and develop tourist infrastructure (such as beach resorts, eco villages and research camps).

21. In the area of promoting marketing and improving the international image of Sierra Leone, my administration will (i) develop an improved web portal for tourism promotions (ii) participate in international tourist activities and (iii) collaborate with our Embassies/Missions to showcase the tourist potentials of Sierra Leone to the outside world.

22. In developing skills in tourism, my administration will conduct skills audit of the tourism sector, prepare a Labour Force Development Plan for the Tourism Sector, upgrade the existing training school for hotel management, support private colleges pursuing tourism-related disciplines in terms of materials, equipment and staffing and introduce higher education programmes for tourism training.

23. Diversification of tourism products will include adventure tours such as safaris, jungle tours, mountain trekking and support local entrepreneurs to promote tourism-based activities to link with the rural economy, harvest seasons, wildlife, farming practices, art, culture and religions.

Mineral Resources

24. The mining sector contributes about 24 percent to GDP and over 80 percent to export earnings. However, it contributes well below its potential, on average of 15 percent of total revenue. Direct and indirect employment in large-scale mines engage over 30,000 people, with an estimated 300,000 people (including dependents and extended families) deriving their livelihoods from these mines.

25. The mining sector suffers from extreme lack of transparency and weak institutional capacity. The 2009 Mines and Minerals Act was enacted to regulate the industry. There are however huge gaps which serve as disincentives to serious investors.

26. Mr. Speaker, my New Direction Government will immediately embark on the following (i) review the Mines and Minerals Act 2009 as well as Mining Lease Agreements to realign with the Mining Policy and ensure it is consistent with international best practices (ii) enact the Extractive Industry Revenue Bill (iii) establish the Natural Resources Account for all revenues generated from extractives (iv) strengthen the National Minerals Agency (NMA) (v) allocate percentages of revenue from the mining sector to education, health and the general development of mining communities (vi) ensure full transparency in the sector through complying with the Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative (EITI) standards and provide updated and validated information on tax and other contributions from the mining sector to the government (vii) support value additions to our mineral resources with a view to generating jobs and additional income to Sierra Leoneans (viii) ensure that all mining companies comply with the local content policy and (ix) enforce corporate social responsibility in all mining activities.

Improving the Management of Oil and Gas Exploration

27. Oil and gas exploration in Sierra Leone has had a very chequered history. From 2009 to 2013, Sierra Leone drilled three successful exploration wells and one highly prospective appraisal well. By 2015, due to undisclosed reasons, all operating oil and gas companies in Sierra Leone, except African Petroleum, had backed out of their contractual commitments and abandoned their operations.

28. Mr. Speaker, in the New Direction, the primary objective is to use oil and gas development to generate wealth without compromising environmental protection and sustainability. Accordingly, the focus will be on (i) Oil and Gas Governance (ii) Petroleum Fiscal Regime and (iii) Capacity Building.

29. Hence, on oil and gas governance, the focus of my administration will be on (i) reviewing policies and laws on oil and gas to be guided by a clear vision (ii) investing in geological data acquisition and strengthen pre-qualification criteria and ensure transparency to attract the best oil and gas companies (iii) simplifying both negotiations and tax structures to mitigate knowledge asymmetries with oil companies to reap early revenues and maximize long-term national benefits.

30. Regarding improving fiscal regime, as in the case of mining, my Government will enact the Extractive Industry Revenue Bill. In terms of capacity building, my Government will restructure the Petroleum Directorate by recruiting trained and qualified Sierra Leoneans without reference to their ethnic or regional origin.

Developing the Manufacturing Sector

31. Currently, the manufacturing sector is dominated by informal small and medium-scale enterprises and a few formal consumer goods industries producing alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages, cement, paint, flour, fruit juice, textiles and apparel, handicrafts and furniture. The contribution of the manufacturing sector to GDP is very minimal at about 2 percent of GDP.

32. The main challenges in the manufacturing sector are weak infrastructure, unfavourable business environment, limited access to finance, limited skilled workforce and unreliable supply of raw materials. The focus of manufacturing industrialisation will be on value addition to agricultural products through agro-processing, consumer and intermediate goods and high potential job creating industries. The specific policy actions will focus on (i) improving manufacturing infrastructure including cost effective energy sources, transport network and technology (ii) improving the environment for manufacturing industrialization (iii) establishing Special Economic Zones (SEZ) and Export Processing Zones (EPZ) (iv) providing finance to local entrepreneurs for manufacturing industrialisation (v) technical skills development (vi) promoting manufacturing industries producing farm implements, schools materials and medical supplies and (vii) promoting the production of agricultural activities.

Fiscal Situation

33. There has been persistent fiscal imbalance with government expenditure far exceeding revenue. This is largely due to the bloated public spending against the background of shrinking domestic revenue. Our domestic revenue make up only 11.5 percent of GDP and is one of the lowest in the World.

34. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, my Government is determined to reverse this deplorable situation. Within the first month in office and in fulfilment of Manifesto commitment, my Government has taken extraordinary measures to mobilise revenue and control expenditure. On revenue mobilisation, my administration has instituted the following three measures (i) suspended all duty and tax waivers to organizations, agencies, companies and contractors excepting organisations that fall under the relevant Vienna Convention on diplomatic missions (ii) in fulfilment of my Government commitment to the Treasury Single Account (TSA), directed Ministries, Departments and Agencies of Government that collect and retain Government revenues to transfer all such revenues into the Consolidated Revenue Fund with immediate effect consistent with the provisions of the Fiscal Management and Control Act 2017 and (iii) export of Timber logs is suspended with immediate effect.

35. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, I am pleased to inform you that there has been an unprecedented surge in domestic revenue mobilisation resulting from these measures. For the period, 11th April to date, a total amount exceeding Le300 billion has been collected. I am also pleased to report that my administration paid salaries for April and arrears to educational institutions without recourse to central bank overdraft. Furthermore, in the bid to reduce fiscal deficit, my Government has further instituted stringent expenditure control measures as articulated in Executive Order Number 2.

36. It is anticipated that both the revenue mobilisation and expenditure control measures will expand on the fiscal space needed to finance our development programme and pay for our essential services. My administration will review these measures in the next few months to ensure they sustain revenue gains without undermining private sector investment. Already, my Government has established a Committee to review duty and tax exemptions, consistent with existing legislations.

37. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, my administration will institute the following additional revenue mobilisation measures (i) evaluate the on-going tax reforms (ii) implement all audit reports findings and recommendations (iii) develop and legislate a National Tax Policy (iv) develop the capacity of local councils, particularly the city councils in revenue assessment and collection (v) simplify processes and reduce transaction cost for clearing imported goods (vi) enforce tax laws especially rental income taxation and ensure timely settlement of all tax obligations.

38. My Government will also implement the following additional expenditure control measures (i) develop and introduce a standardized overseas travel policy for the public service and covering all categories of workers including Government Ministers (ii) develop the capacity of the Ministries, Departments and Agencies in expenditure planning, management and reporting (iii) strengthen Audit Service Sierra Leone and the involvement of Non-State Actors in monitoring public spending (iv) develop a Vehicle Pool and movement tracking system (v) re-establish the authority of the Public Service Commission (PSC) as the primary authority to recruit civil servants (vi) harmonize the wage structure in the public sector to keep the wage bill sustainable and (vii) develop a National Development Monitoring and Evaluation System.

