



PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

DELIVERED BY

**HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT 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 Second Session
of the Fifth Parliament of the Second Republic of
Sierra Leone**

**In the Chamber of Parliament Building
Tower Hill, Freetown**

On Thursday, 2nd May, 2019 at 10:00 a.m.

MR. SPEAKER,
HON. VICE PRESIDENT,
HON. CHIEF JUSTICE,
MINISTERS OF GOVERNMENT,
HON. MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT
THE FIRST LADY,
EXCELLENCIES,
MEMBERS OF THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS,
DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members of this august body, I committed in my maiden address to this body on May 10, 2018 to transforming the economy, creating the ecosystem for investment and private sector growth, investing in human capital development, and making wide ranging institutional and governance reforms.

2. The backdrop to my maiden address in 2018 was a weakened economy, withdrawal of development partners, and a palpable loss of faith in the good governance of the state. At this State Opening of the Second session of the Fifth Parliament of the Second Republic, we stand on the threshold of renewed hope and confidence for our citizens, investors, and development partners.

Transforming the Economy

3. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, real economic growth rate for 2017 and 2018 remained steady at 3.7% due largely to a slump in economic activities and iron ore mining operations. Ongoing renegotiations of concessional agreements on two iron ore mining operations will soon be concluded.

Revenue Mobilisation and Expenditure Management and Control

4. We inherited a fiscal imbalance with expenditure far exceeding revenue largely due to bloated public spending in spite of shrinking domestic revenue. The ratio of domestic revenue of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was 12.6 percent and that of total expenditure of GDP was 24.1 percent in 2017. Overall, fiscal deficit GDP

ratio has dropped from 8.7 percent in 2017 to 5.4 percent in 2018 as a result of ongoing efforts to control expenditure while mobilising domestic revenue.

5. Domestic revenues collected during 2018 increased to Le 4.35 trillion or 14.0 percent of GDP compared to Le 3.34 trillion or 12.6 percent of GDP in 2017, an increase of about Le 1.0 trillion. From April 2018 to March 2019 the Government collected a total of Le 5.09 trillion of domestic revenues giving a monthly average of Le 424 billion. That far exceeded the monthly average of Le 278 billion in 2017.

6. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, as part of the implementation of Executive Order 1, Government conducted an in-depth investigation into duty and tax waivers granted to NGOs, contractors and investors. It has been challenging to totally eliminate all duty waivers. Besides international agencies and NGOs covered under the Vienna and Geneva Conventions, several agreements and contracts signed and ratified by this honourable House before April 2018 provided for massive duty and tax waivers to contractors and investors. Notwithstanding, I am pleased to report considerable revenue gain as a result of the rationalization of the duty and tax waivers. Between April 2018 and March 2019, total duty and tax exemption was estimated at Le 385.91 billion compared to Le 488.54 billion for the period April 2017 and March 2018. This represents a 26.5 percentage gain in revenue.

7. My Government is now finalising a robust and holistic duty and tax waiver policy that will limit the discretionary powers of Government to grant waivers for the consideration of Cabinet. A bill on Duty and Tax Waiver will be laid for enactment by this House.

8. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, my Government is deepening the implementation of the Treasury Single Account (TSA). To date, revenues collected from 9 agencies are remitted to the Consolidated Revenue Fund (CRF) via sub-Treasury account. Percentages of amounts remitted are paid back to the respective agencies as agreed with the Ministry of Finance to take care of operating and investment expenditures. Between April 2018 and April 2019, total revenue collected by all TSA agencies and remitted to CRF was estimated at Le 337.8 billion representing 7 percent of total revenue collected for that period.

9. Despite the amount paid into the CRF, generally, the amount retained for general goods and services is not significant. Apparently, the operating expenses of TSA agencies and also State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) have remained high and unsustainable. To limit the variations in operating expenses, Government will review and develop guidelines of operating expenses of TSA agencies and SOEs and reduce the disparities with a view to optimising collections for general goods and services.

10. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, before the fuel price liberalisation in July 2018, substantial revenue was lost to reduced excise duties, elimination of import duties, and even direct subsidies granted to Oil Marketing Companies. Total revenue lost before the fuel price liberalisation was estimated at US\$34.1 million in 2016, US\$11.2 million in 2017 and US\$26.1 million for January to June 2018. After the reform in July 2018, a total amount of about US\$60 million was gained as revenue which was about 90 percent of what is budgeted for the education sector for 2019.

11. In order to cushion the effect of the removal of fuel price subsidy, government introduced Free Quality School Education, waived fees for admission forms for all tertiary institutions, increased salaries of junior workers and expanded on the safety net programmes. Government has also introduced School Buses to urban towns to ease the cost of transportation to all pupils. I am pleased to report that the buses will soon arrive in Sierra Leone after a necessarily diligent but protracted procurement process.

12. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, the initial ban of export of timber was lifted in October 2018. A sole exporter was designated to export 13,000 containers of timber that was estimated to be available for export at the time of the ban. Between October 2018 and March 2019, the total amount realised from timber export was US\$16.5 million.

13. Mindful of the need for environmental management, an additional US\$2.4 million is now allocated for reforestation. The Ministry of Agriculture has developed a National Programme for Tree Planting and Reforestation and has commenced the procurement process of service providers to implement the programme. This programme will be launched this year. Also, Government is working on a robust policy on forest logging and timber production. That policy will also provide an appropriate institutional framework for licensing, export, and reforestation in the form of a National Timber Governance Agency now endorsed by cabinet.

14. Additionally, this Parliament enacted into law the Extractive Industry Revenue Bill which brings together and harmonizes in one document the fiscal provisions in both the mining and Oil and Gas sectors. This House also enacted the amended 2018 Finance Act and the 2019 Finance Act. The 2019 Finance Act makes possible the implementation of the web-based ASYCUDA World, reviews and establishes rates, fees, and other charges enacted in various parents Acts of revenue generating MDAs.

15. In June 2018, the National Revenue Authority (NRA) started implementing the long-delayed ECOWAS Common External Tariff (CET) regime. The CET harmonises the import and external tariff rates across ECOWAS countries and facilitates import-duty-free trade among countries in the sub-region.

16. My administration has also instituted additional revenue mobilisation measures including (i) evaluating the on-going tax reforms; (ii) implementing audit reports findings and recommendations; (iii) developing a National Tax Policy and later an Act for legislation; (iv) developing the capacity of local councils, particularly the city councils in revenue assessment and collection; (v) automating tax administration including the introduction of the Electronic Cash Register and the consolidation of the ASYCUDA World Wide; and (vi) conducting surveys of rented houses and buildings for assessing rental income taxation.

17. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, the hallmark of financial management of my administration has been efficient public spending. Among other things, we have developed a New Fleet management policy aimed at reducing wastages relating to vehicle maintenance and fuel consumption. We have also prepared price norms to guide MDAs in procurement. These norms eliminate the wide spread disparities in the prices of goods and services procured by MDAs. Government is also developing a new Travel Policy for all MDAs including Government Ministers. We will submit these policies to this House for information.

18. In order to cut down on fraud and waste in public sector payrolls, we have conducted biometric verification of all public sector workers. Preliminary findings indicate savings of about Le 5 billion a month in public sector payroll. Workers who have yet to be captured in the verification exercise have been afforded an opportunity to do so before the public sector payroll is finalised. My government will also conduct payroll management audits in all ministries. The pilot audit conducted by the Ministry of Finance produced evidence of substantial anomalies in payroll management. I have therefore directed that a comprehensive payroll audit be carried out this year to investigate these anomalies with a view to cleaning the payroll in all MDAs.

19. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, we have re-established the powers of the Public Service Commission as the sole authority for recruiting civil servants. Work by the Wages and Compensation Commission to rationalise wages, salaries, and benefits among government agencies is at an advanced stage. Cabinet will soon discuss their report followed by the Bill that will be laid before this House for enactment. Additionally, a Directorate of Monitoring and Evaluation has been established. It is currently working on a blueprint for monitoring the National Development Plan, all government and donor-funded public sector projects, bilateral and multilateral agencies, and NGOs. We shall continue to deepen public expenditure planning and management through the recruitment, training, and deployment of fiduciary staff to serve as Budget Officers, Procurement Officers, Internal Auditors, and Account Officers to all MDAs and Local Councils.

20. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, we have continued to live within our means. I am proud to inform you that my administration has paid salaries, arrears to educational institutions, and for other government services without recourse to central bank overdrafts and bank borrowing.

Exchange Rate and Inflation Management

21. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, despite our gains in fiscal reform, we have experienced a depreciation of the Leones over the past 12 months. The lull in iron-ore mining and possible off-shore foreign exchange transactions are among factors that limit our foreign exchange inflows into the official banking sector. On the demand side, the continued dollarization of the economy remains the single most factor affecting the exchange rate.

22. Consequent upon negotiations, Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, iron-ore production will soon resume. We will clamp down on off shore foreign exchange transactions and compel all remittances and foreign disbursements to be done through the domestic banking system. On the demand side, we will continue to enforce existing regulations including a ban on carrying out domestic transactions in foreign currency such as payments for rent and hotel accommodation and institute policies to dampen demand for non-productive imported goods. We are finalising regulations on currency swapping with key trading partners, hoarding of foreign currency in homes, and paying Daily Subsistence Allowance (DSA) in currencies of the host countries. All these measures will curtail demand for foreign currencies. The cumulative effect of the increased in supply of foreign exchange and cutbacks in demand will arrest the depreciation of the Leone and stabilise the exchange rate.

23. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, given that Sierra Leone is an import dependent country, a depreciation in exchange rate is translated into increase in prices of commodities. This has kept inflation in two digits although projected to progressively decline to single digit in 2021. In the coming year, Government will consolidate ongoing reforms and adopt new measures to expand production which will help to stabilise the exchange rate and retail prices of commodities.

Public Debt Management and Arrears

24. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, the current debt situation is unsustainable and constitutes a critical risk to effective budget management. As at December 31, 2018, external debts stood at US\$1.5 billion and domestic debt at Le 4.9 trillion (US\$636.4 million). Repayment of principal amounts and interest continue to choke the budget thereby reducing the resource envelope for financing priority investments in human capital development. On average, a total of Le 110 billion is used to service debts monthly and debt service payment plus salary constitute about 85% of domestic revenue collected.

25. Arrears to contractors continue to be another nightmare. A total of Le11.59 trillion (US\$1.37billion) were submitted across all sectors to be verified by the Audit Service Sierra Leone. A total of Le4.5 trillion (US\$530.9 million) of the claims submitted were verified as outstanding debt owed to the various contractors/ suppliers by the Government of Sierra Leone. The total claims verified represented 38.9 percent of the total claims submitted for audit.

26. In 12 months of my administration, Government significantly reduced domestic borrowing for financing the budget to Le564.71 billion in 2018 from Le1.02 trillion in 2017 (a decline by 44.4 percent). Government has cancelled three loan agreements totalling over US\$1.5 billion because they constitute a significant risk for debt sustainability.

27. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, my administration will continue with (i) the practice of linking the borrowing ceiling to a clearly laid out medium-term debt management strategy; (ii) limiting external financing of social services to grants; and (iii) reform the institutional and legal framework for accessing external and domestic debt for the central government, local governments, and parastatals.

28. Our strategy to deal with the verified claims will include the following: outright cash payment from the budget or grant resources or revenue windfall; issuance of medium to long-term securities in settlement of the arrears; and, issuance of special treasury bills to raise resources and clear some of the verified arrears in order to allow suppliers and contractors to settle obligations with the banking systems.

29. To avoid future arrears build up, my administration will ensure that quarterly budget allocations are informed by actual cash collected and projected revenue inflows rather than budgeted estimates. Government will also improve cash management operations, enhance fiduciary oversight of sub-national government and state-owned enterprises, and use price norm to guide the procurement activities of MDAs thus avoiding overpricing. Government will also strengthen commitment controls through the Integrated Financial Management Information Systems (IFMIS) to ensure that expenditures are within budgeted ceilings and approved quarterly allocations while continuing to make allocations for clearance of arrears in the medium-term budget framework.

Relaunch of the Extended Credit Facility and Resource Mobilisation

30. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, I am pleased to formally inform you that my administration relaunched the Extended Credit Facility with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in November 2018. The relaunch of this programme within 8 months of my administration has restored the international credibility of Sierra Leone and brought in substantial resources. The new ECF programme is estimated at US\$172.1 million of which US\$21 million was immediately disbursed. This was followed by the disbursement of 23.5 million euros budgetary support from the European Union, US\$40 million by the World Bank and US\$21 million from the African Development Bank. As a mark of recognition of our good record in public financial management, all disbursements, but the disbursement from the IMF, are grants.

31. Additionally, Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, as a result of our good record in economic management, we have also benefitted from a number of development projects in various sectors. The number of donor projects approved in 12 months of my administration is unprecedented in the history of Sierra Leone. A total of 11 projects were approved by International financial institutions, amounting to US\$196.3 million. Of that amount, 59 percent were loans and 41 percent were grants. By June of this year, 5 additional projects amounting to US\$230 million will be approved by the World Bank. We are negotiating for all this

amount to be grant resources. These are in addition to the US\$17.5 million DFID-funded Global Partnership for Education (GPE) grant and other projects approved by the European Union and other partners.

