

Statement by His Excellency Julius Maada Bio, President of the Republic of Sierra Leone at the 73rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York – 27 September 2018.

Mr Chairman,
Colleague Heads of State and Government,
Distinguished Delegates,

It is a distinct honour for me to address this august assembly for the very first time as President of the Republic of Sierra Leone.

On behalf of the Government and people of Sierra Leone, I extend heartfelt condolences to the Government and people of Ghana and to the United Nations family on the passing of Mr. Kofi Atta Annan, former Secretary-General of the United Nations. He served humanity and the world with distinction, and in our country's hour of need, he helped steer our nation out of the deep abyss of seemingly intractable war. May he rest in perfect peace. He always showed us what is possible and what is best in humanity.

Mr Chairman,
Our commitment to building a peaceful and more secure world, as espoused in the United Nations Charter, as well as, our commitment to the implementation of Agenda 2030, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, and on-going reform processes of the United Nations, resonates with the theme "Making the United Nations Relevant to all People: Global Leadership and Shared Responsibilities for Peaceful, Equitable and Sustainable Societies." The work of the United Nations should continue to be guided by the values on which it was founded, including, promoting peace, security, human rights, equality of all nations, and the promotion of social progress and better standards of life.

Mr Chairman,
In April this year, Sierra Leoneans registered their commitment to democratic governance with yet another peaceful transfer of power from an incumbent political party to the opposition. We acknowledge with humility the many messages of commendation from various parts of the world for conducting peaceful and credible Presidential, Parliamentary and Local Councils Elections, which led to my election as President. On behalf of the people of Sierra Leone, we sincerely appreciate the invaluable contributions of the international community in facilitating and monitoring our electoral process. We acknowledge the role of the United Nations and our development partners for supporting the successful conduct of those elections. We are a successful model of a stable democracy – one that has evolved and matured in 20 years from the chaos and lawlessness of civil conflict.

But stable democracies must be sustainable. Sierra Leoneans voted for a change of Government; they voted for a new direction and the right direction. My Government is ready to maximize our country's potential for development because we believe that development sustains emerging, successful, and stable democracies like ours. The international community has invested hugely in facilitating and stabilizing Sierra Leone's democracy. The international community must continue to play its role in sustaining Sierra Leone's democracy in collaboration with the Government and people of Sierra Leone. In particular, we acknowledge the support of UNDP and UNCDF for their support for our economic transformation.

In addition to our firm commitment to good governance and prudent and accountable management of our nation's resources, we are ready to foster a conducive and congenial environment for credible GDP growth. We call on our bilateral partners to help us deliver on the expectations of our people with development funds, technical assistance, and the cultivation of valuable trade links. We cordially invite all credible investors into an open and congenial investment environment where all your investments are guaranteed and protected by our relevant laws and where we have worked assiduously to remove barriers to investment. Help us to sustain our stable democracy.

Mr. Chairman,

This Assembly made a historic pledge during the World Summit held in 2005: A pledge "to strengthen the United Nations with a view to enhancing its authority and efficiency, as well as its capacity to address effectively, and in accordance with the purposes and principles of the Charter, the full range of challenges of our time".

A number of gains have been made, including the establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission and the Human Rights Council, and the adoption of the resolution on Responsibility to Protect. These gains are laudable, but the need for reform is urgent and imperative. We should now endeavor to demonstrate the political will to particularly redress the historical injustice done to the African continent.

The present geopolitical realities are compelling for a comprehensive reform of the Security Council to make way for equitable representation in all Organs of the United Nations.

Africa is the only region without representation in the Permanent category of the Security Council. Africa is also under-represented in the Non-permanent category. Africa's demand for two Permanent seats with all the rights and prerogatives of current members, including the right of veto, and two additional Non-permanent seats is a matter of common justice, and the right to have an equal say in decision-making on issues that affect the African region. It is time that we addressed this longstanding injustice and imbalance perpetuated in the present configuration of the

Security Council without any further delay. Africa is committed to on-going reforms that will make the United Nations fit for purpose.

As the Coordinator of the African Union Committee of Ten Heads of State and Government on the reform of the United Nations, we reiterate our concern over the continuous inaction of this body to adopt measures that will lead to Africa taking its rightful place in the Security Council. Unless we are able to contend with the reform of the Security Council - the most critical question of the day – our organization will be seemingly constituted on undemocratic and discriminatory principles.

Let me reiterate the urgent need for comprehensive reform of the Security Council. 1.2 billion of the world's population of 7.5 billion are African. 1.2 billion of the world's population continues to contribute its fair share to maintaining world peace and security. About 70% of the decisions made at the UN Security Council ultimately affect those 1.2 billion Africans. Those 1.2 billion people are affected by over 70% of the UN's resolutions. 1.2 billion of the world's population therefore asks why it should be excluded from representation on the UN Security Council. Those 1.2 billion people simply want their voices to be fully represented on the UN Security Council.

Mr Chairman,

My Government's blueprint document for moving our country forward – the “New Direction” - focuses on taking Sierra Leone beyond the phase of peacebuilding and consolidation to firmly establishing a stable, peaceful, open, and pluralistic democracy that is a responsible and committed member of the community of nations.

At the domestic level, my Government has established priority areas including job creation; access to quality education; youth empowerment; empowerment of women and the disabled; combating graft and corruption and fostering a culture of accountability and transparency; ensuring effective and efficient public service delivery; and strengthening civic responsibility and national cohesion.

Guided by both our specific situation and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), our governance initiative and policy actions involve strengthening our democratic institutions, opening up democratic spaces, promoting democratic dialogues, and creating a more just and equal society. We see these as precursors for the sustainable growth of our economy and our development as a nation.