Public Debt Management

39. The current debt situation is unsustainable and constitutes a critical risk to effective budget management. As at March 31, 2018, external debts stood at US\$ 2 billion and domestic debts at Le 4.9 trillion (US\$ 636.4 million). Repayment and servicing of these huge debt burden means that there is hardly any resources left to finance priority investments in human capital development and basic services. In the New Direction, my administration will (i) introduce the practice of annual debt ceilings beyond which Government cannot borrow and link the borrowing ceiling to a clearly laid out medium-term debt management strategy (ii) limit external financing of social services to grants (iii) reform the institutional and legal framework for accessing external and domestic debts for the central government, local governments, and parastatals (iv) establish a Sierra Leone Sovereign Wealth Fund to build up a modest surplus of domestic savings.

Exchange Rate Management

40. The New Direction exchange rate management strategic objective is to maintain a stable and competitive exchange rate through increasing exports and reducing imports of consumer goods. The specific policies are (a) review of existing policy framework for supporting cash crop production and marketing (b) improve supportive marketing infrastructure and facilities and (c) promote agro-processing to add value to farm products for exports.

Monetary Policy

41. The main objective of my administration's monetary policy is to achieve single digit inflation and realistic interest rate. My Government will therefore consolidate public finances to reduce high level domestic borrowing which will free up resources for private sector lending at affordable cost.

Private Sector Development

42. My administration will promote competitive, fast-growing and liberal economy led by the private sector. Evidence from the World Bank Doing Business Report and the Global Competitiveness Report shows Sierra Leone is relatively uncompetitive. According to World Bank Doing

Business Report, Sierra Leone dropped in ranking for ease of doing business from 140 out of 185 in 2012 to 145 out of 190 in 2016 and further to 148 out of 190 in 2017. Similarly, the Global Competitiveness Report ranked Sierra Leone 133 out of 134 countries surveyed in 2012. Subsequent ranking did not change significantly and stood at 132 out of 138 countries surveyed.

44. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, my Government will ensure that Sierra Leoneans are given priority in many businesses and employment without compromising efficiency. Companies will be required to provide the necessary training for Sierra Leoneans and review their procurement and employment rules to ensure this is achieved. Specifically, the focus will be on (i) increasing access to finance (ii) reducing the cost of doing business (iii) promoting local entrepreneurship (iv) capacity building and (v) developing the infrastructure.

45. Some specific policy actions for increasing access to finance will cover (i) introducing a partial guarantee scheme to provide loans to high private sector entities and (ii) establishing Funds to provide access to medium and long-term capital to support Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) for women and youth.

46. In terms of reducing the cost and risks of doing business, my administration will (i) review all policies and laws governing business and update them in line with best practice (ii) broaden and deepen regulatory reforms in areas such as labour laws, property registration and licensing procedures (iii) sustain stable and competitive macro-economic environment (iv) review licensing procedures (v) capacitate the fast track commercial courts to reduce the time and cost of enforcing commercial contracts and (vi) provide mechanisms for low-cost alternative dispute resolution.

47. My administration will also promote local entrepreneurship through reviewing and implementing the Local Content Act to give preference to Sierra Leoneans in the award of contracts and employment. My Government will withdraw fiscal incentives from companies that do not comply with employment and local content laws.

Strengthening the Financial Sector

48. The financial sector is critical for any economic development. It pools and allocates resources to promote productivity and economic growth. Currently, there are 14 licensed functional banks in Sierra Leone. Only one of these (Sierra Leone Commercial Bank) is solely owned and another (Rokel Commercial Bank) is partly owned by the Government of Sierra Leone. One is entirely owned by Sierra Leoneans and all others are foreign dominated banks. These foreign dominated banks control 75% of financial sector assets.

49. Some of the challenges in the banking sector include weaknesses in the central bank, particularly in the area of banking regulation and supervision; weak infrastructure; weak policy and legal environment; inadequate bank coordination; shortage of skilled professionals; insufficient technological resources; a weak interbank market; the lack of payments mechanisms; absence of credit-risk information; inadequate short-term financial markets; absence of longer-term finance and foreign currency lending and ignorance of banking products and procedures.

50. My Government's efforts to developing the financial sector will entail developing a strong, sound and effective banking system that will increase access to both short-term and long-term capital for investment purposes. My New Direction administration's efforts will focus on (i) capacitating Bank of Sierra Leone (ii) strengthening commercial banks (iii) developing Micro-Finance Institutions (iv) commencing actions towards a re-establishing of a Development Bank and (v) strengthening Non-Bank Financial Institutions.

Human Development

51. Mr. Speaker, the New Direction recognises that human development is both a means and an end to development. Human capital development covers improving education and developing skills, improving health care, protecting the poor and vulnerable population groups.

Improving Education and Skills Training

52. The primary objective of the New Direction is to increase access to quality pre-primary, primary, secondary, technical and vocational education and training as well as university education that will enable them engage in meaningful productive economic activity. To demonstrate our commitment to education, my Government will increase and sustain budgetary allocation to education to a minimum of 20% of the national budget.

53. The change in the education system from 6-3-3-4 to 6-3-4-4 is challenging. The existing classroom blocks and teachers are not adequate to meet the needs of pupils for an additional year of schooling. This change in the educational system has also impacted on teenage pregnancy and early school leaving among girls who consider the number of years of schooling to be too many. There is no evidence to show that it has improved learning outcomes. Rather, it has imposed pressure on Government for additional classrooms and promoted teenage pregnancy. In fulfillment of my Manifesto commitment, we shall revert to the 6-3-3-4 system of education. The relevant authorities will advise when it will be best for this change to be effective. To improve on the system, My Government intends to increase contact hours, build additional classrooms, eliminate the two-shift system and develop technical and vocational education.

54. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, I am pleased to officially pronounce that effective next academic year starting September 2018, my Government will introduce Free Education from primary level to senior secondary school as promised. I have already engaged many of our partners for support of this programme and I am pleased to report that, our international and donor partners have expressed commitments to support my administration. To ensure effective coordination of support of this programme, Government will establish a Multi-Partner Education for Development Basket Fund. In support of this, two Committees will be established. First, a High Level Inter-Ministerial and Partners Group (IMPG) on Free Education comprising of relevant ministries and partners will be set up. This Group will provide the strategic guidance to the planning and design of the programme, mobilise resources and oversee the implementation. Second, a Technical Group (TG) on Education comprising professionals from the relevant MDAs and partner agencies will be established to design the programme, coordinate and monitor the implementation. The Technical Group will report to the High Level Inter-Ministerial and Partners Group.

55. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, improving education governance is critical for the success of the New Direction in education. To this end, my Government will (i) review the Education Sector Plan to ensure it is realigned with the priorities of the New Direction (ii) strengthen Education Management and Information System (EMIS) to support informed strategic decision-making (iii) develop a robust policy and legal framework for Public-Private-Partnership in the education sector (iv) develop the capacity of School Inspectorate for effective school monitoring and supervision (v) build the capacity of School Management Committees (SMC) (vi) de-politicise the Board of Governors of schools, redefine their roles, and introduce a compulsory reporting requirement (vii) respect and support the autonomy of the National Union of Students (NUSS) and (viii) promote social dialogue with relevant stakeholders in the education service delivery including the Sierra Leone Teachers Union.

56. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, none of us would have been here today without our greatest asset, teachers. Yet, they have been least recognized and least rewarded. This is demotivating. Let me simply state that without qualified teachers, our Free Education Programme will not be fully implemented. In the New Direction, Government will raise the morale and productivity of our teachers. To this end, I hereby pronounce a Presidential Initiative for Teachers. The Initiative will ensure that matters relating to teachers are treated with utmost importance. Additionally, my administration will (i) review and make functional the Teaching Service Commission (ii) develop a special incentive scheme for Science and French teachers as well as teachers in remote areas and those in special needs institutions (iii) introduce THE BEST TEACHER Award Scheme for the most innovative, ingenious and dedicated teachers at national and district levels (iv) provide free university education for three children of every school teacher with at least 10 years' teaching experience.

