"Inclusiveness and Good Governance: Imperative for Regional Development." Graduation Lecture Delivered by His Excellency, Brigadier General (Rtd) Julius Maada Bio, President of the Republic of Sierra Leone at the National Defence College, (Course 27), Nigeria. Tuesday, 30 July 2019.

His Excellency, General Muhammadu Buhari, President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria,

The Commandant of the National Defence College,

Staff Officers from the Services Headquarters,

Faculty and Staff of the National Defence College

The Alumni Association of the National Defence College,

Distinguished Retired and Serving men and women of the Armed and Intelligence Services,

Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps,

Graduating Students of Course 27,

Members of the Fourth Estate,

Distinguished Ladies and gentlemen,

Good afternoon.

On behalf of my delegation, and the people of the Republic of Sierra Leone, I bring you warm greetings.

Let me also join in, again, congratulating graduates of Course 27. Yours is a true test of mettle, a testament to loyalty, and a commitment to public service and the service of humanity. Thank you for your service and congratulations.

Let me also thank the organisers for the singular honour of favouring me with an invitation to address this august occasion at this world class national defence college.

The college's mission to create a "Centre of Excellence for peace support operations and training at the strategic level in West Africa" is critical for the stability and overall development of the sub-region. Indeed, where there is peace and security, there is development. The mission of the NDC is therefore crucial for peace and security in the West Africa sub-region.

But more importantly, the insistence of the college on rigour and creative critical thinking, with the students being actively tasked to challenge conventional notions and intellectual assumptions about "the nature of war, peace, leadership, politics, ethics, and the application of force" is truly impressive.

It is in this vein of critical inquiry and analysis that I would like us to engage on the topic, "Youth Inclusiveness and Good Governance: Imperatives for Regional Development."

Your Excellences, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I could have easily been part of the statistics displayed by scholars and development partners in discussing the failures and defects of youth.

I was born in a small village called Tiihun. I was the 33rd of 35 children to my father, who was a Paramount Chief. At the age of 4, my father died. My mother who was illiterate but who always believed in the power of education was determined that I become a better person through the power of education. I was brought up by strong women. And as Africans, you know what that means.

But I could have easily dropped out of school, worked menial jobs, and lived rough on urban streets. I could have adopted a life of drugs and crime and embraced violence in order to survive. I could have joined a violent anti-government insurrection as a rebel. My story would have been different.

As a young military officer, I hearkened the call of duty in the bushy borderlands interdicting smugglers and providing aviation security. From a baptism of heavy withering fire on the beaches of civil war Monrovia, I was to spend several more years with my comrades, fighting in the jungles of Sierra Leone to protect my compatriots.

When we replaced a repressive one party dictatorship and four years later, ushered in multiparty democracy and initiated peace talks, we did so for the sake of the future.

So the topic of this lecture bears particular resonance for me because we are discussing the future of Africa's security and development.

Your Excellences, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Perhaps we need to define some of our key analytical terms for the purposes of this lecture.

Youth - The African Union policy framework on youth, *The Africa Youth Charter*, defines youth as generally persons between the ages of 15 and 35. This demographic category is not rigid and it captures the diversity of young persons by gender, ability, ethnicity, and socio-economic status.

Good governance – I will unpack the two terms for the purposes of definition by isolating the subject (governance) from the modifier (good).

Governance refers to the process of acquiring and wielding authority over a state usually through control of that state's institutions and managing that state's resources.

When the term "governance" is associated with the modifier "good," it evokes a number of qualitative expectations. Is that governance representative, legitimate, responsive, fair and

equitable, transparent, accountable, consultative, and inclusive? Is it in accordance with the rule of law and constitutionality? These essential elements make governance institutions and processes trustworthy and in turn make for political stability and the peaceful development of the state.

Inclusiveness. As a broad analytical construct, inclusiveness implies a deliberate, purposeful, and intentional practice. It is grounded in policy and it is a commitment to equally value, and take into account the views and contributions of every citizen in goal and agenda-setting, implementation, and in assessing the impact of policy.

Regional development implies an integrated and concerted effort by sub-regional states to develop and align sustainable policies that will trigger off even socio-economic development and wealth-creation. This collaboration across states may narrow gaps and disparities in development in those states that may otherwise have potential security implications.

So the core questions at the heart of this topic, Your Excellences, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, "Youth Inclusiveness and Good Governance: Imperatives for Regional Development," revolve around how our countries have

grappled with the youth question, fully considered and integrated youth in policy-making and implementation, and with what implications for national and also regional development.

Clearly, over the last twenty years, the World (through the United Nations and the World Programme of Action for Youth) and the African Union have all recognised the critical need to both create policy frameworks and actively centre the future of youth in development. The policy frameworks are developed on three key balusters, opportunity through ICT and education irrespective of gender and ability, social protection, and unconditional integration and participation.