National Development Planning

32. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, to restore planning, coordination, monitoring, and evaluation of public investments funded by Government, development partners and NGOs, we have successfully divorced the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development from the Ministry of Finance. The former leads in planning capital projects whilst the latter handles all fiduciary matters as provided for in our National Constitution. The new Ministry of Planning and Economic Development has produced a series of development policy documents including the Child Poverty Report; the Population Policy, and the Development Cooperation Framework (DCF) and is at an advanced stage in the preparation of the country's first Public Investment Policy. The DCF provides rules and regulations for the operations of NGOs in Sierra Leone.

33. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, the aspirations of my Government have been formally articulated in the Medium Term National Development Plan, "***Education for Development***". The total cost of the Plan is US\$8.15 million of which US\$4.5 million will be mobilized from domestic sources and foreign commitment with a projected financing gap of US\$3.65 million.

34. The Plan, which shall henceforth inform the Annual Budget, defines 8 clusters as follows: human capital development; diversifying the economy and promoting growth; infrastructure and economic competitiveness, governance and accountability for results; empowering women, children, adolescents and Persons Living with Disabilities; youth employment, sports and migration; addressing vulnerabilities and rebuilding resilience, and the means of Implementation.

35. The Ministry has also formalised guidelines for development operations at national, sectoral, district and community levels titled National Development Planning Guidelines. The Ministry has conducted an assessment of all district planning offices and will establish and strengthen these offices to plan and coordinate development activities at the district level. My Government has also signed a Memorandum of Understanding with external financing organisations to develop bankable projects that will be used to mobilise resources not only from traditional sources but non-traditional sources including the private sector.

36. The National Monitoring and Evaluation Department has been created in the Ministry with a mandate to create an effective national institutional policy framework to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the Medium Term National Development Plan and other Government and donor funded projects.

Private Sector and Financial Sector Development

37. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, I am pleased to report that my administration is determined to increase private sector investment. The relaunch of the Extended Credit Facility (ECF) with the IMF indicates that there is a stable macroeconomic environment and investor confidence in Sierra Leone is growing. We have recently participated in a few international Investment Conferences. Worthy of note is the Conference organised by Attijariwafa Bank in Morocco and recently another in Dubai. The High Commission in Ghana also organised a very successful investment conference in Ghana only for Sierra Leone. The Conference brought together at least 300 investors from various parts of the World. These Conferences have been followed by large delegations of investors who have expressed interests in various sectors. They are now working with respective MDAs on their investment plans.

38. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, we are developing an ecosystem favourable for investment by improving on the macroeconomic environment, investing in infrastructure, institutionalising norms that are investor-friendly, and reviewing the policy and legal environments to improve the ease of doing business.

39. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, my Government is determined to ensure compliance with The Local Content Act, increase the access of Sierra Leoneans to finance, and restructure and rationalise the Ministry of Trade and Industry as a strategic lead ministry for investments in Sierra Leone.

40. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, the financial sector is stable. We still have 14 licensed functional banks in Sierra Leone; one (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.

41. I am pleased to report that the operations and management of the State Owned Banks have improved considerably largely as a result of the independence granted to these Banks and the elimination of political interference into their operations. The operating profits of Sierra Leone Commercial Bank increased from Le 5.36 billion in 2014 to Le 83.65 billion in 2018. Full year forecast for 2019 is projected at Le 157.58 billion on the back of new revenue streams from digital banking platforms. Returns on assets have consistently grown from 0.44% in 2014 to 5.7% in 2018. Returns on capital employed has moved from 9.62 % in 2014 to 52.13% in 2018. Depositors liabilities have also grown from Le 702.68 billion in 2014 to Le 1.23 trillion in 2019; a reflection of customers' confidence in the Bank. The Bank has progressively managed down its non-performing loans ratio from 45.3% to 16.0% in 2019. Management has embarked on an aggressive debt collection program using means at its disposals to collect long outstanding debts.

42. My administration will scale up efforts to strengthen the Central Bank, particularly in the area of banking regulation and supervision, developing IT including the National Switch that will facilitate interbank transactions, and increase access to both short-term and long-term capital for investment purposes.

Agriculture

43. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, agricultural development shall continue to be the centrepiece of our drive towards economic diversification and poverty reduction. The focus of my administration is to attain self-sufficiency in food production in the next 4 years, increase cash crop production and exports, create jobs, and provide income for the population

44. I am pleased to report rapid development in the agricultural sector. A total of 3,800 hectares of oil palm is now planted all over the country, 2,000 hectares of cocoa plantations have been rehabilitated; 52 Agricultural Business Centres selected for transformation and 26 of them have received complete post-harvest and processing machines with start-up capital. Additionally 25 Agricultural Business Centres have been constructed; 841 hectares of Inland Valley Swamps have been rehabilitated; 600 km of feeder roads have been rehabilitated; 59 small agribusinesses and 9 medium to large-scale businesses supported by Smallholder Commercialization and Agribusiness Development Project (SCADeP) are now fully functional.

45. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, I am also pleased to report that the agriculture sector has attracted support from many development partners including the World Bank, International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), Islamic Development Bank, Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and European Union. An estimate of about US\$220 million has been mobilised from various partners for the development of the sector in the last 12 months and an additional amount of over US\$45 million will be approved before the end of June 2019.

46. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, intra-district trade in agricultural products has often been hindered by unreliable ferry crossing services in several parts of the country. I am pleased to inform this House that additional financing of US\$30 million will be approved by the World Bank to replace all 13 moribund ferries with modern bridges. The European Union has also expressed interest in this project. This will facilitate trade in various districts, increase access to social services, and enhance the movement of people.

47. While we shall continue to provide support to small holder farmers through traditional support systems, we are encouraging private sector operators to engage in large scale mechanized commercial farming activities. To this end, we are currently engaging foreign private sector players to invest in large scale farming in the Torma Bum-Gbondappi areas in the South and in the Rhombe and Samu areas in the North.

48. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, my Government is still committed to increasing public spending to agriculture to 10% in the next 2 years in line with the Maputo Accord. I still strongly encourage prominent citizens, including political appointees, to engage in agriculture at whatever stage in the value chain.

49. To increase food crop production, my administration will continue to (i) improve the seed bank system to attract reliable private sector players; (ii) support the private sector for large scale agricultural food and cash crop production, processing, and marketing; (iii) support local industries engaged in the fabrication of farm tools and the supply for other farming inputs; (iv) develop public and private partnership in tractor management; (v) rehabilitate feeder roads linking farming communities to markets; and (vi) facilitate the establishment of cash crop cooperatives and provide training in processing to ensure our cash crops become competitive for export.

Marine Resources

50. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, my Government inherited a fisheries and marine sector with great revenue losses due to illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing. I am pleased to report the following achievements in 12 months of my administration. First, Government has harmonised the industrial fishing license fees and other charges with those in the sub-region and facilitated the harmonisation of licensing fees of small artisanal canoes across all local councils. Consequently, revenue generated from the fisheries and marine sector has surged upward from Le 74 billion in 2017 to Le 94 billion in 2018. Second, to address the perpetual challenge of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, my administration has deleted all fishing vessels/ fishing related and fish cargo vessels from the International Fishing Registry of the Sierra Leone Maritime Administration that were registered under "**Flag of Convenience.**" Third, in an effort to address the huge infrastructure deficit in the sector, Government has rehabilitated fish ponds, including fencing of the Bo Aquaculture Station, and rehabilitated Fisheries Extension Outstations at Konakrdee, Tombo, and Gbondapi.

51. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, I am also pleased to report that Government signed an MOU with the Chinese Government for the construction of a US\$70 million fish harbour. The site for the construction has been surveyed and a plan for the harbour is available. Additionally, Government has also signed a partnership agreement with Iceland for a US\$3.2 million project to construct improved fish smoke ovens, water and sanitation and hygiene improvement, analysis of data from Vessel Monitoring System and training on the law of the sea.

52. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, in order to strengthen planning, management, and monitoring in the marine sector, we are recruiting 52 lower and upper cadre staffs to enhance efficient and effective fisheries management. We have also trained 300 fish processors/fishermen in improved fish processing and quality management, employed additional Fisheries Enumerators and Fisheries Assistant, formed an umbrella body of fishermen herein referred to as the Artisanal

Fishermen Consortium, and procured equipment for the expansion of the data collection programme into other fish landing sites (Goderich, Shenge, Bonthe, and Sulima). The Ministry is also implementing Fisheries Stock Assessment through the Scientific Observer Programme and it has enhanced the monitoring, control and surveillance of fishing vessels by ensuring regular patrols and utilization of Vessel Monitoring System and Fisheries Observers. A total of about US\$700,000 was generated by government through fines for various fisheries infractions.

53. Government implemented a 'closed season' in order to rebuild fish stock between April 1 and 30, 2019. This is sustainable best practice the world-over for managing fish stock.

54. My administration will continue to improve fisheries infrastructure, rehabilitate existing laboratories for improving fish quality, and to pursue measures to make our marine products attractive in European Markets. Government will also establish a special fund to provide capital to women engaged in fish trading.

Tourism

55. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, 12 months ago, in this very House, we identified critical challenges in the tourism industry including weak policy and regulatory framework, limited human capacity, poor infrastructure, and an unfavourable country image. On the policy and legal framework, Government has reviewed the Monuments and Relics Ordinance of 1947 and formulated and popularised a Five Year Strategic Plan for the sector. A new heritage legislation endorsed by Cabinet has also been sent to the Law Officers' Department for drafting.

56. To improve and market the international image of Sierra Leone, the Ministry and its agencies embarked on a series of marketing and rebranding campaigns by attending leading tourism trade shows including the International Tourism French Market (Top Resa) in France, The World Travel Market (WTM) in the UK, and the Fitur Tourism Fair in Madrid, Spain.

57. The Ministry has resuscitated working relationships with UNESCO, ICOMOS, the World Monuments Fund, The International African American Museum Charleston, South Carolina USA, the Friends of the Sierra Leone National Railway Museum, the BBC, the Wilberforce Institute of Slavery and Emancipation (WISE), the Department of Arts and Culture of South Africa, the International Organisation of National Trusts (INTO), the Black Nova Scotia Heritage Centre, Halifax Canada, Ghana Museum and Monuments Board, the Maroons of Trelawney-Flagstaff Jamaica, the Federal Gullah/Geechee, Heritage Corridor Commission, and a host of other organisations. Also, the Ministry has established collaboration with AHLEI, an American Hospitality Institute, to provide training to private and public workers.

58. The first City Tourism Information office was established at the National Museum. Sierra Leone is now covered in internationally recognised tourism magazines and the Tourism Inflight Magazine called "The Traveltainment" has been launched and disseminated. With the support of the US Government, the Bunce Island jetty has been completed and Bunce Island has been preserved and transformed into a National Historic Park.

59. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, the overall objective in the New Direction for tourism will continue to be increasing revenue, creating jobs, and promoting the cultural heritage of the country. The specific policy actions will continue to cover (i) improving the policy and legal environment; (ii) developing historic sites; (iii) developing the relevant Infrastructure; (iv) promoting marketing and improving International Image; (v) furthering skills development, and (vi) diversifying tourism products.

60. In the coming years, Government will further review and upgrade tourism-related laws, regulations and policies, and we will upgrade additional tourism and cultural sites. We will also implement public-private partnerships to maintain some of these facilities and to develop an improved web portal for tourism promotion and marketing in Sierra Leone. Additionally, my administration will conduct a skills audit of the tourism sector, prepare a Manpower Development Plan for the Tourism Sector, and upgrade the existing school for hotel management. Government will also support private schools pursuing tourism related disciplines by providing them with materials, equipment, staff, and introduce higher education programmes for tourism training.

Mineral Resources

61. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, the mineral sector is challenged by huge gaps and deficiencies as a result of a lack of comprehensive geological data and information. Government recently commissioned aircraft for the Nationwide Airborne Geophysical Survey. The primary objective of this survey is to acquire adequate and reliable geophysical data that will ascertain the types, quantities, and distribution of Sierra Leone's mineral resources. This data will ensure sustainable future exploration and enable Sierra Leone to bargain with potential investors from a position of strength.

62. On policy and legal reforms, Cabinet approved the Sierra Leone Mines and Minerals Policy, the Artisanal Mining Policy of Sierra Leone, and the Geo-Data Management Policy for Sierra Leone. Government will soon review the regulations contained in the Mines and Minerals Act (MMA) 2009. A consultant has been hired on a long-term basis to facilitate processes for the review of the MMA 2009 up to enactment by Parliament. Government also enacted the Extractive Industry Revenue Act which seeks to rationalise and harmonise revenue sources from oil and gas exploration.

63. In the year under review, the Ministry, with support from the World Bank funded Extractive Industries Technical Assistance Project Phase 2 (EITAP2), has forged collaborative partnerships with academic and professional local training institutions for human capital development. Also, with support from the UNDP, the Ministry has established a minerals development research and resource centre for the first time to increase access to learning and teaching materials for quality academic and professional education and training. The resource centre is equipped with textbooks relevant to mineral policy formulation, computers, printing, photocopying, and high-speed internet facilities. There are also plans to subscribe to international journals. As part of its support to academic institutions, the World Bank, through the EITAP2 will increase capacity of the Resource Centre to cater for the research needs for researchers and students from all academic and professional training institutions.