57. There is limited number of qualified teachers at all levels. Only 55 percent of teachers at pre-school level, 42 percent at primary level, 35 percent at Junior Secondary School, 49% at Senior Secondary School, are qualified to teach. Increasing the number of qualified teachers and ensuring fair distribution amongst districts is critical for the successful implementation of our Free Education Programme. In support of this, my administration will establish Teacher Training campuses in all districts, expand and improve on distance learning education for teachers and provide free tuition for teacher education.

58. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, the amounts of public spending on fee subsidy for university education is unsustainable. Whilst we will improve on the management of the Grants-in-Aid policy, my administration will introduce Students Loan Scheme that will provide loans to deserving students to access higher education.

59. Mr. Speaker, Free Education will increase demand for school. As a progressive Government, we need to prepare for the anticipated increase in school enrolment. Therefore, my administration will adopt a policy of One-Administrative Section-One Primary School, One-Electoral Ward-One Junior Secondary School and One-Electoral Constituency-One-Senior Secondary School. Additionally, my Government will construct new classroom blocks in urban towns to reduce congestion in schools and eventually eliminate the two-shift system in the next few years.

60. To sustain high school enrolment and improve learning, my administration will work with World Food Programme and other food agencies as well as the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry to expand school feeding programmes in all public assisted primary schools.

61. The cost of transportation constitutes a major share of urban household expenditure on education. This high cost of urban transportation causes lateness and affect school attendance which further affect learning. My Government will re-introduce school bus system in large urban towns on a cost recovery basis and less than the prevailing market price.

62. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, the high level of adult illiteracy in Sierra Leone estimated at 60 percent is unacceptable in any progressive nation. As part of my commitment to education, my administration will work with partners to develop and implement cost effective strategies for providing basic literacy and numeracy training for our adults who were not fortunate to attend school. Some of these will include (i) initially establishing one functional adult literacy centre in every district and later expanding to every chiefdom using existing school facilities and (ii) integrating literacy programmes into agricultural and livelihood programmes.

63. The New Direction believes that training is the foundation for enhancing the country's competitiveness. To this end, my Government will (i) review and standardise the curriculum and certification for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) (ii) develop a national apprenticeship scheme which can provide internship for trainees of TVET institutes and at the same time provide direct training for youth and (iii) develop a robust Public-Private-Partnership framework to increase private sector participation in TVET training. Also, my Government will establish in every district capital one Polytechnic Institution that will be fully equipped with modern tools and equipment for technical vocational education and training in areas with high potential for job creation.

64. Mr. Speaker, the conditions of our institutions of higher learning and in particular the citadel of knowledge, University of Sierra Leone and Njala University are deplorable. We have lost the glory of being the Athens of West Africa. We require urgent actions to develop our Universities and all other higher institutions. Already, my Government has created a separate Ministry of Technical and Higher Education that will solely focus on technical and higher education. My intention is to establish a university system that employs its own leadership as chancellors and Vice Chancellors with distinguished and proven records of higher education leadership and significant international clout and contacts (funding and research networks). In this light, effective 2019, I as President will cease to be the Chancellor of the University of Sierra Leone. In the coming months, the 2005 Universities Act will be reviewed to reflect this and many other changes where necessary.

65. Science and Technology is the bedrock for the development of any modern economy. Unfortunately, in Sierra Leone, the schools and colleges lack even the basic facilities for scientific research. My Government is setting up a Directorate for Science, Technology and Innovation to develop a framework for scientific research. Initially, this Directorate will be midwived in the Office of the President but shall work closely with the Ministry of Technical and Higher Education.

66. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, one of the reasons for attitudinal challenges is limited civic education among the population. This is compounded by mass illiteracy among the population. If we are to develop as a nation, we must educate our people on rights, responsibilities and obligations as good citizens. To this end, my Government will launch a National Civic Education Programme to provide civic education in our educational institutions and communities. Additionally, my administration will direct that civics be re-introduced in our schools and colleges, comprehensive curriculum for all levels will be developed and civic educators be provided training to cascade the training in schools.

Health

67. According to World Health Organisation (WHO) statistics, life expectancy in 2015 was estimated at 50 years compared to 53 in neighbouring Liberia and 59 in Guinea. According to the Demographic and Health Survey (2008), infant mortality rate increased from 89 per 1,000 in 2008 to 92 per 1,000 in 2013 and under-five mortality rose from 140 per 1,000 in 2008 to 156 in 2013. Maternal mortality was 1,165 per 100,000 live births in 2013 compared to 857 in 2008. WHO even estimated maternal mortality at 1,360 per 100,000 live births and puts Sierra Leone as least on the child survival league table. Two (2) out of every five (5) maternal deaths is due to teenage pregnancy.

68. The figures above indicate that the Free Health Care launched in 2010 has not created the desired impact. There are still reports of leakages in the distribution of drugs, limited manpower to provide health care and poor incentive for the limited staff and probably wrong entry point to reduce mortality among children and mothers. Despite the health system strengthening efforts under the Post-Ebola Recovery Strategy, healthcare services delivery remains gloomy. The health sector continues to be plagued by limited public investment and untimely disbursement, weak human resource base, weaknesses in disease prevention, control and surveillance, poor service delivery and poor governance.

69. The strategic objective of the health sector in the New Direction is to transform the under-resourced, ill-equipped, dysfunctional and inadequate health infrastructure and healthcare delivery system to make it high quality, efficient, reliable, cost-effective, affordable and sustainable. The thrust of the New Direction is increasing access for all the population (particularly mothers, children and the elderly) to quality health services in an equitable and efficient manner. The focus will be on (i) health governance (ii) health financing (iii) human resource (iv) free health care (v) disease prevention and control and (vi) service delivery.

70. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, my administration will implement the following (i) strengthen Health Management and Information System (HMIS) to support informed strategic decision-making, planning and programme development, monitoring and coordination (ii) develop a robust policy and legal framework for Public-Private-Partnership in the health sector (iii) review laws and policies relating to regulatory bodies such as the Medical and Dental Association and make them more functional (iv) promote dialogue with relevant stakeholders in the health sector including but not limited to the Sierra Leone Health Service Workers Union, the Sierra Leone Medical and Dental Association and the Nurses and Midwives Association.

71. If we are to reverse the appalling statistics in the health sector, we need to increase both public and private investment in the sector. Accordingly, my Government will take the following measures (i) raise the current public spending on health and sanitation from its current level of less than 10 percent to 15 percent as required by the Abuja Declaration and ensure timely disbursement of allocated resources (ii) review and implement the National Health Insurance Scheme (iii) strengthen the management and coordination of all resources allocated to the health sector and effectively track all donor resources to the sector and (iv) develop public-private sector framework for health care service delivery.

72. Our health care workers constitute the most important input in the sector. Specific action will include (i) strengthening Health Service Commission and developing a comprehensive Human Development Plan that would ensure the immediate absorption of trained health workers in the public service (ii) improving on the conditions of health workers for all categories to attract and retain them (iv) developing special incentive scheme for trained medical doctors and health workers working in remote areas.

73. The figures above also indicate that the Free Health Care launched in 2010 has not created the desired impact. There are still reports of leakages in the distribution of drugs. To address this malaise, my Government will strengthen national, district and community-based monitoring of free health care drugs and services.

74. Preventive health care saves costs. Therefore, my administration will institute cost effective disease prevention measures. Already, we have re-introduced National Cleaning Day. My administration will closely work with local councils to strengthen the cleaning, collection and depositing of garbage. To support regular cleaning exercise, my Government will support sanitary inspectors under the supervision of local councils.

75. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, Government spends huge amount of foreign exchange on basic diagnosis of diseases and treatment of severe ailments overseas. To save cost and increase citizen's access to quality health care services, my Government will (i) equip laboratory facilities in all district hospitals with modern equipment and materials for testing and x-ray facilities and (ii) provide modern equipment including CT and MRI scanning and other diagnosis and treatment equipment in all regional hospitals.

76. Despite the many donations of ambulances during the outbreak of the Ebola Virus Disease, it is disappointing to note that to date, we do not have a National Ambulance Service. We still do not have a clear number of ambulances. In the next few months, my Government will conclude arrangements for a National Ambulance Service.

77. Mr. Speaker, the New Direction particularly notes the rise in teenage pregnancy and its calamitous implication for maternal mortality and the development of our female population. About 15 percent of our girls have sexual intercourse before 15 years; our adolescent pregnancies are among the Top 10 countries in the world and about 28 percent of adolescent women age 15-19 years are already mothers or pregnant and 44 percent of girls are married before 18 years. About 44 percent of pregnancies below 20 are lost after 7 months of gestation or babies die within 7 days of life. Teenage pregnancy accounts for 40 percent of maternal deaths. To address this serious problem, my administration will launch a National Programme on Sexual and Reproductive Health for adolescents to reduce teenage pregnancy and the alarming maternal mortality. In addition, my Government will initiate discussions towards the re-introduction of Family Life Education in schools.

Youth

78. Sierra Leone's population is mostly youthful. Youth, that is, persons 15-35 years, account for about 33 percent of the country's population and represent about 67 percent of the economically active population of which 67 percent are unemployed. Our youth are untrained and lack the skills required in the job market.

79. Overcoming youth unemployment will be at the centre of our fight against poverty and our efforts to consolidate peace. In the New Direction, the youth problem will not only receive our topmost priority, but will also be viewed as a human development and security challenge. It is our view that stimulating job creation requires a holistic approach. Our approach will be integrated and coherent. Specifically, in addition to scholarship scheme, my Government will (i) develop Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) to provide technical skills to youth in areas relevant for the job market as earlier elaborated on Education and Training (ii) review the current design of the National Youth Service and support its implementation (iii) establish a special Youth Empowerment Fund to support youth engaged in small and medium scale entrepreneurial ventures (iv) promote youth engagement in agriculture through the provision of direct support in the form of finance, market information, technology and technical advice to youth (including agricultural graduates) to engage in commercial agriculture and agro-processing activities.

Music and Performing Arts

80. Mr. Speaker, despite its huge potential to create jobs, past Governments have done very little to promote music and the performing arts. Overall, the policy and legal environment is weak. The past Government legislated the piracy law but failed to put in place the necessary mechanisms for enforcement. Piracy is still very rampant as the copyrights laws are not enforced and the infrastructure is not attractive to investors. The National Dance Troupe which used to be the cultural ambassadors of our nation has been rendered dysfunctional largely because of their eviction from the Aberdeen Cultural Village. There are limited studios for music and film production and no auditorium for musical shows and screening of films. Low private investment in music and the performing arts is due to a combination of factors including the weak policy and legal environment, particularly the seditious libel law. In addition, training in music and the performing arts is not done by most schools and colleges.

81. To promote music and performing arts, my Government will (i) review and enforce the copyright laws (ii) review policies and establish standards for promotion of music and performing arts (iii) establish a National Arts Gallery and Theatre for Performing Arts (iv) promote Sierra Leonean music and musicians nationally and internationally and maintain good business ethics in the industry (v) re-establish and develop cultural village.

Sports

82. There has been a dramatic decline in sports over the past decade. The critical challenge facing sports development include weak policy and legal environment, and constant crisis in the Sierra Leone Football Association (SLFA) largely because of political interference. For many years now, we cannot even organise national competitions in football and athletics and there has been virtual elimination of physical education in schools. Consequently, Sierra Leone has not qualified for any major international sporting competition in recent years.

83. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, my Government will (i) review the policy and legal environment for sports development (ii) increase budgetary support to sporting activities, football, athletics, cricket, volley ball and basketball (iii) establish a Sports Development Fund that will be financed from various sources including corporate establishments and international sporting organisations and Government (iv) develop and implement a comprehensive capacity building programme for all sporting disciplines (v) reactivate school and community sporting activities with a view to identifying and developing talents for national and international competitions (vi) recommence national competition for all sporting activities.

Women

84. Women account for 51 percent of the population and face major challenges in their communities to access justice, social and economic opportunities and seek their overall advancement. Specifically, the challenges of women include (a) gender-based violence (b) barriers to women's economic empowerment, especially in terms of access to markets, training, finance, infrastructure, technology, education, counseling and entrepreneurship development (c) exploitative or hazardous forms of the livelihood of poor, unskilled women and girls, especially commercial sex workers (d) inadequate sensitisation and education on gender and development issues and (e) low political participation as a result of socio-cultural, educational, legal and policy environment and economic factors.

85. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, in the New Direction, my government will promote gender equality, equity, empowerment, and the protection of the rights of women either as mainstreamed interventions or as stand-alone initiatives. Our specific actions will be to (i) provide training and educational opportunities for our women (ii) establish a Women's Development Fund to support female entrepreneurs (iii) promote women in agriculture through direct support to them for farming and agro-processing activities (iv) provide improved facilities for fish processing and poultry, and promoting female access to land and other strategic resources (v) transform the Gender Directorate into National Commission for Gender Affairs.

Persons Living with Disability and our Aged

86. The most disadvantaged group in Sierra Leone is the physically challenged. Although the last Parliament enacted the Disability Bill, no concrete action was taken by the out-going Government to provide basic services to persons living with disability or even implement the provisions of the Act. To date, the basic structures for implementing the Act are weak. Government budgetary allocation is low and actual disbursements are not regular. Additionally, support by NGOs is limited and restricted to provincial capitals.

87. In the New Direction, the SLPP government will (i) review and implement policies and laws relating to disability, especially making public facilities disability friendly (ii) review and improve incentives for Teachers in Special Needs Institutions (iii) provide free health care for the physically challenged and the aged (iv) provide livelihood support to persons living with disability for economic empowerment.

Children

88. Government recognises that childhood is a one-time opportunity for physical, mental, emotional and social development. Some of the critical child protection issues identified in the New Direction are sexual based violence, teenage pregnancy, early and forced marriage, child trafficking and child labour.

89. In the New Direction, my Government will ensure a Child-First approach for the survival, protection and development of children, including those living with disability and vulnerable children. Specifically, my administration will implement policy actions and programmes to address (i) sexual violence (ii) teenage pregnancy (iii) child marriage (iv) orphans and vulnerable children (v) child trafficking and (vi) child labour and juvenile justice.

90. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, my administration will embark on the following child protection measures (i) review and increase budgetary resources for the implementation of the Sexual Offences Act of 2012 (ii) increase the capacity of the Family Support Unit, the Ministry of Justice and the judiciary to investigate and prosecute reported cases (iii) strengthen protection, rehabilitation and reintegration support for victims of sexual abuse (iv) design and launch a national programme on Adolescents and Sexual and Reproductive Health (v) increase opportunities for pregnant girls and teenage mothers to have access to education (vi) design policies, harmonise and standardise laws to combat child marriage (vii) develop a national strategy to combat child marriage and (viii) review and enforce laws relating to adoption, child trafficking, child labour and juvenile justice.

Our Workers

91. The most valuable asset of any nation is its workforce. A nation needs a workforce that is well motivated for the transformation of the natural resources to wealth. Over 65 percent of Sierra Leone's working population representing nearly 2 million people participate in the labour market and women participate almost as men.