The United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development has taken a lead role in aligning an aspirational youth-centred agenda with the Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the UN in September 2015.

Also, the African Union's Youth Decade, 2009-2018 Plan of Action (DPoA) is predicated on the Africa Youth Charter and designed with a framework for multi-sectoral and multi-dimensional engagement of all stakeholders - governments, development partners, and constituent organs of the AU.

Furthermore, the framework is useful for developing, coordinating, and focusing various actions at the national and regional levels geared towards enhancing the lives of young people.

In the several continent wide, cross-continental, and global declarations since, there have been commitments to create or reshape existing participatory mechanisms for youth, foreground youth in public policies, and work effectively across sectors.

Your Excellences, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

In September 2018, I shared a podium with Bill Gates at the 2018 Goalkeepers event on the margins of the United National General Assembly. Our conversation on that day focused on sustainable development goals, young people, and the future of the world. We discussed poverty and the prospects for the future of young people. We concluded then that young people are central to development and poverty reduction especially in Africa and that governments must leverage investments in human capital development if we are to generate future economic prosperity and stability.

But here is why that conversation matters.

The 2018 Goalkeeper's Report projects the following:

- Over 60% of Africa's population is already aged 0-24. This is projected to grow by 50% in 2050.
- In 2050, Sub-Saharan Africa will have the largest youth population in the world at 945 million persons. Compare that to shrinking youth populations in South Asia; South East Asia, and Oceania; and, Western Europe and North America.
- In 2050, 86% of the poorest people in the world will live in sub-Saharan Africa.

So one can reasonably deduce that the majority of the world's poorest people will be young people who live in sub-Saharan Africa.

Let us focus on some realities and some implications for Sub-Saharan Africa.

There is justifiable anxiety about what has been termed the "youth bulge" – a burgeoning of youth populations especially across the West Africa sub-region. This anxiety is complicated by rapid urbanisation and poor housing, low investments in education, lack of social services and infrastructure, large youth

unemployment, financial exclusion and general lack of opportunity, and the penetration of social media politics. These pose a security risk with which our regional militaries and military leadership may have to grapple at some point either as law and order encounters or fighting against fully-fledged insurgencies.

But let us dwell for a second on scholarly renditions of the implications of the exponential growth of youth populations in large urban centres in Africa.

Proponents of the "youth bulge" perspective generally align it with the "urban threat" or "lumpen proletariat" thesis. The conversations are certainly not ideologically neutral and value – free. Various people would argue that the debates are imbued with everything from the rhetoric of high fertility/population control, rebellious youth in chaotic states, or helplessly corrupt and predatory regimes that misuse and destroy their youthful populations by keeping them in perpetual penury. The argument can be reduced to a simple equation: a disproportionate high youth population is a restive population.

They further argue that such a youthful population is culpable for interpersonal, criminal, and political violence and that

structural factors (poor governance, lack of education, lack of opportunity, threatened or limited livelihoods, and a drug culture) merely exacerbate their propensity for unleashing such violence. That population, they conclude, can be easily mobilised into violent, insurrectionary politics. Add in identity partisan politics and a recent or ongoing history of protracted violent conflict, and youth populations are thus considered a clear and present danger to political stability.

Your Excellences, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

The premise of this scholarly perspective is untenable. The idea that wherever there is a disproportionate number of young people there is violence is a spurious correlation. As we all know, correlation is not causation. Quite often, in fact, young persons are overwhelmingly victims of such violence and the majority of young persons are not perpetrators of violence.

To my mind, the questions we should be asking should focus on understanding the precursors to political instability and violence. Young people, more often than other population groups, struggle with fragile and weakened state institutions. Such man-made/man-generated factors as corruption, nepotism, governance deficits and inefficiencies, uneven state resource distribution and management, lack of social services

and infrastructure, can all lead to a lack of opportunity, exclusion, and youth disillusionment. This can escalate into everything from social protest and unrest to criminal violence, drug use, defects of rapid urbanisation, cross-border migration, to degeneration into outright state violence.

So my argument, Your Excellences, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, is that the "youth bulge/Urban threat" thesis stigmatises youth as a homogenous category. It also presents a simplistic and one-dimensional picture of an otherwise very complex and complicated interplay of structural and governance issues. Above all, absent from this "youth-bulge/urban threat" thesis formulation are the voices of the youth.

So beyond the theoretical and academic arguments, let us briefly examine some of the barriers to youth participation in good governance

Governance Structures and Weak to No Political Participation

In our sub-region, our governance institutions are increasingly predictable. Peaceful democratic transitions are slowly becoming the norm in most West African states. However, our governance institutions are not sufficiently resilient and resistant of the usual pressures of ethnic nepotism and other

exclusionary and discriminatory practices. These have direct implications for the levels and nature of participation of young persons in governance. Political spaces are still heavily dominated by political parties and civil society groups led by adults.