64. In its effort to improve compliance with Mineral Rights, the National Minerals Agency has recruited Mines Compliance Officers. It has also motivated companies to speed up the exploration process leading to an increase in the number of large-scale mining companies in Sierra Leone. There are presently 12 large-scale mining licences and 152 exploration licences.

65. The NMA has also undertaken effective monitoring for compliance in the mining sector by updating, validating information on ownership, taxes, and revenues in compliance with Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative (EITI) standards.

66. The National Minerals Agency (NMA) has developed standard procedures for all negotiations and agreements between Mineral Rights Holders (MRH) and local communities through a model Community Development Agreement and also ensured that all mining companies assist in the development of mining communities by promoting sustainable development.

67. In the near future, Government will completely review the Mines and Minerals Act 2009 as well as Mining Lease Agreements to realign them with international best practices as provided for by EITI standards.

Improving the Management of Oil and Gas Exploration

68. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, in 2018, the new leadership took over a Petroleum Directorate that was marred by so many organisational challenges including an exceptionally low response rate to the Call for Tenders in the context of the Fourth Licensing Round. In 12 months, the following have been accomplished: (i) developed a Medium Term Strategic Plan 2018-2023 and Operational Plan 2019, (ii) initiated intensive industry consultation with London based technical partners; (iii) established or strengthened partnerships and undertaken marketing activities as part of efforts aimed at stimulating interest in the upstream sub sector in Sierra Leone; (iv) initiated the acquisition, processing, and Interpretation of Additional 5,000 line-km of 2-Dimensional Multi-Client Seismic Data; (v) reconfigured contract areas, and (vi) undertaken capacity building for operational excellence while enhancing the visibility of the sector.

69. The Government has re-stimulated intensive investor interest and a new bid round will be announced shortly. We have also signed a revenue-sharing agreement with GEOPARTNERS, a UK based company, for a 2D Long Offset Seismic Survey over areas not yet covered by any preliminary survey. The completion of this project will add significant value to exploration activities as it will enhance knowledge about the sub surface structures and reservoir characterisation. Government has also upgraded infrastructure for storage and retrieval of Geoscience data in progress and developed the existing work station centre.

70. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, our focus as a Government is to use oil and gas development to generate wealth without compromising environmental protection and sustainability. For that reason, we have emphasised Oil and Gas Governance, Petroleum Fiscal Regime, and Capacity Building in the sector.

Human Capital Development

71. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, you would recall that human capital development which we consider as both a means and an end of development is the central pillar of my administration. This includes education and training, health care and social protection. Our primary objective as a government is to increase access to quality pre-primary, primary, secondary, technical and vocational education and training as well as university education that will enable our citizens to engage in meaningful and productive economic activity.

Basic and Secondary School Education

72. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, in fulfilment of our electoral promise, my Government launched the Free Quality School Education (FQSE) programme in August 2018. It benefits 2.14 million pupils in Government-owned and Government-assisted pre-primary, primary, and secondary schools. The planning for the programme was informed by data from a National School Census collected with the support of DFID and the World Bank.

73. To demonstrate our commitment to education, my Government has increased and sustained budgetary allocation to education to 21% in 2018 Supplementary Budget and 2019 Budget.

74. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, as promised 12 months ago, Government established a Multi-Partner Fund to mobilise additional resources and ensure effective coordination of support of this programme. A High Level Inter-Ministerial and Partners Group (IMPG) on Free Education comprising relevant ministries and partners was set up to provide strategic guidance to the planning and design of the programme, mobilise resources, and oversee implementation. A Technical Group (TG) on Education comprising professionals from the relevant MDAs and partner agencies was established to design, coordinate and monitor the implementation of the programme. The Technical Group will report to the High Level Inter-Ministerial and Partners Group.

75. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, for the first two terms of the implementation of this Programme, I am very pleased to report that Government has paid a little over Le 66 billion as subsidies to over 4,007 schools. Government has also provided teaching and learning materials to all schools. In addition, Government has developed a book distribution and handling policy that actively involves Local Council and District Education Offices.

76. Government has also invested in school infrastructure and feeding. A total of Le 3 billion was provided for the provision of furniture to 90 schools most in need and another Le 3 billion for the rehabilitation of 50 schools. Additionally, 210,000 pupils in Koinadugu, Falaba, Kambia, Pujehun and Tonkolili are currently benefitting from the National School Feeding Programme and Le 69 billion is allocated for the remaining 11 districts.

77. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, the 2019 budget provided for the recruitment of 5,000 additional teachers. By the end of December 2018, 2,202 teachers retired and are now being replaced with new teachers, of whom 1,432 teachers have received pin codes and 1,112 are now on the payroll. The Teaching Service Commission has received and is processing 12,000 applications for recruitment and over 1,075 have been recruited.

78. Additionally, Government has paid backlog for all public examinations including NPSE, BECE and WASSCE, successfully conducted public examinations with increased numbers of candidates sitting and passing, and funded the hosting of the 67th Annual (International) Meeting of West African Examinations Council (WAEC).

79. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, the design of the FQSE Programme recognises the role of school inspectors in monitoring and supervising teachers and ensure effective learning. To this end, Government is recruiting over 150 school inspectors who shall be provided mobility and fuel support to visit schools as frequently as possible. Additionally, Government has established District Education Committees and Ward Education Committees and strengthening Boards of Governors of Secondary Schools and School Management Committees to support school and education governance.

80. I am also pleased to inform you that, in fulfilment of our electoral promise, the 6-3-4-4 system of education has been abolished and replaced with the 6-3-3-4 system and the two-shift system is being eliminated in schools.

81. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, our bold move to initiate the Free Education Programme has impressed development partners and put Sierra Leone on the global agenda for education. The World Bank has endorsed Sierra Leone as one of the early adopters of human capital development and both the Ministers of Basic and Secondary School Education and Finance are being invited to global

platforms to share experiences. Mrs. Melinda Gates publicly acknowledged my government as a champion for human capital development during the World Bank/ IMF Annual Meeting in 2018 in Bali, Indonesia with the theme "Investing in Human Capital Development".

82. Consequently, there has been considerable support for the programme and we anticipate that our partners will do more. Within 12 months, a total of US \$ 17.2 million was secured from DFID through the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and implemented by UNICEF. The European Union 11th EDF Project implementation costing 29 million Euros has commenced. By June this year, the World Bank will submit to its Board for approval the sum of US\$70 million for the Free Quality School Education. BADEA will also submit to its Board in June this year, a project costing about US\$45 million for the rehabilitation of 4 government senior secondary schools (Kenema Government Secondary School, Prince of Wales, Government Secondary School, Bo Government Secondary School and the Magburaka Government Secondary School for Boys); 2 teacher training colleges (Milton Margai Teachers College and Bunumbu Teachers College); and the construction of a multi-storey headquarter block.

83. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, initial assessment of the Free Quality School Education is very positive. Enrolment at primary level increased by at least 90,000 between 2017/18 and 2018/19 and nearly 10,000 at Junior Secondary School. This indicates the programme is providing opportunities for persons who would not have gone to school in the absence of such a programme. The programme has also reduced household spending on education and the subsidy to schools and the elimination of school fees provides savings for families which they can now use for consumption or investment. To put this in context, imagine a family that spends Le 500,000 on school fees and learning materials for 3 children, this family now saves Le 1.5 million a year, which is more than start-up capital for some small businesses.

84. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, we fully recognize and we will address the concerns of teachers. Government is committed to raising the morale and productivity of our teachers. The Teaching Service Commission (TSC) is now fully functional. We have completed the transfer of teacher management functions to the TSC, transferred teacher payroll management function from the Accountant General's Office to the TSC, and we are rolling out the Integrated Financial Management System (IFMIS) in the TSC. A Teacher Records Repository has been established at the TSC and the TSC has completed the symbolic commissioning of TSC District Offices in all 14 districts. The TSC is now working on the recruitment, re-assessment and replacement of teachers as well as teacher reassessment and promotion. The TSC has also developed policy guidelines for registering, licensing, and managing teachers. The Commission has also conducted baseline study on characteristics of teacher training providers and developed Performance Management and Standards for teachers.

85. The Ministry is working with the Sierra Leone Teachers Union (SLTU) to commence the **THE BEST TEACHER** award for the most innovative, ingenious, and dedicated teachers at national and district levels. The Ministry of Technical and Higher Education will automatically award grants-in-aid to a maximum of 3 children of a teacher who has taught for at least 10 years.

86. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, we are committed to increasing the salaries of teachers. Government awaits the outcome of the ongoing negotiations between the Sierra Leone Teachers Union (SLTU) and the Ministry in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour and Social security for increase salaries and improved conditions of services for teachers.

87. Mr. Speaker, Free Education has increased demand for school places. In anticipation, we will continue to pursue the 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.

88. We also remain committed to addressing the huge cost of transportation for school going children particularly in Freetown and other urban towns. I am also pleased to report that part payment has been effected and the final inspection of 50 school buses has been done and the buses are expected soon. These buses will be managed by the local councils and will be run on a cost recovery basis.

89. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, improving education governance is critical for the success of the New Direction in education. To this end, my Government has reviewed the Education Sector Plan and aligned it with the national development priorities. Government is also strengthening Education Management and Information System (EMIS) to support informed strategic decision-making. We have also commenced the development of a robust policy and legal framework for Public-Private-Partnership in the education sector.

90. 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 a Students Loan Scheme that will provide loans to deserving students to access higher education. Already, a Cabinet Paper has been prepared for discussion.

Technical and Higher Education

91. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, in the first year of my Government, we delivered a key election promise by establishing a separate Ministry of Technical and Higher Education. This new Ministry, among other things, provides effective oversight of tertiary, technical and vocational sectors of the national education system for effective service delivery in the country.

92. Despite the huge challenges of starting a new Ministry, a comprehensive assessment of all existing facilities has been carried out and we are in the process of providing equipment for these facilities. To this end, Government has secured a US\$20 million loan from the World Bank for supporting Skills Development in both the formal and informal sectors. The main objective of this project is to increase access to demand-led skills training and build the foundations for a demand-led skills development system in Sierra Leone. It will focus on increasing access to quality skills provisions that will contribute to improving Sierra Leone's economic competitiveness and the promotion of sustainable and inclusive development. The project will target selected training institutions that wish to improve the relevance and quality of their training programs and to introduce new short courses for out-of-school unemployed and underemployed youths, with a focus on girls. It also aims to improve access to demand-responsive TVET programs focusing on Formal TVET and Informal TVET, through among other things: (i) upgrading of curricula; (ii) purchasing learning resources; (iii) training of instructors; (iv) providing industrial attachments; (v) twinning arrangements; (vi) providing career counselling and internships; and (vii) conducting training needs assessment and tracer studies. It will also target businesses in the productive sectors (agriculture, fisheries, mining, construction and tourism) that need to address the skills gaps to expand their production and markets, or to upgrade their production process to climb higher up the value chain, including co-financing short- to medium term training aimed at upgrading the skills of current and potential employees. The Ministry will also establish at least one Functional Literacy Centre using existing school facilities.

93. In the ensuing years, Government will vigorously pursue the development of a national apprenticeship scheme which can provide internship for trainees of TVET institutes and at the same time provide direct training for youth, develop a more robust Public-Private-Partnership framework to increase private sector participation in TVET training. Also, Government is committed to establishing in every district capital one 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.

94. The Ministry of Technical and Higher Education has improved the governance in the technical and higher education sector, developed their capacity and their effectiveness through continuous quality assurance, negotiated partnerships that improve research, science, technology, and innovation and also finalised bankable projects to develop infrastructure.

95. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, my Government has demonstrated more political will than any Government in support of tertiary education by disbursing a total of Le49 billion for just Quarter 1. The management of our tertiary institutions has been challenging. Before the establishment of a separate Ministry for Technical and Higher Education, oversight of these institutions had been weak. Despite Government budgetary allocation to these institutions, some do not even pay PAYE tax to NRA or workers contributions to NASSIT and even

benefits to retired workers. These institutions have hired staff without consideration to budgetary provisions. Often, the payment of staff salaries is not prioritised. This has resulted in frequent strike actions. To address this, Government is now integrating salaries and compensation of staff of tertiary institutions with the central payroll system. As in the case of the schools where Teacher Service Commission manages the payroll, payment management of staff of the tertiary institutions will henceforth be transferred to the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC). All staff payrolls will now be processed along with general payroll.

96. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, my Government waived off the fees for university and tertiary institution application forms from 2018/2019 academic year. This was estimated to cost Le5.6 billion and total target beneficiaries of about 15,000 students who applied to tertiary institution for admission.

97. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, the Ministry reserved automatic Sierra Leone grant-in-aid award to newly admitted students reading Agriculture, Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics and Engineering at the University of Sierra Leone, Njala University, Ernest Bai Koroma University, Eastern Polytechnic, Milton Margai College of Education and Technology and Freetown Teachers College. Female students in STEM disciplines will also be automatically awarded grant-in-aid.

98. In order to reduce budgetary pressures from fee subsidies, Government is finalising details of the Student Loan Scheme following a multi-agency study tour to Ghana, Tanzania and Malawi to study best practices in peer countries. Stakeholder consultations are underway and a draft Bill will be presented to Cabinet and subsequently to Parliament for enactment.