My Government's economic and development policies, as I stated inter-alia, create a congenial environment for credible private sector investment and entrepreneurship. We are eager to work with and listen to the private sector. Our policies are enabling and our investment framework is attractive. We can ensure the full legal protection

of all investments and we can ensure predictable and profitable revenue streams and returns on investments.

Sierra Leone is at the beginning of adopting renewable energy. We now need public and private investment for commercial and industrial use, powering hotels, agriculture, and small-scale manufacturing. My country is endowed with significant renewable energy resources in solar irradiation, coastal and offshore wind, mini-hydro, and bioenergy. My Government's target of 60% renewable energy capacity by 2030 is practicable especially to generate growth in rural areas. Our country, like most developing countries, has been on the expensive and dirty liquid fuel treadmill since independence.

My government is seeking international technical assistance and capacity building for migrating a percentage of my country's power-generation away from heavy liquid fuel to liquid natural gas (LNG) trucked to site. My government is seeking collaboration between local companies and US engineering companies that have proven experience in working on PowerAfrica funded LNG-Power projects in Africa. We believe that investment in renewable energy sources and LNG will help us meet SDG 7 by modernizing our energy generation systems and this will have a multiplier effect in helping our country meet SDGs for poverty alleviation through job creation and increased investments, health delivery, water, and cities. We are determined to make Sierra Leone the renewable energy hub of the ECOWAS regional block. Our vision is good for our world's climate, good for foreign and local investors and development, and good for our country.

My Government has a bold vision for science, technology, and innovation. I have established the first Directorate of Science, Technology, and Innovation. We have set a bold and achievable target of 2025 for developing solid ICT infrastructure that will support graft-free governance and the delivery of effective, reliable, responsive, and transparent services from banking and business to education, agricultural extension, revenue collection, healthcare delivery, access to justice, governance, tourism, trade, and the rule of law.

Mr. Chairman,

We have undertaken extensive reforms in line with SDG 16 plus to create a peaceful, just, and inclusive Sierra Leone with resilient institutions. We are engaged in judiciary and criminal justice reform and in collaboration with civil society and partner organizations, we continue to build on gains in justice delivery that take into account disparities in access to justice. We have launched a focused and sustained campaign against graft and waste and misuse of public funds. Our National Revenue Authority has streamlined revenue collection and reduced tax evasion and theft. We have launched a free quality education programme that provides access to basic through secondary education for the girl child and other children of school-

going age. We are building, re-tooling, and opening up our governance, healthcare, financial, and other institutions to empower our women, young persons, the aged, and disabled compatriots. We are also reviewing discriminatory laws and practices and we will engage communities in order to change traditional strictures that have excluded those persons. In particular, our young people, like young people the world over are energized and eager to make Sierra Leone a better place. Our development policies and priorities harness their vibrancy and direct it into targeted education and skills training, entrepreneurship, and strong civic participation.

We are working towards a comprehensive biometric identification system so that all citizens can fully participate in the economic and civic life of our nation. In particular, we acknowledge the support of UNDP, KIVA and UNCDF in strengthening our National Digital Identification System. Their assistance modernizes our credit reference bureau that will radically transform the financial inclusion landscape and the ease of doing business in our country.

We are fully committed to promoting a free press, rescinding adversarial public order laws, and protecting and promoting the right of citizens to know and to access information. We have instituted a national civic education council to further ensure the unrestricted participation of every Sierra Leonean in our stable democracy. For all of the foregoing, we need a constructive but intensive and sustained engagement with our bilateral partners and partner institutions.

Mr. Chairman,

My Government is committed to increasing equitable access to quality healthcare for Sierra Leoneans. We call on bilateral partners, organizations, private persons to help us invest in and also develop our critical institutional, technical, human resource capacity, as well as develop infrastructure that ensures the delivery of quality healthcare for Sierra Leoneans.

We recall with great appreciation the magnanimity of the world as we dealt with recent deadly epidemics like the Ebola virus disease, and the sustained interventions of our partners in helping us battle tropical diseases including malaria, cholera, and typhoid. We need more help in all those areas and in expanding and maintaining all immunization levels at a 100%.

My government has increased healthcare investment. But that will not be enough. We call on the international community to enhance our institutional and technical capacity for preventative healthcare, and for managing public health and environmental sanitation issues including waste management and storm drain water management in urban areas.

Mr Chairman,

Sierra Leone welcomes the UN's renewed commitment to conflict prevention as embodied in its Charter. The world, more now than ever before, needs a stronger United Nations and consistent and effective multilateralism that collectively ponders and cooperatively resolves mankind's common challenges from trade to climate change, and from world security to our common humanity, and our collective social and economic well-being. Our foreign policy should be driven by the golden rule, impartiality, and cooperation. This is the only way humanity can respond effectively, without hesitation, to the global challenges that we face.

We acknowledge the continued relevance of the Programme of Action and the International Tracing Instrument, which constitutes the global framework to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects. We welcome the Secretary-General's reform agenda in sustaining peace, including the efforts to reform peacekeeping as one of the most effective tools available to the UN in the promotion and maintenance of international peace and security. My Government will bolster Sierra Leone's participation in the promotion and maintenance of international peace and security as a Troop and Police Contributing Country and supporting UN peacekeeping operations, especially with the deployments of formed units or contingents of both military and police. Sierra Leone stands ready to continue contributing to world peace and security.

Mr. Chairman,

With a strong belief in a shared vision and a common destiny, Sierra Leoneans stand with the world in meeting the world's challenges. Sierra Leoneans equally look to the world for all the help the world can offer to help consolidate Sierra Leone into an economically developed, open, inclusive, and pluralistic democracy. We are "one, with a faith that wisdom inspires; one, with a zeal that never tires." We are optimistic because our country stands ready on the threshold of a new direction.

I thank you for your attention.