92. Employment laws and regulations are not only weak but their implementation is also undermined. The institutional framework for the issuing of work permits exposes our potential workforce to unhealthy competition from other nationals who are usually put on better terms and conditions. The enforcement of our labour laws is weak. For instance, the provision that firms should only resort to foreign workers in the absence of qualified Sierra Leoneans is undermined with impunity. Most big industrial companies do not have medical and health insurance policies and where they exist they are of the barest standards. Core labour standards that emphasize the rules and principles regarding the minimum standards recognised internationally for treating workers have been violated. These labour standards are fundamental principles that protect basic human rights of the workforce.

93. Minimum wage has not only been low, but incomparable to living standards. Successive Governments have failed to enact or enforce the necessary laws and policies or respect international standards to overcome most of these challenges. There are hundreds of foreigners in positions that can otherwise be filled by Sierra Leoneans. Illegal dismissals without benefits are common.

The pension scheme of the National Social Security and Insurance Trust (NASSIT) which was set up in 2001 is seriously challenged. The misuse of the pension fund; non-payment of contributions by both government and private employers; wrong investment decisions of the pension fund; non-reporting of dividends, if any, from investment of the pension fund and the politicisation and poor leadership of the Trust are now the norm.

94. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, in the New Direction Government will adopt a Sierra Leonean First Policy wherein the interest of Sierra Leoneans will be paramount. My Government will (i) review and implement the Local Content Act (ii) review existing mechanisms issuing and enforcing work permits (iii) review all laws, regulations and agreements to ensure that apart from statutory social security benefits, employers have in place medical and insurance policies consistent with international best practice (iv) establish a Minimum Wage Board comprising Government agencies and private agencies with the primary responsibility of setting minimum wage at regular intervals (v) capacitate the Ministry of Labour to enable it to monitor and enforce the labour laws, policies and regulations effectively (vi) conduct a comprehensive systems audit entailing financial, procurement, technical and management audits and an audit of all its investments with a view to restructuring NASSIT and making it more effective and efficient and (vii) review the NASSIT Act and restructure the institution to make it more efficient and effective for achieving its objectives.

Energy Supply

95. Sierra Leone is among one of the least developed countries in the World in terms of power infrastructure. In the entire country, power generation and supply still falls below 100Megawatt (MW) with less than 50 MW coming from the Bumbuna Hydro Electric Power Station in the North, 6MW from Dodo in the East and 2 MW from Charlotte in the West.

96. The existing energy supplies, especially electricity, are delivered at very high cost. There has been little transparency in the operation and management of the sector. The poor transmission and distribution network cause huge power losses and compounded by low and irregular voltage

continue to impact negatively on reliability, causing damage to personal equipment. In 2007, the out-going Government started with Independent Power Producers (IPP) for the supply of electricity using thermal plants at over bloated costs. To date, we still rely on high cost IPPs. Power stations in most of Sierra Leone are non-functional. Overall, the entire sector is ridden with inefficiency and corruption. Preliminary estimates of Government's liabilities in the electricity sector exceed over Le 500 billion indicating the poor electricity management.

97. Mr. Speaker, my Government's strategic objective in the energy sector is to increase population access to cost effective electricity supply. My Government will (i) conduct technical audit of the energy sector (ii) undertake robust reform in the energy sector (iii) restore electricity supply to all district capitals and (iv) invest in low cost renewable energy potential of the country in the areas of solar, hydro, wind and biomass.

Transport

98. It is estimated by the Sierra Leone Roads Authority and the African Development Bank that Sierra Leone has about 11,300 Kilometres roads of which less than 10 percent are paved. Traditionally, infrastructure development and implementation world-wide and particularly in Africa including Sierra Leone has been based on sector specific development with no coherence and relationship to other sectors. For example, road construction in Sierra Leone has never included other sectors and for the most part other transport modes. The culture of intermodal development is seldom embraced. Thus, the utility and full benefits of the roads constructed are limited and never realized. Along all the corridors or alignments of the roads constructed in Sierra Leone, there are no other new or refurbished transport modes nor are there any new sector development that will capitalise and take full advantage of the new road constructed. Therefore, the full benefits or the utility of the road constructed are very limited and not fully realized, thus negating the economic and financial value of the investment. This does not unlock economic opportunities and create jobs.

99. The conditions of arterial and feeder roads are very deplorable. Cost of construction of a kilometer of road funded by past Government is the highest in the world. The quality of the roads constructed is poor and implementation very shoddy. Overall, corruption has marred road construction. In addition, co-ordination is weak among departments involved in public works to the extent that telecommunications and electricity cables and water pipelines have been destroyed during road construction.

100. Political meddling by the then Ministry of Works, Housing and Technical Maintenance with the operations of the Sierra Leone Roads Authority (SLRA) led to the loss of independence and objectivity in the handling of the affairs of the Authority. Poor governance continuously afflicts the management and sustainability of the Road Maintenance Fund.

101. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, my administration will plan, develop and implement infrastructure in Sierra Leone on an integrated, holistic and cross-sectoral development basis. In addition, full utilization will be made of inter-modal transport development. Whenever a new road is constructed, provisions will be made to ensure that along the same road corridor or alignment, there is a pipeline for fibre optic to improve Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) connectivity or a pipeline for water to provide clean drinking water, transmission lines to transmit electricity to provide power and adequate electricity. Specifically, my administration will (i) promote and implement a holistic integrated infrastructure that will maximize the utility and effectiveness of infrastructure, thereby greatly contributing to the overall socio-economic development of the country regardless of region (ii) conduct a technical audit of all roads completed or under construction to ascertain the technical integrity and value for money (iii) address the current traffic congestion in Freetown not only by the construction of new roads but also by employing proven and practical traffic engineering mitigation measures (iv) complete all ongoing road projects including townships roads and (v) commence the planning and construction of the Bo-Mattru Road, Mano Junction-Bumpeh (Kono) Road, Bo-Matotoka Road, Moyamba-Yagoi-Mattru Road and Kenema-Zimmi Road (vi) devolve maintenance of township roads and feeder roads to local councils and (vii) reform the management of the Road Maintenance Fund Administration (RMFA).

102. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, my Government will establish a Presidential Infrastructure Initiative to support my office in the selection, design, planning and management of roads projects, mobilise resources and provide implementation support.

Air Transportation

103. International connectivity is served by Lungi International Airport (passengers and light freight). Over 200,000 passengers pass through Lungi yearly. Overall, the runways, taxi ways and aprons are fairly good but need repairs. According to report of International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO), Sierra Leone is at 20 percent compliance in terms of safety, which is far below the 60 percent safety threshold set by African Ministers responsible for Aviation in Abuja commonly referred to as the "Abuja Safety Targets". Enforcement of regulations by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) continues to be weak. The CAA is not economically sustainable given its inability to generate revenue and its low level of competency and capability.

104. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, in the New Direction, my Government will work in consonance with the ECOWAS Vision 2020 to improve the Air Transport sector by developing a sound and seamless regional air transport system that is safe, reliable, efficient and affordable, well connected within West Africa and integrated with the global network. Specific policy actions will include (i) enhancing global civil aviation safety by certifying the Freetown International Airport at Lungi to meet international standards (ii) improving ferry and sea coach services between Targrin and Freetown to support passenger travel and comfort (iii) enhancing global civil aviation security and facilitation and (iv) developing an Air transport master plan to foster the development of a sound and economically viable civil aviation system.

Sea Transportation

105. Queen Elizabeth II Quay and Kissy Oil terminal as well as the two ferry terminals constitute the port of Freetown. They constitute major logistics hub for Sierra Leone's imports and exports. The Queen Elizabeth II Quay comprises a multi-purpose terminal (general cargo), break bulk, containers and bulk and holds 4 berths. With the global trend of containerization wherein the bulk of cargo will consist of containers, the current terminal for containers is proving inadequate.