99. We continue to benefit from external scholarships from various countries. The Ministry recommended 256 candidates for international scholarships offers in various countries. In addition, 11 women beneficiaries are in the Barefoot College in India, undergoing training for the Rural Women in Solar Electrification and Rainwater harvesting.

100. My Government has concluded negotiation for a loan for the establishment of a Centre of Excellence for ICT education on Bonthe Island to provide world class ICT training to Sierra Leoneans and other nationals. Already, a 15-acre plot of land has been secured for the construction of the centre. The loan agreement will soon be discussed in Cabinet and submitted to this House for ratification.

101. The Universities Act of 2005 has been reviewed and draft Act will be presented to Cabinet and subsequently to Parliament. The Act aims at strengthening the governance of our Universities. Government strongly encourages and welcomes internal institutional reforms at various tertiary institutions that will make those institutions more effective.

Health

102. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, you would recall that the strategic objective of health 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.

103. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, my administration increased budgetary allocations for health to 10% of public expenditure in 2019 from 6% in 2018. Additionally, my administration has given concurrence for the hiring of 4,000 additional health workers of all critical cadres to address the challenge of human resource gap in the sector. Out of this, 1,500 were recruited before March and 2,500 will be hired before September 2019.

104. Under the health system strengthening programme, supported by Global Fund, Ministry of Health and Sanitation will upscale 200 State Enrolled Community Health Nurses (SECHN) to State Registered Nurses (SRN) and 20 SRN to Nurse and Midwife Tutors. Selected candidates have commenced training on the 4th March 2019. Also, Under the health system strengthening programme, supported by the World Bank, the Ministry of Health and Sanitation will upscale 200 certificate Midwives to Diploma Midwives and select 50 of those for 1 year training as Tutors in Nursing/Midwifery

105. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, Government has introduced three types of allowances to compensate clinical workers for remote locations, on call duties, and occupational health and safety concerns. This is expected to motivate our health workers to work in remote areas and in clinics.

106. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, my Government has launched the National Emergency Ambulance Services with 167 ambulances being repaired. So far, a total of 58 ambulances have been distributed and are actively used, plus one spare ambulance per district.

107. To enhance vaccinations, 220 solar-powered fridges have been installed nationwide and 235 items of drugs worth US\$2.9 million have been distributed to every public health facility in the country and additional procurement for beddings and uniforms for all public facilities and health workers.

108. On health care infrastructure, in the last 12 months, my Government has upgraded the Connaught hospital with the completion and opening of a new emergency triage, the construction of the Maternal and Children's Hospital at Hangha Road Hospital, Kenema, and the completion of the Makali Community Health Centre (CHC) that is provided with ultramodern equipment and a solar-mini-grid system.

109. Ministry of Health and Sanitation has strengthened disease prevention, surveillance and control through the launch of the One Health Approach. For instance, in 2018, *Marburg Virus* was effectively controlled through effective surveillance. A total of 293 motorbikes have been distributed across the country to enhance the surveillance function of districts and the Ministry of Health and Sanitation has obtained 14 acres of land to build the West African Tropical Research Institute, which will ultimately be part of the National Public Health Agency. Also, I have directed that all monies recovered by the Anti-Corruption Commission will be used as seed money to construct a National Diagnostic Centre which has recently been approved by Cabinet. Government is now mobilising additional financing for constructing and equipping the centre.

110. In the coming years, we will scale up our efforts in health care development focusing particularly on health governance, health financing; human resource; free health care; disease prevention and control, and service delivery.

Youth

111. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, youth (persons 15-35 years) account for about 33% of the country's population and representing about 63% of the economically active population of which 67% are unemployed partly because they are untrained for the job market and due to limited job opportunities in the narrow private sector. This was the explanation for the adage in 2008 "**global**" and now "**dae gron dry**". It is imperative that we robustly address the challenge of youth unemployment.

112. During the past 12 months of my administration, some of the initiatives of the Ministry of Youth to create jobs include the following: Firstly, the Ministry trained and certified 510 young people in different live skills programmes and commissioned 200 youth corps to facilitate national cohesion and support programme delivery to all regions and districts across the country. Secondly, through the Livelihood Skills Programme, the Ministry has started the construction of ten car wash centres across the Western Area (Rural and Urban) and intends to roll it out to other districts. Thirdly, with support from the ADB, SALWACO recruited youth plumbers who have received refresher training in SLOIC and Eastern Polytechnic to actively undertake service connections for domestic and public consumers. Fourthly, we have launched the Career Advisory and Placement Service Centres in Eastern Polytechnic and the Ernest Bai Koroma University of Science and Technology (EBKUST). With support from the United Nations Development Programme, the National Youth Commission piloted this project at the University of Sierra Leone and Njala University with the overarching goal to empower university students and alumni to achieve lifelong success through seamless access to transformative global experiences, comprehensive and holistic career services that will improve the pathways from universities to employers. Fifthly, the African Development Bank is supporting the Government of Sierra Leone to implement a

three year Youth Entrepreneurship and employment project with funding from the Fund for African Private Sector Assistance (FAPA) and the Transition Support Facility (TSF). The specific objective of this pilot project is to provide career guidance and counselling to 2,400 youths; train 20 TVET instructors; enhance supervisory skills of at least 100 graduates in collaboration with private sector partners; train 150 youth in three selected priority trades needed by the private sector and be linked to employers or capacitated to become entrepreneurs; support 60 youth to start and manage businesses through mentoring; and to enhance the image and attractiveness of Technical Vocational Education and Training.

113. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, the practice of providing handouts to our youth is not sustainable and cannot change the lives of our youth. My administration has commenced concrete action to promote youth entrepreneurship. Through the Ministry of Youth Affairs, we have initiated consultations with youth entrepreneurs from Belgium, Sweizzy, Lumley, Makeni, Bo, Kenema, Kono and other places and started the design of a National Programme on youth entrepreneurship. The logic of this programme is to provide capital to our youths and empower them to import goods of their choice and eventually owned and manage shops. We anticipate that the first batch of youth entrepreneurs will leave Freetown within the next six months.

114. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, in the New Direction, we shall continue to view youth unemployment as a human capital development and security challenge and will adopt a holistic, integrated and coherent approach to create jobs. Whilst we shall continue with the Free Quality Education to increase access of youth to secondary education, provide both grant-in-aid and loans to our youth in tertiary institutions, provide technical and vocational education for youth who have little or limited education as well as those that cannot enter university, we will soon launch the Youth Empowerment Fund to promote youth entrepreneurs and non-farm activities. Regarding youth in agriculture, we will support youth through provision of tractors, training and extension services, improved seedlings and farm implement and post-harvest support in every chiefdom in the next 4 years to enable them establish youth farms.

Sports, Music and Performing Arts

115. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, after several years, we have commenced secondary school football competitions and Premier League. The ongoing premier league is now creating jobs for our youth, promoting small businesses and even national tourism as teams and supporters travel to other parts of the country for away matches. Personally, I have been very impressed with the organisation of the teams and the league, the generally non-violence characteristic of the league, and above all the transparency exhibited by the organisers. In the ensuing years, Government shall increase allocations to sports to cover not only the Premier League but to develop the existing sports infrastructure. Meanwhile, Government is still in discussion with FIFA to resolve the long standing impasse in the Sierra Leone Football Association (SLFA).

116. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, my Government is still committed to (i) reviewing the policy and legal environment for sports development; (ii) establishing a Sports Development Fund that will be financed from various sources including corporate establishments and international sporting organisations and Government; and (iii) developing and implementing a comprehensive capacity building programme for all sporting disciplines.

117. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, we also remain committed to promoting music and performing arts given the jobs it creates for our youth and the rebranding of our image as a nation. My Government will review and enforce policies and laws governing the sector, seek support to establish a National Arts Gallery and Theatre for Performing Arts using Public Private Partnership model and re-establish and develop cultural village.

Women, Children and Persons Living with Disabilities

118. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, a fight against poverty means a fight for women's empowerment, child protection and social protection for persons living with disabilities.

119. In terms of promoting female entrepreneurs, Government in partnership with ECOWAS through support from the Spanish NEPAD fund has commenced the Business Incubator for African Women Entrepreneurship (BIAWE) in Sierra Leone targeting the most vulnerable women particularly women in agro-business. Government has allocated the sum of Le 2 billion as part of the capital budget for the Women's Development Fund for female Entrepreneurs in the 2019 Budget. The aim of the Fund is to provide seed capital for female traders and entrepreneurs to enable them start small businesses.

120. The Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Policy has been drafted awaiting Cabinet approval. This policy will lay the foundation for the establishment of the National Gender Affairs Commission and the affirmative action quota of minimum 30 percent representation in governance at all levels as mentioned in the State Opening of Parliament in May 2018.

121. Government through the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs has concluded the drafting of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BDPfA) +25 Country assessment report and the deadline of May 1, 2019 submission date was met.

122. With respect to disability, the Ministry is now finalising the first country report on the status of implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD); demonstrating compliance with treaty reporting obligations. Additionally, the Government of Sierra Leone and the Government of Guinea has signed Memorandum of Understanding on the socio-

economic and cultural development of persons with disabilities in both countries. Also, the National Commission for Social Action has now expanded the Social Safety Net Programme (Cash Transfer) to cover persons with disabilities.

123. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, efforts in the area of child support has been largely in the area of policy and legal framework. Specific accomplishments cover the following: First, Government has reviewed and increased budgetary resources for the implementation of the Sexual Offences Act of 2012. There is now a public emergency on rape and sexual violence. Second, Cabinet has approved the revised Sexual Offences Act 2012 to appropriately deal with issues of rape and sexual violence country wide and this will be tabled to this House for ratification. Third, Government has recently launched the National Strategy on the Reduction of Adolescents Pregnancy and Child Marriage and the Child Welfare and Alternative Policies. Implementation of both the strategy and policies are underway. Fourth, Government has also developed a Medium-Term Plan to combat the increasing spate of human trafficking and smuggling in country, and as part of this plan a revised Anti-Human Trafficking Bill has been drafted. A Rapid Response Plan involving nationwide awareness raising and training of professionals is being implemented. Government has so far provided psychosocial support services (including counselling) to over 1,000 returning migrants. Furthermore, Government has commenced the review of the Adoption Act of 1989 and ratification of the Hague Convention on Intercountry adoption.

124. Additionally, to strengthen capacity of the Ministry and Local council, the Ministry has conducted Human Resource Capacity Gap Analysis to strengthen the capacity of both the ministry and local councils in social service delivery.

125. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, it is embarrassing to the state to see our disabled brothers and sisters running after us in vehicles begging for handouts. It is even more emotional to see teenagers who are supposed to be attending school carrying our disabled brothers and sisters around. The boys often a time resort to thieving, and drug abuse, and the girls are sexually abused. Undoubtedly, addressing this problem is quite challenging. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, my administration has decided to start now. We are now designing a Livelihood Programme for this category of vulnerable persons. This programme which will be initially funded from the budget as pilot will provide basic skills and finance to Persons Living with Disabilities and also create opportunity for the many teenagers who carry them around to attend school.

126. In the coming years, Government will focus on implementation of the policies and enforce the laws relating to women, persons living with disabilities and children. Specifically, making public facilities disabled friendly, providing special incentives for Teachers in Special Needs Institutions, health care for the physically challenged and the aged and livelihood support to persons living with disability for economic empowerment.

Our Workers

127. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, I maintain our position that in the New Direction, the most valuable asset of any nation is its workforce. Sierra Leone's workforce estimated at over 2 million needs to be well motivated for the transformation of the natural resources to wealth.

128. In the first year of my administration, the salary of civil servants, teachers, police and the military in Grades 1 to 6 increased by 20 percent and those in Grades 7 to 14 by 5 percent. Government also reduced the top marginal personal income tax rate from 35 percent to 30 percent with effect from January 2019 in order to increase the disposable income of workers. This is also consistent with taxation principles of ensuring that the highest marginal personal income tax rate is equal to the corporate tax rate to avoid the shifting of taxes from corporate income to personal income or vice versa.

129. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, as part of efforts to improve the living conditions of our retirees, Government increased the minimum pension to Le250,000 per month consistent with the NASSIT Act 2002 (which is 50 percent of the minimum wage). A significant number of pensioners used to receive less than Le20,000 per month as pension payment, which automatically classifies them as extremely poor people.

130. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, Government is reviewing the Local Content Act and strengthening the institutional arrangement for robust enforcement, reviewing existing mechanisms for issuing and enforcing work permits. To address the disparities in salaries and compensation of public sector workers, Government is currently concluding the policy and legal framework for wages and compensation commission. Cabinet will discuss the policy and draft bill and submit to this House for enactment before the end of this year.

131. A comprehensive technical audit on NASSIT has been completed. Among other things, the Audit recommends that the NASSIT Act be reviewed, policy document for the Trust be taken to Cabinet for approval, administrative cost be reduced from 5.6% to 3.5%, the NASSIT database and the IT system be overhauled, NASSIT reviews its entire portfolio of investment to determine which ones are to be discontinued and those that should maintain and under which conditions. Meanwhile, the Trust ceases all investment activities until a proper mechanism is put in place to test for the considerations required by the Act. We are committed to implementing these recommendations. Therefore, the Ministry of Labour in collaboration with the Ministry of Finance will work with the Board and Management of NASSIT to develop a work plan for implementing the recommendations of the report.