106. Maritime transportation is in a bad state in Sierra Leone today. The turnaround time for clearing goods at the Port is still high and both freight costs and clearing costs are prohibitively expensive, impacting on the retail cost of goods. Some regulatory agencies like the Sierra Leone Maritime Agency (SLMA) have been found to handle their mandate inefficiently and need significant reforms.

107. In the New Direction Government strategic objective for sea port development is to provide a conducive and competitive port facility. To this end, the specific policy actions shall include (i) instituting policies and regulations that will help reduce the costs of shipping and clearing goods (ii) re-organising the Maritime Protection Agency to make it more effective (iii) conducting a feasibility study to convert the Nitti sea port used by mining companies into a commercial sea port and (iv) encouraging and promoting private sector development of inland water transportation services for passenger and goods as an alternate mode to road transport.

Railway Transportation

108. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members the closure of the railway posed considerable burden on the economy. It led to massive job losses, created shortage of farm goods in urban markets leading to high prices and stifled the rural economy. Regenerating the rural economy will require massive investment in transportation including railway transportation. In the New Direction, my administration will conduct appropriate feasibility studies for the re-institution of a National Railway Scheme.

Water Supply and Improved Sanitation

109. Most of the Sierra Leone population do not have access to safe drinking water and improved sanitation. Barely half of the population, 43 percent (86 percent in urban areas and 26 percent in rural areas) have access to safe drinking water and 13 percent have access to improved sanitation; 24 percent in urban areas and 6 percent in rural areas. Pipe borne water supply is largely limited to Freetown and rural areas depend on contaminated surface water. In Freetown, the Guma dam is inadequate to meet the growing demand. The distribution network is not only poor but it barely covers three-quarters of the city. Most rural communities access water from hand-pump wells and a few from gravity system. A substantial percentage of people even still access water from unprotected sources including hand-dug wells and polluted rivers and lakes.

110. The management of both garbage and sewage in urban towns, particularly Freetown, is poor. To date, the institutional arrangements for city cleaning are weak. Deforestation of the hillsides largely for housing construction has compounded the problem. With the support of the German Government, sanitation in the provincial capitals of Bo, Kenema and Makeni have improved. Most shacks in Freetown do not have access to latrine facility and the conditions of the sewage pipes are deteriorating. It is not unusual for human waste to be seen in garbage and streets of Freetown. Rural sanitation challenges comprise disposing garbage in backyards and limited access to latrine facilities encourages the bad practice of open defecation.

111. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, the objective of the New Direction is to increase access of the population to safe drinking water and improved sanitation. In the new Direction government, a comprehensive water and sanitation strategic plan will be put in place to guide investment in the sector and public sector investment will be progressively increased from its current low level of 3 percent.

112. In the area of provision of water supply, my administration will (i) commence planning for the construction of new water reservoir for Freetown and its immediate environs (ii) restore pipe borne water supply facilities in district capitals (iii) rehabilitate water distribution network in Freetown and construct stand pipes in deprived communities (iv) construct boreholes and gravity water supply facilities in hard to reach peri-urban areas in Western Area and rural areas (v) rehabilitate existing water dams and protect all major watershed areas against deforestation and other environmental problems (vi) undertake reforms in the water sector including unbundling water generation from distribution as it is in the energy sector to improve on efficiency and cost recovery (vii) strengthen the maintenance capacity of Guma Valley Water Company and Sierra Leone Water Company (SALWACO) as well as local councils.

Improving Information, Communications and Technology (ICT)

113. An efficient ICT network improves human life and accelerates economic development. This includes telephones and computing equipment, satellite equipment, right down to a regular television and radio service. Statistics all round the world have proved that countries that take ICT seriously develop faster than others and have improved competitiveness.

114. The young generation is yearning for new opportunities to interact with their peers in other countries and on a real-time basis. Social media has become the order of the day and there is increased demand on data bandwidth to respond to these demands. Although SIERRATEL was recapitalised using external funds, there has not been any marked improvement in the services provided. SIERRATEL is in fact burdened with debt problems. Similarly, SALCAB and the Ministry of Telecommunications have landed high speed fibre optics but there has been little improvement in the use of ICT in the country and very little is made public. Again, because of political meddling, NATCOM's role as an independent regulator is under threat. It is perceived to be inefficient. There are concerns about value for money to consumers and the non-transparent management of the international telecommunications gateway.

115. Mr. Speaker, my New Direction will ensure that communications services are improved to such an extent as to contribute significantly to the country's communications development and at affordable cost to all. More specifically, my administration will (i) de-politicise NATCOM to enable it carry out its functions efficiently and effectively (ii) establish an Electronic Governance system to manage government business electronically (iii) provide computer to all public libraries and promote training in use of computer in public libraries, schools and colleges (iv) protect legal documents by establishment of digital storage centres at remote locations (v) develop IT infrastructure resilience by multiple back up services for all government documents in all ministries thereby ensuring health records, land records, etc. are secure and (vi) enhance broadband access across the country, improving rural telecommunications and creating customer choice and affordability.

Lands, Housing and the Environment

116. The growing demand for housing and other infrastructural facilities has severely constrained the limited space. The disputes about land ownership overwhelm the courts often with multiple claimants. Also, land transfers are badly managed by the authorities in the Lands Ministry such that land issues have become overwhelming and contentious and the courts are increasingly inundated with a large number of unresolved cases. This situation is untenable.

117. The land tenure system in Sierra Leone is proving to be serious impediment to economic development and is therefore in need of urgent reform to make it compatible with the requirements of a modern economy. Land planning and the enforcement of related laws are poor and are also in need of radical reform. Consequently, illegal structures abound in many areas. Successive governments have been hamstrung to provide the necessary remedies mainly for political reasons. The effect of such inaction is evident in the congestion, poor planning and severe sanitation problems in many communities.

118. Mr. Speaker, my Government will sanitize and reform the land tenure system to make it compatible with the increasing demands of a modern economy and ensure equitable distribution of land and related issues. Government will pursue the following specific policy action (i) implement the National Lands Policy 2015 (ii) improve the management of state lands with a view to ensuring equitable distribution (iii) set up a Lands Court to help speed up the trial of land cases (iv) build affordable housing around the country for the underprivileged (v) create Land Banks to ensure availability and affordability (vi) in consultation with relevant professional bodies including the Sierra Leone Institution of Engineers (SLIE), the Professional Engineers Regulation Council and the Sierra Leone Institute of Architects (SLIA), improve the enforcement of land use planning and building regulations and (vii) codify land tenure through a GIS Cadastral system with standard town lots as basic module. All private and state lands will be plotted as multiples of the standard lot.

119. In the area of housing, my Government will (i) encourage the setting up of Home Finance Institutions (ii) train youths in the use of local materials and appropriate technology for housing construction (iii) design and implement a national programme for housing (iv) encourage large-scale local production of building materials.

Environmental Management

120. Sierra Leone is presently ranked at the bottom of the Environmental Performance Index, 163 out of 163 countries in 2010, indicating phenomenal regression since the end of the civil war. The 2013 Verisk Maplecroft Index ranked Sierra Leone the 3rd most vulnerable to climate change in the world (or the 3rd country in the world with the least capacity to respond or adapt to environmental change). About 13 percent of the country's area and more than 35 percent of the population are at risk to disasters. In the last 15 years, 4 major floods have affected 220,000 people and caused severe loss and economic damage.

121. In 2008, the Environment Protection Agency Act (hereinafter referred to as EPA Act) was passed giving the Ministry of Lands, Country Planning and the Environment policy guidance and directional functions while the regulatory functions were passed to the Agency. In 2010, the 2008 Act was amended to completely change the governance mechanism of the Environment Sector. It removed all Government Ministries previously on the Board, transferred its supervision to the Office of the President and changed the title of the Chairman of the Board to Executive Chairman and Professional Head of the Agency. The Director of the Department previously the Secretary to the Board was also expunged from the Agency. All in all, the EPA has been politicised and made generally dysfunctional without any effective collaboration and co-ordination between itself and the many MDAs so essential for the proper observance and implementation of environmental regulations.

122. The main objective in my New Direction administration is to protect the environment. Specifically, the policy actions will focus on (i) environmental governance (ii) managing forest resources (iii) ecosystem conservation and (iv) environmental education.

123. In the area of Environmental governance, my administration will (i) review the EPA 2010 Act and placed it under the supervision of the Ministry of Lands, Housing and the Environment (ii) monitor industrial establishments for compliance with environmental laws and regulations (iii) establish independent agencies for disaster management and meteorology to improve the knowledge base and expand actions for early warning and disaster risk reduction (iv) ensure environmental sustainability of development policies, programmes and projects at national and local level by mainstreaming environmental issues across sectors particularly agriculture, energy, infrastructure, industry, decentralization, finance and planning (v) develop a national programme for the regeneration and shared management of forest cover and related products (vi) strengthen public-private partnerships for forest conservation, especially the establishment of woodlots and commodification of Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) (vii) adequately enforce laws and policies to protect forests and designate new areas for conservation and ecotourism (viii) intensify education and information campaigns to reduce practices harmful to the environment and (ix) support the teaching of environmental matters in the curricula of schools, colleges and universities.

Improving Governance

124. In the New Direction, Government is determined to reverse this deplorable trend in the governance landscape so that every citizen of Sierra Leone will interact to make governance work for all by undertaking robust, ambitious and courageous programmes in the following areas of state governance:

Building and Promoting National Cohesion

125. In the last ten years, the building blocks of national cohesion and the feeling of belonging of all citizens have gravely crumbled. The recent governance strategy has been characterised by tribalism, divisiveness, exclusion and the weakening and subversion of state governing institutions.

126. Mr. Speaker, to promote unity and national cohesion, my Government will (i) launch a Presidential Initiative that will be heralded by a national conference on peacebuilding, diversity management and rebuilding of national cohesion. I therefore announce the creation of an Independent Commission for Peace and National Cohesion to be established by an Act of Parliament (ii) fully implement the National Youth Service Scheme where young people from one part of the country will be cross-posted to other parts for their national youth service.

Fighting Corruption and Improving Accountability

127. Despite the establishment of the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), corruption is still rife in Sierra Leone. Government Ministers who were fined after being found guilty of corruption charges returned to active public service.

128. Mr. Speaker, my Government will treat corruption not only as a governance issue but also as a national security threat. It will therefore leave no stone unturned in its fight against corruption. In particular, my administration will (i) review the relevant provisions of the Constitution of Sierra Leone 1991 (including Section 119 in particular) and the ACC Act to strengthen the ACC's investigative and prosecutorial mandate with

respect to audit reports tabled by the Audit Service Sierra Leone (ASSL) before Parliament to give it powers to proceed without the need to wait for Parliamentary investigations (ii) develop value systems and implement a robust merit and reward system in public and private life (iii) ensure the full implementation of all recommendations in annual audits of the ASSL and of Ministries, Departments and Agencies (iv) adopt a new framework to ensure accountability and transparency in the public sector in the form of National Public Sector Transparency and Accountability Initiative (NAPSTAI) to subject the public sector to more scrutiny by civil society and development partners (v) set up a system for planning, monitoring and reporting on Development Results referred to as Results-Based Management (RBM) wherein development targets will be set at the start of each year and senior managers will be accountable for delivering on these results (vi) strengthen monitoring of public funds and (vii) establish a special Anti-Corruption Division in the High Court to promote judicial specialization and expeditious trial of corruption cases.

Improving Security Governance for Development

129. The security sector presently consists of about ten agencies with political oversight from the Office of the President in the case of the Office of National Security (ONS), the Central Intelligence & Security Unit and Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF). The Ministry of Internal Affairs has oversight responsibilities for the Sierra Leone Police, National Fire Force, National Civil Registration Authority (NCRA), Immigration Department and National Drugs Law Enforcement Agency.

130. The critical challenges in the security sector cover inadequate logistical support inhibiting and impeding the collection and analysis of intelligence; poor conditions of service leading to corruption at every level of the sector; dependency on donor support creating uncertainty around continuity of reforms; weak coordination among security agencies, inadequate budgetary allocation and delays in payments.

131. We will build on the progressive reforms of the security sector that commenced after the end of the war, with a focus on professionalization, de-politicisation and equipping of all forces and agencies for effective service delivery. Specifically, we will (i) improve the conditions of service of all service men and women (ii) ensure recruitment, promotions, transfers and deployment of service personnel are conducted in a fair and transparent manner taking due account of professionalism (iii) re-introduce community screening of recruits into the RSLAF and SLP (iv) provide adequate housing for RSLAF and SLP service men and women and their families (v) work towards mechanizing and modernizing the RSLAF to enable them generate revenue to contribute to non-traditional military functions such as relief, disaster interventions, agriculture and construction (vi) ensure a more transparent and value-added participation of our security sector in peacekeeping missions around the world (vii) take immediate steps to decongest our prisons and institute reforms in the areas of pre-trial detention, prison management and sentencing (viii) develop an updated fire policy with attendant regulations and guidelines for the fire force (ix) set up an integrated immigration network system linking key border posts with the immigration headquarters in Freetown to facilitate data processing and storage (x) increase support to the civil registration system (xi) institute measures to create a National Immigration Service with a view to making it semi-autonomous in the discharge of some of its functions (xii) review the laws against drug trafficking with a view to empowering the state to seize and forfeit assets of drug traffickers to meet national and international obligations and (xiii) remove disaster management from the Office of National Security and establish a specialized agency National Disaster Preparedness and Management Agency.

The Civil Service

132. Despite the many civil service reforms, many challenges remain. Prominent amongst them are weak human capacity, filling of senior positions by donor-funded consultants, weak training institutes, over-centralization in Freetown, poor remuneration, weak expenditure management, poor accountability and ineffective parliamentary oversight. In addition, patronage networks and ethnic politics have been important barriers to building a professional and non-partisan civil service for a modern democracy.

133. The New Direction will strengthen and modernize the Civil Service for effective and efficient service delivery. In the New Direction, the principal objective will be to restore the professionalism and efficiency of the civil service. To this end, my Government will (i) reinforce political commitment and provide strong leadership in the reform agenda (ii) rationalize the structure of the public service with a view to having a clear political leadership and direction (ii) develop a new architecture of State governance and a national civil service organogram (iii) review the Civil Service Code and Regulations (iv) establish a National Civil Service Capacity Enhancement scheme.

Rule of Law, Promoting Justice and Human Rights

134. Sierra Leone's judiciary has come under serious scrutiny and condemnation under the APC government with perceived unconstitutional intrusion from the executive arm of government under what has become popularly known as "orders from above". Consequently, public confidence in the system of justice delivery at all levels is at its lowest ebb. The justice sector in Sierra Leone is marred by poor service delivery, limited access to justice, limited allocation of resources, shortage of staffing and limited capacity.

135. Thus, the biggest challenge confronting the Judiciary today is the growing erosion of public confidence. Neither are the Judges of the superior courts immune from public chastisement and this is occasionally engendered by their suspension from office without due process and their replacement by colleagues with known sympathies for the APC. The present status of the judicial system therefore continues to be a huge source of grave concern for the maintenance of good governance and national stability.