Social Protection

132. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, the National Commission for Social Action (NACSA) established in 2001 was the main Government vehicle for resettling internally displaced persons and refugees, rehabilitation and reconstruction of socio-economic infrastructure and it remains the main delivery channel for social protection services. It had a 5-year renewable mandate. The mandate has been renewed at least 3 times since it was established. After a careful assessment, my administration has transformed NaCSA from a short-term agency to a permanent institution of Government to address vulnerabilities of communities and persons. It will now be supervised by the office of the Vice President.

133. In the area of social protection, within the past 12 months, the following have been achieved: Firstly, through the Social Safety Net Programme (SSNP) with the support of the World Bank, Government made unconditional cash transfers of Le 250,000 per household to twenty-eight thousand, five hundred and thirty-eight (28,538) beneficiary households in ten (10) districts namely, Western Rural, Moyamba, Kono, Karene, Bombali, Tonkolili, Bo, Kenema, Port Loko, and Kailahun. Secondly, in November 2018, Government paid Le 11.5 billion for NaCSA's War Reparations Programme, re-verified and paid rehabilitation grants to 7,695 War Widows and Victims of Sexual Violence. Each beneficiary received a grant of Le 1,200,000. In addition to the income support, NaCSA also provided access to medical facilities for 35 war victims with various critical ailments. Thirdly, with funding from the Islamic Development Bank through the Sierra Leone Community Driven Development Project Phase II, 205 new Self Help Affinity Groups were formed, comprising 4,089 vulnerable women and youth. With each beneficiary being a household head, 20,445 direct and indirect beneficiaries at an average of 5 members per household are benefiting from the intervention. These new groups received training in managing small enterprises, voluntary savings and records keeping.

134. In the area of infrastructure, with support from the IDB and through NaCSA, Government reconstructed 9 Primary and Junior Secondary Schools and 10 Community Health Posts in seven chiefdoms in four districts.

135. With support of the German Government, NaCSA supported spot improvement work on a total of 141.8 km of feeder roads in Kailahun, Kono, Koinadugu and Falaba districts and routine maintenance of 327.7 km of feeder roads through 4 district councils to enhance access to remote communities and from farm gates to markets. At least 5,000 youth had temporal employment through this intervention.

136. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, I am pleased to inform you that we secured additional financing of US\$30 million for the safety net programme with emphasis on Persons Living with Disabilities.

Energy Supply

137. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, you would recall that Government's objective in the energy sector is to increase population access to cost effective electricity supply. In 2018, my Government promised to (i) conduct technical audit of the energy sector (ii) undertake robust reform in the energy sector (iii) restore electricity supply to all district capitals (iv) invest in low cost renewable energy potential of the country in the areas of solar, hydro, wind and biomass.

138. I am pleased to report that a technical audit has been conducted. Among many other things, the Audit recommends strengthening internal controls in the Ministry and affiliated parastatals, EDSA and EGTC, development of a Strategic Plan for the sector and development of a long term strategy for power supply rather than rely on high cost emergency power deals. I urge the Ministry of Energy in collaboration with the Ministry of Finance to work with the Boards and Managements of both EDSA and EGTC to implement the recommendations of the Audit.

139. Regarding power generation, in 2018, Government signed with Karpowership contract to provide power to Freetown. The new Contract saved the Government US\$9 million dollars yearly and US\$18 million dollars for the two-year contract. Also, a project has been designed, completed, and equipment delivered to site for a 6 Megawatt (Mw) Solar Power Park at Newton and a 50Megawatt (Mw) Solar Power Purchase Agreement awaits Financial Close.

140. In the area of Transmission & Distribution, work on the Cote D'Ivoire, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea line is at an advanced stage and is expected to be completed in 2020. The Bumbuna and Kamakwie sub-stations have been completed; those in Kenema and Bumpeh are underway. The towers from Gendema to Bumpeh are 90% completed.

141. I am also delighted that Government has negotiated with the IDA additional resources of US\$50 million to upgrade the network and improve on the Transmission and Distribution (T&D) in the Western Area. It is anticipated that this project will be approved in next month. Government has also made available resources for developing T&D to all district capitals in phases.

142. Since December, EDSA Electricity Vending is now operated by all Aggregators under an Advance Payment Scheme Contract since December 2018. Government has also awarded contracts for the rehabilitation of Electricity House that was burnt and abandoned a few years ago. This will substantially reduce the huge cost of rents paid to landlords.

143. Overall, between February 2018 and January 2019, energy sales (kWh) increased by 46.9% and the number of EDSA customers also increased to 195,094 in March 2019 from 175,315 in April 2018 representing an 11% increase. Generation utilisation in Freetown also increased from 93.5% in April 2018 to 98.1% in February 2019 at a peak of 70 Megawatt (Mw).

144. Government has also signed 4 Public Private Partnership for the Rural Renewable Energy Projects and 13 regulations of the Electricity and Water Regulation Commission have been developed and ready for Parliamentary ratification for Tariff and Mini-grids.

145. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, Government will organise this quarter of the fiscal year an Energy Roundtable that will bring all stakeholders in the sector to develop a concrete medium and long term strategy for the energy sector in the country. This will be a road map for transitioning from the current reliance on high cost emergency power supply to cost effective sustainable power supply.

Roads

146. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, poor road conditions nationwide constitute the major development challenges in Sierra Leone. It is estimated that only 10% of the 11,300 roads are paved. Although, the previous administration awarded several roads contracts, corruption has marred the sector. Costs have been exorbitant, implementation has been shoddy and quality has been poor. 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.

147. The 2019 Technical Audit reveals, among other things, that the process of contracting was often not competitive and there was no evidence of submission and approval of design, specifications, construction plans, programme of works and cost estimates for all projects reviewed. There were substantial addenda to roads contract without clear reason and availability of funds. Half of the roads reviewed have addenda exceeding 25% contrary to the procurement regulations. The report recommends competitive bidding processes and full compliance with procurement regulations at all times. I urge the Ministry of Works and Public Assets, Sierra Leone Roads Authority and Ministry of Finance to prepare a strategy for implementing the recommendations.

148. Despite the challenges with the roads project, my administration had to continue with some township roads in Freetown, Kenema, Bo and Bonthe because some of the abandoned sites were socially undesirable. Additionally, my Government, with the support of the Government of the People's Republic of China, has completed the construction of the second Juba Bridge and work on the Hill Station-Regent Road is progressing satisfactorily.

149. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, my Government has established a Presidential Infrastructure Initiative to support my office in the selection, design, planning and management of roads projects, mobilisation of resources, and the provision of implementation support. This unit has recently completed a national feasibility study on the Lungi Bridge and has initiated actions to mobilise resources through a competitive process that does not impose huge contingent liability on Government.

150. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, I am pleased to report that we have completed negotiation for part loan and credit of US\$50 million to develop the transport sector. The project will be formally approved in June of this year. The objective of the project is to improve access to quality public transport, address climate resilience, and improve road safety in selected areas while enhancing institutional capacity in the transport sector.

151. In the coming year, while we remain committed to implementing the recommendations of the Audit Report. We shall quickly review most of the highway roads projects to ensure they are in line with the recommendations of the Audit Report.

Air Transportation

152. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, 12 months ago, we laid out our strategy for reversing the low compliance of Sierra Leone in terms of aviation safety, which, according to the report of the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO), is estimated at 18.5 %, far below the 60% safety threshold set by "Abuja Safety Targets". Enforcement of regulations by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) continues to be lax. The CAA is not economically sustainable given its inability to generate revenue and its low level of competency and capability.

153. To address this, Government has secured US\$500,000 from ICAO to establish an effective safety oversight system in Sierra Leone and strengthen its safety oversight capabilities. It is envisaged that this will increase our safety ratings from 20% to the minimum target of 60% thereby being in compliance with the Abuja Safety Target. A 60% compliance level will enable the state of Sierra Leone to fulfil its responsibilities under the Chicago and Montreal Conventions on International Air Transport in the areas of certification, licensing and surveillance with special emphasis in the areas of issuances of air operators certificate and the certification of Freetown International Airport Lungi. In the interim, the Sierra Leone Civil Aviation Authority has entered into a technical cooperative agreement with the Banjul Accord Group Aviation Safety Oversight Organization (BAGASOO) for the provision of services in the area of Flight Operations and Airworthiness, staff training and capacity building. This will lead to the issuance of Air Operators Certificates which will enable the state to resume the registration of aircraft on the national aircraft register of Sierra Leone.

154. In addition, the effort of promoting safer airport operations and meeting the much needed ICAO airport certification, Government, through the Civil Aviation Authority has entered into a cooperative agreement with Airport Council International (ACI) the global body responsible for promoting excellence in airport operations.

155. Mr. Speaker, Hon Members, let me inform this house that our only international airport Lungi will be having an ACI Airport Excellence (APEX) Review in Safety this year precisely in May/June 2019 for the first time in its history. The programme is based on ICAO standards, national regulations and ACI best practices. APEX Programmes combine the mandate for regulatory compliance with day-to-day operational needs to maximize operational efficiency and safety and/or security standards. Moreover, APEX Reviews are tailored to the individual needs of airports and APEX Reports propose effective and targeted solutions.

156. The Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM) was launched on 28 January 2018 during the 30th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the Union held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. I am pleased to inform you that Sierra Leone is rated 80% in terms of meeting 7 out of 8 implementing measures compared to 3 out of 8 just 12 months earlier.

157. Within the last one year, in an effort to reduce the cost of air ticket, my Government has reduced Passenger Service Charge from US\$40 to US\$25 per passenger; Airport Development Charge from US\$10 to US\$5 per passenger; Aviation Safety Fee from US\$25 to US\$15 per passenger; reduced all landing charges by 34%, and all passenger handling fees reduced to zero.

158. Finally, the Government of Sierra Leone, through the Ministry of Finance, has paid US\$100,000 to International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), US\$120,000 to African Civil Aviation Commission (AFCAC), US\$60,000 to Banjul Accord Group Aviation Safety Oversight Organization (BAGASOO) as part of its international obligation to settling outstanding arrears, making this Bio Administration the first government to embark on such international commitments in two decades.

Sea Transportation

159. In the New Direction, the overall objective of sea port development is to provide a conducive and competitive port facility. To this end, a port expansion project estimated at a cost of US\$120 million by Freetown Terminal Limited has been completed. Government has terminated the Cargo Tracking Note contract with TPMS which was never in the interest of the State and has put in place a competitive process to attract other private sector players with the view to increase Government revenue share from cargo tracking.

160. The new management of the Sierra Leone Ports Authority is making efforts to rehabilitate the infrastructure to include the installation of CCTV cameras to monitor activities around the port area and drafted a new Bill to replace the 1964 Port Act. As at February 2019, total cash balance of the SLPA stood at Le 12 billion compared to Le 8.7 billion in August 2018.

161. Currently, we hire tug boats at very high cost. Government is in the process of acquiring 2 Tug Boats that will facilitate berthing and un-berthing of ships and thus increase turnaround time of the ships and efficiency of the port.

Increasing Access to Water Supply and Improved Sanitation

162. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, after nearly 6 decades of independence, a large number of our population still lacks access to safe drinking water. We had promised increasing access to safe drinking water through the construction and expansion of existing treatment and distribution facilities in Freetown; restored pipe borne water supply facilities in district capitals; protect all major watershed areas against deforestation and other environmental problems; and 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 and strengthen the maintenance capacity of Guma Valley Water Company and Sierra Leone Water Company (SALWACO) as well as local councils.

163. In the Western Area, we have secured funding from DFID and ADB, for the rehabilitation of treatment facilities, water supply transmission and distribution network and construction of stand pipes in deprived settlements in the Western Area. The procurement process to undertake a detailed feasibility study and preliminary design for the Rokel River Water Supply has been completed. Furthermore, an MOU has been signed with a Chinese firm for the construction phase of the project. A 5-month feasibility study contract has been signed. This project will supply water from the Magbele Bridge to Freetown and all communities along the line.

164. In the provinces, I am pleased to report that the three Towns Water supply projects in Bo, Makeni, and Kenema have been completed and will be commissioned in July 2019. Government has allocated budgetary resources for the completion of existing water supply facilities to meet current and future water demand in the following district capitals: Kailahun, Pujehun, Moyamba, Kambia, Magburaka and Kabala and has secured funding for restoring water supply in four additional towns.

165. Government has allocated resources for the construction of one hundred solar powered boreholes with 1,005 public stand posts including the supply of four hundred plastic water tanks in thirteen districts. Also, contracts have been signed with various contractors for the construction of forty-five industrial boreholes across the country. With the support of the ADB, there is work in progress for the completion of 1,266 water points and 316 sanitation facilities in Kambia, Bonthe, Kono, Pujehun & Koinadugu districts.

166. In the policy and programme area, we have developed a 5-year strategic plan to address the myriad problems of the Ministry of Water Resources and launched the preparation of the Freetown Water Supply and Sanitation Master Plan and Investment studies (FWSSMPIS) aimed at identifying necessary interventions and investment opportunities that will secure water supply in Freetown up to 2050. Moreover, we have developed a national Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Programme and a Monitoring and Evaluation Plan. The programme defines a

sustainable WASH roadmap that would improve the livelihood of rural communities through universal access to effective and sustainable WASH services. The M&E Plan aims to strengthen country-led monitoring of water and sanitation services in households, communities, schools, and health facilities. Government has also established the National Water Resources Management Agency (NWRMA) that shall ensure the water resources of the country are controlled in a sustainable manner.

167. At present, the role of the Ministry of Water Resources responsible for policy and strategic planning for water supply in the country through Guma Valley Company and SALWACO are unclear. The National Commission for Privatisation and the Board where the Ministry is not represented supervise Guma Valley Water Company. This is indeed an anomaly and should be addressed forthwith. I therefore direct that the necessary policy and legal changes be made to clarify the role of the Ministry of Water Resources as supervising agency while maintaining the Board as in the case of Ministry of Energy and EDSA/EGTC and accordingly delete from the list of agencies to be privatised.

Improving Information, Communications and Technology (ICT)

168. My administration promised increased access to cost effective communications for home use and businesses; establish an Electronic Governance system to manage government business electronically; develop IT infrastructure resilience by multiple back up services for all government documents in all ministries; ensure that health records, land records, etc. are secured with enhanced broadband access across the country; and improve rural telecommunications, and create customer choice and affordability

169. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, Government is at an advanced stage of acquiring a concessionary loan of US\$30 million through Exim Bank of China for the residual work on the National Fibre-Optic Backbone Infrastructure Project to address gaps and weaknesses in the existing network and to provide ring protection to the transmission infrastructure across the country.

170. The Ministry has initiated engagements with relevant stakeholders particularly the PPP Unit to kick start the procurement process for a turnkey for the supply, delivery, installation, and commissioning of Digital Terrestrial Multimedia Broadcast (DTMB) platform solution based on DVB-T2 technology. The technical design of the turnkey project will cover the country with 10 main sites with powerful DTTB transmitters.

171. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, the growth and development of an electronic transaction sub-sector (e-Commerce) requires a stable and predictable legal and regulatory framework that ensures trust online and secure transactions. In this regard, the Ministry has developed a National Electronic and Transaction Bill. The New Bill is at the publication stage (*Gazette*) and will be submitted to

Parliament for enactment. Once passed, it will enhance admissibility of electronic document/evidence in legal proceedings thereby promoting e-Commerce and improving the country's rating in the World Bank Doing Business Reform and financial transactions rankings.

172. The Universal Access Development Fund (UADF) had, over the years, failed to deliver on its core mandate to drive rural internet Connectivity due to its over bloated administrative structure. The structure has been overhauled and made leaner and productive to drive rural connectivity. Cabinet recently gave its *fiat* for the regulatory instrument to be laid before Parliament.

173. As part of its restructuring process, the Ministry dissolved the Attitudinal and Behavioural Secretariat (ABC) to create a new Outreach Coordination Unit with the Ministry to embark on public education and awareness on Government policies and strategies.

174. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, the current management of SALCAB inherited a negative portfolio in August 2018, with a cumulative loss of Le 3.8 billion from January to July 2018, a debt exposure of Le 58 billion, with a less than 47% monthly revenue collection penetration. I am now pleased to report that in less than a year, SALCAB made a net profit of Le 10 billion, re-calibrated the business model to offer a value proposition that reduced the price of wholesale data by 48%, increased data utilization/uptake by 100% from a monthly average of 8G to 16G, and increased monthly revenue by 32%.

175. The new management also inherited a network that was in a terrible shape. The challenges included no spares to support service recovery in the event of a downtime, and no national and International redundancy - the entire country only had one circuit going up north to Lisbon. In less than six months, the new management deployed two international redundancies in Paris and Accra (added to Lisbon) that earned the business an uptime of 99.9%. The team has re-designed the terrestrial fibre network to help operators transport a large amount of data cheaper and faster. They activated a fibre point of presence in 28 provincial cities and townships. This helped operators like Qcell to roll out their network at the back of the fibre backbone. The new Management is also migrating existing operators such as Afcom, Orange, and Onlime to the terrestrial fibre.

176. The current management team has reduced operating expense by 37% through strategic cost savings initiatives; they have attracted the right skill set that gave them the leverage to terminate a contract agreement with an International Commercial Consultancy Firm, which saved the business over US\$ 41,000 monthly. Contract for international IP Transit has been reduced from a whooping wholesale price of US\$ 38,000 to US\$ 4,700 with full redundant content without compromising quality.

177. In the coming years, SALCAB will launch a quarterly Tech Start-up competition that will help drive innovation, create an international redundancy which will serve as a backup to the existing submarine cable and will help make the network more robust and resilient, develop a data center that will be the centralized host of all government and private sector data in the country, partner with strategic international partners to expand rural connectivity in the country, provide internet connectivity in 500 schools and universities by 2023 under the School Connectivity Project, and roll out phase 2 of the National Terrestrial Fibre Network.

178. A massive Simbox fraud was unearthed in November 2018. This was unprecedented in West Africa. No effective measures have been put in place to reduce Telecoms fraud by enforcing proper SIM card registration and deploying other effective fraud management systems. The National Telecommunications Commission is now cooperating effectively with the Cyber Police and the operators in tracking Telecoms fraudsters and minimizing fraud cases in the country.

Lands, Housing and the Environment

179. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, the growing demand for housing and other infrastructural facilities has severely constrained the limited space. We inherited a situation where disputes about land ownership overwhelm the courts often with multiple claimants. My Government promised to 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.

180. To this end, Government has refined the procedures and processes regarding the management and acquisition of lands (both private and state). The procedures to acquire State Lands have been simplified and a Verification and Complaints Unit has been created for the first time to ascertain the provisions contained in the Letter of Offer before any lease payments could be made in the banks. This has resulted in a drastic reduction in the multiple claims of ownership over a piece of land in the western area. Interviews for applicants are now held in an open and transparent manner. Currently, applications for 1,000 people are being processed and the ministry has already commenced the effective distribution of state lands to successful applicants in the western area.

181. To demonstrate transparency and accountability, Government has established State Lands Management and Allocation Committee with the responsibility to allocate state lands to the public for mainly residential purposes and to investors in agriculture, mining and industrial estates. The committee has concluded interviews for over one hundred applicants for the allocation of state lands in the Western Area. The committee has also approved a total of one hundred and ninety-four (194) freehold land ownership amounting to 39.8 acres.

182. Applications for Freehold are also handled by a Committee headed by the Minister in an open and transparent manner. A total of 60 Freehold Conveyances have been duly processed by the Ministry and handed over to individuals in the full view of the media.

183. We have also set up a Regularization Committee to handle the huge backlog of genuine cases wherein state land holders want to abide by the lease agreements of the Government but because of the unnecessary delays, inconveniences involved in receiving the correct lease documents and site plans, such people have stayed away and failed to pay revenue to government.

184. Furthermore, the Ministry has recorded remarkable success in the reclamation of state lands in the western area. To date, 4,800 acres of state lands have been reclaimed around various locations in the Western Area. In the provinces, the Government has also successfully paid land owning families in Bo and Kenema Districts to the tune of Le 1.5 billion (covering both arrears owed over time by the Government and outright purchase of these lands) in the Reservation and Airfield Area. These lands are now the properties of the Government of Sierra Leone.

185. To demonstrate its commitment to protecting and securing lands belonging to educational institutions, the site plan of Fourah Bay College (one of the constituent colleges of the University of Sierra Leone) with an acreage of 463 was signed and handed over by the Ministry and College Authorities after several decades. Lands belonging to other schools like Huntingdon in the East and Approved School have almost been protected from land grabbers.

186. While we shall continue to improve on the management of state lands, in the coming years, the focus will be on improving the enforcement of land use planning and building regulations, codifying land tenure through a GIS Cadastral system with standard town lots as basic module, and provide land for the construction of affordable housing.

187. In the area of housing, my Government will continue to encourage the setting up of Home Finance Institutions, train youths in the use of local materials and appropriate technology for housing construction, design and implement a national programme for housing and encourage large- scale local production of building materials.

Improving Science, Technology and Innovation

188. In May 2018, my Government established the Directorate of Science, Technology and Innovation with a mission to support the national development agenda and promote research in Sierra Leone. Four months later, the five-year work-plan of the Directorate of Science, Technology and Innovation (DSTI) was endorsed by the Cabinet of Sierra Leone followed by DSTI's formal public launch in October 2018.

189. Over this initial start-up period, the Directorate has set up a diverse team of thinkers, strategists, coders, creative makers, artists, and problem solvers each contributing to a rich portfolio of activities. In the first year, the Directorate of Science, Technology and Innovation has achieved the following: (i) restructured and upgraded the network infrastructure at State House in collaboration with Ministry of Information and Communication; (ii) initiated the development of a National Financial Data Architecture with Ministry of Finance and other partners; (iii) developed a prototype for an integrated GIS mapping solution of government services and infrastructure in collaboration with several MDAs including Statistics Sierra Leone, Ministry of Health, and Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education; (iv) provided initial evidence and data to Anti-Corruption Commission in relation to misappropriated Government vehicles in collaboration with Sierra Leone Roads and Safety Authority; (v) developed and presented an interactive visualization tool for exploring the Annual School Survey data in collaboration with the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education and UNICEF; (vi) Collaborated with the Ministry of Trade and Industry to support GoSL's Ease of Doing Business efforts; (vii) initiated formal engagements between Njala University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology that has led to an official relationship between Njala University and the Abdul Jameel Lateef-World Education Lab (J-WEL); (viii) worked with Millennium Challenge Coordinating Unit to define specific technology enhancing projects in support of their mission; (ix) developed and tested 3 web and mobile applications within the Office of the President as part of Government Digitization Initiatives; and (x) developed machine learning models to identify important features from the 2018 annual school survey that impact learning outcomes. Results are used in discussion with Government and development partners

Environmental Management

190. Sierra Leone is presently ranked at the bottom of the Environmental Performance Index and is ranked as the third most vulnerable to climate change in the world or is one of the countries in the world with the least capacity to respond or adapt to environmental change. About 13% of the country's area and more than 35% of the population are at risk to disasters.

191. The overall objective in the New Direction 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.

192. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, on assumption of Office, the Environment Protection Agency Act had been 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 EPA was 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.

193. I am now pleased to report that Cabinet has adopted the proposal to review the EPA Act and take back the supervising role to the Ministry of Lands, Housing and the Environment over EPA from the Office of the President. The Ministry of Lands, Housing and the Environment is expected to lead in the amendments of the Act and submit to this House for enactment. We have intensified the monitoring of industrial establishments for compliance with environmental laws and regulations.

194. With the support of the World Bank, the institutional arrangements for the establishment of the Disaster Management Agency to improve the knowledge base and expand actions for early warning and disaster risk reduction and prevention as well as manage disasters is in progress. It is expected that in the next few months the comprehensive structure with positions and clear roles will be submitted to Cabinet for discussion.

195. As stated early, a National Reforestation Programme has been developed and the procurement of service providers for implementation is an advanced stage.

196. In the coming years, we will complete the transfer of supervising authority of EPA to the Ministry, sustain the monitoring of business establishments to ensure compliance, strengthen public-private partnerships for forest conservation, especially the establishment of woodlots and commodification of Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs); adequately enforce laws and policies to protect forests and designate new areas for conservation and ecological tourism; intensify education and information campaigns to reduce practices harmful to the environment and support the teaching of environmental matters in the curricula of schools, colleges and universities.

Coordination and Facilitation of Government Priorities

197. Government established the Office of the Chief Minister to support the presidency in coordinating MDAs. The Office is the central hub for coordinating and supporting the implementation of the Government's Strategic Priorities. It supports the presidency and Cabinet Secretariat to ensure follow up and implementation of decisions.

198. The Office is leading on implementing the recommendations of the Governance Transition Team report. The recommendations of the report including the setting up of the Commission of Inquiry are being implemented. The Office also coordinates disaster relief efforts and it resolved the huge backlog following the Mortormeh Mudslide disaster. The Office also facilitated the cabinet endorsement of the New National Disaster Preparedness and Management Agency.

199. The office conducted two Cabinet Retreats. The first retreat identified Government's priorities for the next five years and strengthened inter-and intra-ministerial networks for building a high performing team to deliver the President's New Direction agenda for the people of Sierra Leone. The second Retreat was to build a strong collective commitment amongst ministers and civil servants to take the necessary action and deliver on the 8 priorities of Government.

200. The Office has established a Performance Management, Monitoring & Evaluation system to manage a result-based performance management system for Ministers and Deputy Ministers, and to support the development of the wider public service performance management system for MDAs in order to promote greater efficiency and effectiveness in services and support Government to achieve the objectives of its National Development Plan. Ministers have signed Performance Undertakings demonstrating their commitment to addressing four critical areas of public administration and management, namely, Competent Strategic Leadership, Efficient Fiduciary Management, Effectiveness in Strategic Policy Planning & Implementation, and Corruption Eradication.

201. The Office also facilitates regular briefings of the President by Ministers and the technical heads of MDAs. This platform provides an opportunity for public servants to interface with the presidency, better understand strategic and operational issues in the MDAs, appreciate better the challenges and seek to resolve those.