136. Mr. Speaker, in the New Direction, government will as a matter of utmost urgency undertake an overhaul of the judiciary and the justice delivery system in the country with a view to restoring public confidence in its independence and impartiality and make justice accessible and available for all. In pursuit of this, my Government will (i) facilitate a national dialogue on the justice system (ii) train a cadre of 'paralegals' to support the sector in the country's extreme rural communities where the services of trained legal practitioner's currently pose a huge challenge (iii) strengthen and capacitate the Legal Aid Programme to continue to provide legal aid services to our indigent and vulnerable citizens and (iv) promote dialogue with the Sierra Leone Bar Association to enhance effective and efficient judicial service delivery .

Executive Power and The Presidency

137. A presidency that is powerful beyond the limits of democratic governance is dangerous for any democracy. Sierra Leoneans were disappointed by the unlimited and unbridled use of "Executive Power" over the last 10 years. State governance has been treated as if there are no constitutional injunctions or limitations under the 1991 Constitution. The result has been that the Rule of Law has suffered enormous damage in the last 10 years.

138. In the New Direction, Government will commit itself to adhere to the rule of law and institutional reforms to maintain law and order in society. This will mean I will lead by example, demonstrating the necessary discipline to refrain from acting unconstitutionally and scrupulously respecting the rule of law in the best interest of national development and stability. Therefore, we endeavor to (i) review unlawful acts of the last Government by way of Judicial and Parliamentary review to facilitate the quick restoration and maintenance of the rule of law (ii) strengthen Judicial Independence to avoid the current embarrassment engendered by the ECOWAS Court Ruling in the Sam Sumana case (iii) avoid the reckless use of Supreme Executive Authority and so-called Orders from Above and (iv) examine the recommendations of the Constitutional Review Commission and the accompanying White Paper with a view to giving effect to them as much as is practicable.

Local and Chieftaincy Councils

139. Since 2007, the APC government has shown little or no interest in implementing the decentralisation process despite its many public pronouncements to that effect. Human resource management has been politicised with unwarranted and irregular transfers of staff. Between 2004 and 2007, whilst developing the capacities of the local councils, the then SLPP administration devolved 40 out of 72 functions. Between 2007 and 2017, only 18 additional functions have been devolved by the APC government. It also resuscitated defunct District Offices to run side by side with the local councils. Also, there is a huge disconnect between the Civil Service and the Local Government Service Commission.

140. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, my Government is determined to strengthen decentralisation through (i) reviewing the National Decentralisation Policy and amending the Local Government Act 2004 (ii) completing the devolution of functions (iii) reviewing the local government grant-making mechanism with a view to ensuring that the initial principles underpinning it (equity, need, lack of capacity to raise adequate own/local resources and even development across the country) form the basis of computation, allocation and distribution of all grants irrespective of location and partisan composition (iv) restore the dignity of Paramount Chiefs and bring them back to the centre stage of national governance with rights and obligations fully recognized and respected (v) harmonize the relationship between Local Councils and Council of Paramount Chiefs to ensure mutual respect and trust for effective service delivery process and (vi) ensure that the salaries and other conditions of service of Local Council staff are aligned with the conditions of service of the Civil Service Commission and that Local Council staff have the opportunity of serving at the central level and vice versa.

Strengthening Democratic Institutions

141. Democratic institutions including the National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR), the Political Party Registration Commission (PPRC), National Electoral Commission (NEC), Independent Media Commission (IMC), National Commission for Democracy (NCD), Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC) have been weakened owing to Government's interference and patronage. These institutions have been starved of competent human capital to enable them function effectively. Even worse, they have been grossly politicised to the extent that they have lost their operational focus and independence.

142. My administration will ensure that all national democratic institutions are put back on track as a matter of urgency by restoring their autonomy, creating the necessary enabling environment to execute their statutory mandate and to serve the people well. Specifically, my Government will (i) review laws and policies guiding the functioning of democratic institutions with a view to restoring their autonomy and independence (ii) increase the role of non-state actors in the management of democratic institutions (iii) increase the transparency of the operations of democratic institutions and (iv) develop the capacities of democratic institutions through adequate funding, qualified and competent human resources as well as efficient and effective systems and procedures.

Foreign Affairs and Diplomacy

143. The Foreign Ministry has been unable to make major imprints on the foreign and international scene to earn the country the much-needed foreign direct investment and recognition in the sub-region, African continent and the world at large. The lack of a clear foreign policy orientation, the low capacity of our foreign diplomats, undue interference in the recruitment and performance of diplomats, among others, constitute the critical challenges in our efforts to optimize the gains from our diplomatic and foreign relations. The recent hiring of staff to serve in technical positions was a mere charade.

144. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, in the New Direction, Government will place the highest premium on development and economic diplomacy as a core national interest. To this end, the location of existing and the establishment of new Embassies/Missions will be rationalised in order to achieve the greatest benefits consistent with the national interests of our country. My Government will specifically carry out the following (i) elaborate a new robust foreign policy for Sierra Leone with a clearly focused re-orientation that will de-emphasize dependence on foreign aid in favour of promoting favourable development and trade relations consistent with evolving global trends and anticipated outcomes for national economic development (ii) restructure the Foreign Ministry to fully reflect the new national policy objectives (iii) establish a school of diplomacy to train career diplomats and (iv) evaluate our foreign embassies and missions for rehabilitation, upgrading and revitalizing

Fourth Estate and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)

145. Media and civil society have become the bedrock of modern governance. In Sierra Leone, the media and CSOs are at the forefront in holding state actors accountable. In early 2000, Government set up the Independent Media Commission (IMC) and charged it with the task of regulating and monitoring media institutions to ensure that they operate in a way that promotes the public good. However, the IMC has failed to enforce its own ethics and like most democratic institutions, it has not escaped political interference from past Government.

146. In 2009, the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service (SLBS) was transformed into a national broadcaster and renamed the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation. Its mandate enjoins it to be impartial and to provide equal opportunities to all political parties. Over time it has failed to discharge this mandate and became virtually the mouthpiece of the former ruling APC party.

147. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, my administration will take immediate steps to (i) repeal the seditious libel law (ii) support the School of Journalism and other institutions to train journalists (iii) encourage the private sector to invest in the media (iv) provide budgetary subvention to SLAJ (v) enhance the capacity of the IMC to enforce the IMC Act and (vi) review the legal and operational status of the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation to make it a truly professional national broadcaster.

Diaspora Affairs

148. The Diaspora is a resource that Sierra Leone can tap into for its development needs. In the Diaspora reside some of the most educated, entrepreneurial and wealthy citizens. Most Diasporas are strongly attached to Sierra Leone and would be willing to contribute meaningfully to the country's development.

149. Mr. Speaker, my Government will (i) will review the mandate of the Diaspora Office and access its validity (ii) examine the laws relating to dual citizenship with a view to allowing Sierra Leonean Diaspora to fully participate in the politics of Sierra Leone (iii) mobilize highly skilled Sierra Leoneans for knowledge and skills transfer to Sierra Leone through volunteer services or short-term consultancy services or partnership between local and Diaspora professionals organizations (iv) mobilize and leverage Sierra Leonean Diaspora business communities for investment and trade in Sierra Leone (v) develop interactive mechanisms and special incentives for Sierra Leonean Diaspora Business communities and (vi) encourage Sierra Leonean Diaspora to form professional fora abroad.

I thank you all

God bless you all

God bless Sierra Leone



SIERRA LEONE GOVERNMENT

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

DELIVERED BY

**HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT
DR. JULIUS MAADA BIO *G.C.R.S.L.***

*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 First
Session of the Fifth Parliament of the Second
Republic of Sierra Leone**

In the Chamber of Parliament Building

Tower Hill, Freetown

On Thursday, 10th May, 2018 at 10:00 a.m.