Building and Promoting National Cohesion

202. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, 12 months ago, we recognized the fact that the past governance strategy was characterised by divisiveness, exclusion, and the weakening and subversion of state governing institutions. We promised to launch a Presidential Initiative that will herald a national conference on diversity management and the rebuilding of national cohesion. We also promised fully implementing 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.

203. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, I am pleased to report that Government has prepared for the establishment of the Independent Commission for Peace and National Cohesion. A Green Paper has been submitted for consultation on how to achieve inclusive governance and improve on the infrastructure for peace and democratization. Together with the Green Paper on Democratic Consolidation and National Cohesion, we shall host a National Dialogue Conference to be called Bintumani III on Democratic Consolidation for Peace and National Cohesion scheduled for 23-25 May 2019.

204. I have initiated multiparty stakeholders' dialogue meeting at State House with all registered political parties. This initiative will promote political dialogue

among political parties and help promote national cohesion. This dialogue meeting will be held at least once every quarter or as when deemed necessary by any of the parties.

205. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, to further enhance national cohesion, my administration will work with political parties to develop bi-partisan programmes on critical development challenges in the country. This year, I will make public the Terms of Reference and composition of two bi-partisan committees to develop long-term national programmes on housing and persons living with disabilities. My hope is that this bi-partisan sectoral programme development will culminate into the preparation of a Long-term Development Plan that can even be legislated.

Fighting Corruption and Improving Accountability

206. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, fighting corruption and improving accountability is the hallmark of my administration. Over the last 12 months, we have changed the leadership of the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), amended the Act to strengthen the civil powers of the ACC and make the Assets Declaration Regime more manageable, efficient and effective and to increase the penalties for serious corruption offences, established a special court for corruption cases with special judges to try corruption offences speedily and efficiently. Prosecutions are now moving faster and investigations covering all spheres of public life with no room for impunity with 100% conviction rate. The ACC has recovered over Le 12 Billion (Over \$1,500,000.00) of funds lost through corruption and corrupt practices. Le 6 Billion to be recovered at the completion of investigations in the next 6 months will be committed to the provision of social services. This recovery rate within one year is almost equivalent to what the ACC has ever collected in its 18-year existence as a whole.

207. Government launched the three Commissions of Inquiry which are presently investigating former officials of the previous government in a bid to ensure democratic accountability. The work of the Commission is progressing satisfactorily and it is now clear it was never intended to be a witch hunt contrary to what our detractors have been saying.

208. Additionally, Government has conducted special audits of all arrears in Government and technical audits of 4 sectors -telecommunications, roads, energy and social security. The Ministry of Finance has estimated that a total sum of US\$ 1billion was missing. Whilst Parliament will continue with its discussions of the Report, the ACC has started investigations of financial impropriety. The results of the technical audit can also be helpful to the Commission of Inquiry. I have also directed the Ministry of Finance to work with respective institutions to implement the structural recommendations with a view to restoring efficiency in the sector.

209. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, Sierra Leone passed the Millennium Challenge Corporations' Control of Corruption Scorecard from a failing position of 49% in 2017 to a respectable pass of 71% in 2018. Afro Barometer Corruption Perception dropped from over 70% in 2015-2017 to an all-time low of 43% in 2018. Similarly, according to Afro Barometer Corruption Perception survey of 2018, Citizens' belief in government's effort in the fight against corruption jumped from an all-time low of 40% to over 66% in 2018. Generally, the citizens' confidence in the fight against corruption and the results being produced by the ACC is at an all-time high under the New Direction.

National Civil Registration

210. The National Civil Registration Authority (NCRA) was established by an Act of Parliament dated 30th June, 2016 with the mandate to undertake compulsory registration and characteristics of vital events occurring to all citizens and non-citizens' resident in Sierra Leone. These vital events include the registration of Births, Deaths, Causes of Deaths, Marriages, Divorces, Adoptions, Nullities, Judicial Separation, Recognition and Legitimization and the generation of unique National Identification Number (NIN) for every resident in Sierra Leone leading to the production of multi-purpose ID Cards.

211. In September 2018, on the request of the Ministry of Finance and the Human Resources Management Office (HRMO), the NCRA conducted a nationwide Biometric Verification, Registration and Update of personal data of all Public and Civil Servants who are on the Payroll of the Government of Sierra Leone, including those paid from the Consolidated Revenue Fund. The exercise was conducted for a total of 83,675 personnel of which 77,329 were verified, records updated and registered, while a total of 9,875 Pin codes were either unclaimed, names mismatched or unverified duplicates cases with multiple Pin Codes. This exercise does not only sanitize the payroll of the Government of Sierra Leone and save the Government billions of Leones but it enhances accountable service delivery, eliminates corruption, ghost workers, double-dipping, and facilitates predictable resource planning.

212. At the request of the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, the NCRA provided data on the precise number and ages of school-going children together with the number of teachers at ward levels. This enabled the Ministry to reasonably estimate the cost per pupil and guided budgetary estimation on the number of books and other learning materials for each pupil. This information was critical for planning the implementation of the Government's Flagship Project - Free Quality Education.

213. In fulfilling International Commitments that Sierra Leone is a party to, the NCRA is collaborating with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) to undertake a Comprehensive Country Assessment and the Development of a Costed Plan for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) Programme in

Sierra Leone. The Assessment commenced in January and it is currently at an advanced stage. The outcome will provide the basis for Sierra Leone's inclusion among countries to be considered for sustained international support. Given the milestones that NCRA has met, Sierra Leone has been selected for further consideration among twelve countries in Africa to benefit from the UN/World Bank support on Identity Management. This confirms that as a country, we are keeping in line with international guidelines and best practices set by the UN and other Development Partners to promote Civil Registration and Vital Statistics that is now considered globally as a tool for accountable service delivery and good governance.

214. The backbone for a functioning CRVS system is the existence of structures at community level for the continuous registration of vital events as enshrined in the NCRA Act of 2016. To fulfil this, the NCRA has successfully undertaken a nationwide Rapid Health Facility Assessment for births and deaths registrations. The main objective was to ascertain the readiness of health facilities both in terms of infrastructure and personnel to conduct registration of births and deaths as and when they occur with a view to transmitting such data in real time. The challenges identified are being addressed with support from Partners supporting the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Programme in Sierra Leone.

215. Given the growing international attention civil registration continues to attract, the NCRA continues to engage its Development Partners and other International Organisations to support the Initiative. This has attracted funding from the European Union Delegation up to the tune of 11 million Euros to support comprehensive Civil Registration System and to ensure interoperability with institutions providing social service, financial inclusion, and good governance. The support covers Technical Assistance in the areas of Civil Registration, ICT, and Identity Management to ensure that Sierra Leone is in line with international best practice and observes UN guidelines for CRVS.

216. NCRA also attracted funding from KIVA to the tune of USD\$15 million to support Digital Identity for Financial Inclusion through Credit Reference jointly implemented by the NCRA and the Bank of Sierra Leone. This Project will contain Identity fraud and Know-Your-Customer in the course of financial transaction. The UNDP has supported the civil registration programme and the development of a data protection and privacy policy. The period for the establishment of a multi-purpose permanent civil register has been extended. NCRA has also attracted support from UNICEF for continuous birth registration and the availability and uninterrupted supply of Birth Certificates thus guaranteeing the right to legal identity as a human right from birth.

Local and Chieftaincy Councils

217. Before my assumption in Office, only forty three (43) of the 79 local functions were devolved and thirty six (36) of the scheduled functions continued to be implemented by central authority. Consistent with the commitment of my Government to decentralization, the Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) on decentralization has resumed sittings after several years of inertia. In March this year, 28 of the 36 outstanding functions were devolved to local councils with immediate effect and completed the review of the local government grant making mechanism. The review of the National Decentralisation Policy and the Local Government Act 2004 is in progress.

218. In my second year in office, we shall complete work on both the policy and Act, develop a revenue mobilisation strategy for Local Councils, harmonise the relationship between Local Councils and Council of Paramount Chiefs to ensure mutual respect and trust, and align local council staff with the Civil Service Commission so that local council staff have the opportunity to serve at the central level and vice versa.

Strengthening Democratic Institutions

219. My Government remains committed to strengthening democratic institutions including the National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR), the Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC), National Electoral Commission (NEC), the Independent Media Commission (IMC), National Commission for Democracy (NCD), and Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC).

220. We continue to be committed to restoring the autonomy of these institutions and creating the necessary enabling environment to execute their statutory mandate and to serve the people of Sierra Leone well. The ongoing work on the review of the laws and policies guiding the functions of democratic institutions will be fast tracked in order to 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

221. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, as promised, my Government has placed premium on development and economic diplomacy as a core national interest. In line with this, missions are now organizing private investment dialogue sessions in the missions. The Ghana High commission recently organised a very successful investment conference. I recently led a delegation to Morocco to participate in an Investment Conference where I was the only President and delivered the keynote address. The Ministry has strengthened strategic partnerships with China, Japan, Russia, Ireland, Morocco, and United Arab Emirates focusing exclusively on trade and investments.

222. Cabinet will soon approve the establishment of a school of diplomacy to train career diplomats. Land has been secured and funding has also been secured from a bilateral partner for the construction of the diplomatic academy.

223. During the last 12 months, we have organised the following international conferences: (i) The 7th Ministerial level meeting of the African Union Committee of Ten (C-10) Heads of State and Government on the Reform of the United Nations Security Council; (ii) The Second Annual Showcase of Sustainable Development Goal 16 and the Second Task Force Meeting for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies; (iii) The Multi-Stakeholder Consultation Forum on Global Compact on safe, orderly and regular migration, organized with support from IOM, UNDP and the EU; (iv) The Ministry conducted, for the first time, an induction and training workshop for all newly appointed diplomats and attaches giving them the requisite diplomatic knowledge to facilitate transition to their new diplomatic life;

224. This Parliament has recently ratified the following agreements: (i) The New York Convention on the Recognition and Enforcement of Foreign Arbitral Award; (ii) Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Sierra Leone and the Government of the People's Republic of China on Mutual Visa Exemption for holders of Diplomatic and Service Passports China Visa; (iii) Agreement on Establishing Consultation Mechanism between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Republic of Sierra Leone and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China; and, (iv) Agreement between the Federation of Saint Christopher and Nevis and the Republic of Sierra Leone on Exemption of Visa Requirement for Holders of Diplomatic Official, and Ordinary Passports.

Fourth Estate and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)

225. The 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 Governments. Government has restructured the leadership of the IMC with a view to improving on delivery of its mandate.

226. 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. My Government is committed to ensuring that the Board and staff meet the corporation's original mandate.

227. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, we are still committed to repealing the seditious libel law. Consistent with the pledge to repeal the obnoxious Section of the Public Order Act 1965, which criminalizes defamation and seditious libel, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has held consultations with key stakeholders including the Law Officers Department, and the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists amongst others to adopt the appropriate strategy. The draft cabinet paper requesting the amendment of the Public Order Act 1965 has been submitted to the Attorney-General and Minister of Justice for her concurrence.

The Civil Service

228. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, my administration recognises the importance of the Civil Service despite the many challenges including weak human capacity and poor remuneration. To address the disparities in wages, salaries, and compensation among public servants and even within the civil service, Government commissioned a study towards the establishment of the work on the Wages and Compensation Commission. The technical paper is now completed and awaits Cabinet discussion. It will be subsequently submitted to Parliament for enactment.

229. In the years ahead, our principal objective continues to be the restoration of professionalism and efficiency in the civil service. Specifically, we will establish a National Civil Service Capacity Enhancement scheme.

Improving Security Governance for Development

230. The Defence Council has approved the implementation of new enhanced Terms and Condition of Service (TACOS) introduced across board for all ranks as opposed to the extant Army Order Act No. 1 1965, which was applicable to officers only. This is expected to ensure operational effectiveness and boost troop morale. Troops now receive their gross pay for their leave allowance as opposed to their net pay which they were receiving.

231. The paltry amounts formations and units used to receive as ration cash allowance and imprest have been reviewed to reflect the present economic situation/ market prices. These monies are meant to run the units and formations and feed the troops on border operations and training. The military also benefited from the 10 % salary increase in June last year for all Government workers from Grades 1-6, and this year's increase of 10% for Grades 1 - 6 and 5% for grades 7 and above.

232. Just last month, the RSLAF concluded, for the first time, an all-female-recruitment. Three hundred and thirty-two females representing the demographic set up of Sierra Leone are presently undergoing training at the Armed Forces Training Centre. This figure will go a long way to reducing the huge gender

imbalance in the armed forces. This initiative is in collaboration with our development partner, the UK Government through the International Security Advisory Team (ISAT). With the support of People's Liberation Army of the People's Republic of China, an infectious diseases centre for service personnel has also been constructed.

233. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, Government has conducted a comprehensive border area assessment and provided training for border management agencies, established regional and district Immigration offices in Port Loko City and Kamakwie respectively.

234. The country has, for the first time, developed a migration policy and has commenced the review of out-dated Immigration laws of the country.

235. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, to properly account for VISA fees and facilitate travelling to Sierra Leone, Government is finalising plans to introduce E-Electronic Visa and Visa-on-arrival into our immigration systems.

236. Regarding the Fire Force, Government commenced the construction of four (4) fire stations in Western Rural, Kailahun, Pujehun and Kabala; initiated the process of acquiring additional fire engines; and, recruited additional staff. Cabinet has also endorsed a Fire Safety Bill and will soon submit to this House for enactment.

POLICE

General Security, Crime and Public Disorder

237. As the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) continues to collaborate with other security and Intelligence agencies, stakeholders including the communities, there has been great improvement in the general security situation as there is relative peace throughout the country. According to the Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP), the Global Peace Index 2018: Measuring Peace in a Complex World, Sierra Leone is still ranked as the most peaceful country in West Africa, 3rd in Sub-Saharan Africa and 35th in the world. Sierra Leone is also among the 71 countries that were more peaceful in 2018 than in 2017.

238. There has been a total decrease in overall crime rate across the country from **1.08%** in 2017 to **0.8%** in 2018. Economic offences, such as counterfeiting of currency, financial scams, fraud, money laundering, fraudulent conversion, false pretences, etc. are crimes that evoke serious concern and impact on the Nation's economy, security and governance. With the efforts made so far, there was a slight decrease in recorded cases of Economic Crimes from **6,591** in 2017 to **6,585** in

2018 nationwide. The Sierra Leone Police through the community policing and partnership have also put under control certain public order offences like riot, violent disorder, affray, provocation of violence among others. Reported cases of such nature decreased from 1,446 in 2017 to 1,150 in 2018. Similarly, various drug-related cases investigated and prosecuted reduced from 120 in 2017 to 64 in 2018.

239. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, with a robust policing strategy applied by the SLP including community engagements, patrols, Mobile Vehicle Checkpoints (MVCP) and covert night deployment in grey areas; violent crimes including murder, manslaughter, assault, wounding and armed robbery have been suppressed. The total number of recorded violent crime cases reduced from 21,592 in 2017 to 19,488 in 2018. As these figures are still not encouraging, the SLP is reviewing its strategy in order to reduce the cases to the barest minimum.

240. Nevertheless, more efforts need to be made in the area of road safety as recorded road crashes increased from 3,189 in 2017 to 4,425 in 2018 with a corresponding recorded increase in fatalities of 402 to 456. We will collaborate with other stakeholders in road safety management including the Sierra Leone Road Safety Authority (SLRSA) to review and implement road safety strategies in order to save lives.

Family Support Unit

241. The fight against the various forms of Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) is still a challenge that requires all hands on deck with drastic actions in order to reverse the ugly trend. Even though Domestic Violence cases reduced slightly from 9,377 in 2017 to 9,121 in 2018, cases of Sexual Penetration and Rape continue to pose a threat to our women and girls. Reported Sexual Penetration cases increased from 2,549 in 2017 to 2,726 in 2018 and Rape from 103 in 2017 to 205 in 2018. However, with the recent actions taken by my Government, including the Proclamation of a State of Emergency, coupled with the cooperation of other stakeholders, we hope to reverse the trend.

Transnational Organized Crime Unit (TOCU) & INTERPOL

242. Human Trafficking - the practice of illegally transporting people from one country or area to another, typically for the purposes of forced labour or sexual exploitation continues to affect our women, youth, and children. In the past, there have been low prosecution and interdiction rates and the past Government withheld funding of anti-trafficking training and activities. For the first time in three years, the Government of Sierra Leone has released funds to support anti-trafficking activities. These funds are being used for public awareness activities and training of frontline staff. Government will maintain a sustained effort in this vein.

Human Resource and Training

243. The SLP is at an advanced stage of recruiting 1000 personnel which will help fill the gap created by the attrition rate and to enhance police operations. In order to expand the process to encourage and attract more rural females to be recruited, the Directorate of Gender Affairs, Hospitality and Protocol of the SLP in collaboration with the UNDP embarked on a nation-wide job fair sensitization exercise in all six regional police commands.

244. The Sierra Leone Peacekeeping and Law Enforcement (SILEA) has received accreditation from the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) and the National Commission for Technical and Vocational Awards (NCTVA). It has started offering certificate and diploma courses as an affiliate of the University of Sierra Leone. In order to build the capacity of personnel and enhance service delivery, SILEA will start to offer security related degree and higher degree courses. A total of 1,122 personnel benefitted from various local and international training programmes comprising various professional, leadership and public order management training programmes including those delivered by the International Security and Advisory Team (ISAT). Personnel have also benefitted from some technical training in cybercrimes investigations. These personnel still require further training and the requisite equipment in order to enhance their investigation capability.

Infrastructure

245. The SLP through government and community support has commissioned police stations in Savage Square and Wellington whilst others are under construction in Wilberforce, Aberdeen and Bamoi Luma. As a further step in improving police infrastructure, the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development has approved budgetary allocation for the rehabilitation of the Advanced Public Order Training School (APOTS) at Samu, Kambia District, the Mountain Police Divisional Headquarters, the Mattru Jong Police Station, the Kingtom Police field with its pavilion and construction of toilets. The budget will also be used for the construction of police stations in Koidu, Gardorhun and Taidu Town, the Bonthe Police Station, and the Blackhall Road Police Station.

Peacekeeping

246. In a bid to continue contributing to global peace and security, the SLP, between March, 2018 and April, 2019, has deployed 219 officers to peacekeeping missions in Darfur, South Sudan and Somalia comprising 57 Individual Police Officers (IPOs), 2 professional Post Officers and one Formed Police Unit (FPU) made up of 160 personnel with brand new Contingent Owned Equipment to the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) in Kismayo, Somalia. Their performance rating

has been very high due to the initial robust training they received before their deployment. They have just been rotated with another set of FPU.

Rule of Law, Promoting Justice and Human Rights

247. Mr. Speaker, one of the key priorities that the Government committed to last year is the advancement of the "Rule of Law, Promotion of Justice and Human Rights." We stated that our "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". We promised to facilitate a national dialogue on justice systems to ensure impartiality, availability and accessibility to all, enhance the services of legal aid and work with stakeholders to enhance effective and efficient Judicial service delivery. We have also elaborated our commitments to justice more clearly within the National Development Plan. Here are some of the steps we have taken in the past year to address our commitments to justice.

248. Mr. Speaker, for the first time in this country we hosted a Justice conference in October 2018 that brought together several Justice Ministers from United Nations member-states, international organizations, civil society, and the private sector to deliberate on how we can accelerate the delivery of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 to ensure equal access to justice for all our people. My government through the Attorney-General's Office is providing the global leadership that is required to realize SDG 16 by Co-chairing the Task Force on Justice to develop the "Justice for All" Report; an initiative to accelerate delivery of the SDG 16 targets for peaceful, just and inclusive societies. Work is ongoing with our local communities and stakeholders, on continuing the dialogue on how we can provide justice systems alongside our formal Justice institutions, that empower them to recognize and take action to tackle their justice problems. How best to make services available to them that are less expensive, speedy and efficient and that will be responsive to their justice needs.

249. Mr. Speaker, we consider that protection of Human rights is an antidote to injustice. We have therefore moved quickly to constitute five new commissioners as provided for by the Law ensuring the representation of women and the regional balance that is required. I can also report that there has been a progressive increase in the number of complaints received by the commission suggesting an increase in public confidence in the institution. We further demonstrated our commitment to protection of human rights for our investors and our people, by hosting a Side-Event at the United Nations General Assembly for the first time in our country's

history, to identify ways to leverage a rights-based approach to business in Sierra Leone. The recommendations address how we can promote and protect foreign investment, end exploitation of our people and corruption and bribery in business through effective, accountable, and transparent institutions. And we have constituted the policy and legal framework for this around an Investment Board.

250. On Legal Aid programme, we have increased the number of persons that have access to justice. Since we took over the Government in 2018, a total of one hundred and six thousand, six hundred and fifty-five (106,655) people benefitted from the scheme indicating an increase of twenty three thousand, six hundred and two (23,602), compared to 2017, when eighty-three thousand and fifty-three (83,053) people benefitted from the scheme. Through this scheme, we demonstrated our concern to protect the vulnerable especially women and children so a total of thirty thousand and nine (30,009) females and thirty-nine thousand, eight hundred and thirty-four (39,834) children benefitted from the scheme in 2018. As promised, also, a Curriculum and Training Manual has been developed for the 'Training of Paralegals' in Sierra Leone, and the Judicial and Legal Training Institute is soon to commence the legal trainings that is desired to enhance their services.

251. With respect to overhauling the judiciary, Mr Speaker, we have approved the appointment of several judges for the High Court, Appeals Court and Supreme Court and administered by a new Chief Justice. We aim to ensure an efficient system of delivering justice that is fair and impartial and accessible to service the people of Sierra Leone.

252. In the Criminal Justice delivery system, Mr Speaker, the state completed a total number of eight-hundred and sixty-five (865) cases country-wide, securing convictions of seven hundred and twenty-three (723), a profound increase from the previous year. But we also inherited overcrowded correction facilities that do not speak well for the human rights of the convicts. I want to assure this house that my government is working with the relevant stakeholders to address this issue. We have already taken immediate action in a combination of measures to reduce the high number of the remand inmates.

253. Mr. Speaker, maintaining the rule of Law also applies to the protection of legal redress for government interest when individuals and businesses institute legal actions against the state domestically and internationally, or in the fight against corruption. We have successfully defended several actions ranging from land disputes, commercial disputes and human rights dispute in the ECOWAS Court, and have avoided huge financial cost to the government running into millions of dollars. We have also instituted three Commissions of Inquiry running concurrently with sole commissioners to address the impunity of corruption and enhance accountability in governance.

254. We will continue our efforts to ensure the observance of the rule of law, protection of human rights and to provide for our people a system of justice that is impartial, accessible and available for all; one that is efficient and responsive to their justice needs and that is based on continuing "justice dialogue" with our people, communities, justice delivery stakeholders and our donor partners, in line with the National Development Plan.

Diaspora Affairs

255. Mr. Speaker, last year I promised to (i) review the mandate of the Diaspora Office and assess 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 professional 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.

256. To achieve this, my Government through the Ministry of Political and Public Affairs has conducted a Management and Functional Review (MFR) of the Office of Diaspora Affairs as part of Government's commitment to strengthen and improve on service delivery. The review paid attention to operational efficiency and programmatic effectiveness that are inextricably linked to help redirect the functions of ODA within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International cooperation, rather than it being an independent institution amidst multiple government financial priorities and competing resource scarcity. This justification is in line with lessons learned and models of international best practices from other Diaspora institutions in Africa and other parts of the world.

257. The review results show that the mandate of the Office of Diaspora Affairs is not in sync with the Ministry of Political and Public Affairs whose mandate is geared towards serving as a bridge between the public and government in promoting democracy and good governance. It was therefore recommended that the mandate of ODA be realigned within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation with a view to streamlining its objectives in order to make it more relevant to the development needs of the country and the Sierra Leone Diaspora Communities across the world.

258. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, A Directorate for Diaspora Affairs will be established within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, which can be cost-effective and will also increase the portfolio of the Ministry. A scheme of Service for the respective positions will be realigned to ensure upward mobility for staff and former staff of the ODA assessed to determine their suitability for the proposed Directorate of Diaspora Affairs.

259. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been requested to conduct a training needs assessment for all incoming staff that will be recruited for the Directorate so that their felt needs would be incorporated into the training plan and policy of the Ministry.

The Legislature

260. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, the Parliament of Sierra Leone is the heartbeat of democratic governance. I know the critical role this Noble House plays as a beacon of peace, progress, democracy and good governance of the State. Accordingly, my New Direction Administration will listen to the many calls by Members of Parliament to address the critical infrastructure and welfare needs of the House.

261. Under my Presidential Infrastructure Initiative, my Government will seek both internal and external support to ensure that Members of Parliament are provided with conducive office space to enhance their effectiveness and efficiency in Parliament.

262. My Government also recognises the challenges Members of this Noble House face with housing in the capital city. Some of the accommodation occupied by honourable members clearly does not befit their status. My Government will actively engage partners to develop an ultra-modern parliamentary housing estate exclusively for Members of Parliament.

263. In addition to infrastructural development, the welfare of Members of Parliament is equally important. I am fully aware of the importance of the provisions contained in Part IV of the Constitution of Sierra Leone (Act No.6 of 1991) and the Standing Order 26 dealing with the privileges of Members of Parliament. Consequently, collective action is needed to address the deficiencies that currently exist in recognizing and actualizing the privileges of the House - ***Paopa Parliament go betteh.***

264. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, in consonance with established norms and best practice the world over, my Administration will also take measures to review and strengthen the ***Parliamentary Service Act of 2007*** to enhance the capacity of Parliament.

265. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, one year in office has gone too quickly but the achievements we have made are laying the solid foundation for not only sustainable development but also restoring our international reputation. Therefore, let me take this opportunity to express my profound gratitude to the Honourable Vice President and the rest of the cabinet for their hard work and commitment; to the Speaker, Members of Parliament and staff of Parliament for their cooperation; to the Chief Justice and members of the judiciary for their support; to all public servants across our country for their devotion; to our development partners for their invaluable partnership; to all political parties and civil society organisations for the constructive engagement; to the members of the fourth estate for reporting our achievements and holding us to account; to the general populace for the goodwill and to my wife and children for the love and personal support. We must all wholeheartedly invest in a renewed drive to change the narrative of the only country we call home because this is the “land that we love, our Sierra Leone”.

I thank you.