Formal political party structures do not often provide for the organised, integrated, and meaningful participation of young people. Often, they do not mainstream or prioritise the needs of young people in policy decisions. They instead recruit and induce young persons into violent partisanship and identity politics. When young people are mobilised, they are mobilised within most political parties as a violent proxy paramilitary to intimidate opponents. They can also be used to cause social instability or vocalise discontentment in response to such trigger events as price changes or economic crisis, bye–elections and other political events, actions by security forces seen as adversarial,

Furthermore, young persons are excluded from formal governance structures and they are not given leadership responsibilities within those structures.

In countries in the sub-region where decentralisation governance structures are implemented, the leaderships and participatory structures are still predominantly led and

controlled by older persons. Younger people are largely excluded.

Informal networks of youth are generally not organically organised even at community levels. Where they are organised they are often co-opted into political patronage networks. Young persons who are often empowered by a local politician who wants to be seen as doing some visible good in the community. The ultimate, selfish aim of those politicians is to create or foster political networks rather than to maximise the political capital of young people. So a key barrier therefore to participation is the perception that young people lack autonomy for making effective and rational leadership choices. These may be further complicated by socio-cultural factors that downplay the importance of young people's voices in national policy-making and agenda-setting.

Difficult Access to Quality Education, Vocational Training, and Opportunity

With restricted economies and fewer private capital investments across our sub-region, West African countries, including mine, struggle to provide sufficient economic opportunities for young people. Often, young people have limited access to economic opportunity because they have little to no formal skills training, entrepreneurial training or

knowledge for the few available jobs in the formal sector. The lack of access to quality or relevant education has implications also for the financial, health, social well-being of young people. It restricts them to the informal economy and gives them limited livelihood opportunities. The exclusion from the formal economy and formal processes is a barrier to their participation in good governance.

Limited Civic Spaces and Civic Participation

In most countries in the sub-region, young persons do not have sufficient visibility in civic spaces because they are either not well organised in civic organisations or their interests are not fully represented in existing organisations. As a result, their views are not solicited by policy-makers and they do not participate in public policy-making spaces and negotiations. Civic education alone is not sufficient to guarantee the solicitation of the views of youth or their participation in the civic space. At the level of state leadership, national youth policies are also largely silent about consultative processes involving youth

Other structural Barriers

Often, governments in the sub-region do not develop national development plans or negotiate multilateral trade and investment agreements with the potentials and future

participation of young people in the labour market in mind. In mapping growth areas of the economy, policy makers or leaders in the sub-region do not seem to actively pre-empt questions around such issues as financial inclusion, access to capital for entrepreneurship, and access to land.

Your Excellences, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, let us briefly discuss Sierra Leone's National Youth Policy and Structures

The post-war Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report foreground the urgency of the youth crisis and the need to centre it in national policy making. Various dedicated government ministries were established with a youth component between 2003 and 2018. So for instance, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports was established in 2003. This was later separated into a dedicated Ministry of Youth, Employment and Sports and, in 2013, further rationalised in to a Ministry of Youth Affairs.

The country's first National Youth Policy was ratified in 2003. This was followed some years later by the National Youth Commission Act of 2009. The National Youth Policy of 2003 gave policy backing, for the first time, to the concept of youth as a national development priority. The policy is designed to

'mainstream youth activities and contributions and to highlight youth concerns as critical input in the development process' (GoSL, 2003).

The policy outlines the roles and responsibilities of the youth themselves, the state, and other actors in "reinventing the time-honoured notion of dignity in labour, instilling national consciousness and patriotism in our young citizens, so as to lay the foundation for the emergence of a responsible citizenry."

This policy was revised in 2014 by the newly created Ministry of Youth Affairs. The revised policy, among other things, identifies priority areas of intervention, key strategies, institutional structures, coordination, accountability, and financial mechanisms for the implementation of the policy.

The policy created specific instruments for supporting and promoting youth issues at the district level through the creation of District Youth Councils (DYCs). DYCs are tasked with identifying major youth concerns, needs, and opportunities in their districts and identifying projects/programmes that could be recommended for funding and support.

In December 2009, an Act of Parliament established the National Youth Commission (NAYCOM) as the implementing commission for the provisions of the National Youth Policy. NAYCOM's responsibilities include, among other things, creating

employment opportunities for youth, initiating youth development programmes, developing a national youth development plan, creating a network through which young people can access information about beneficial services, and coordinating the activities of youth groups. The act also provides for Youth Advisory Committees to be established in all local councils with the purpose of assisting the Commission meet its core mandate.

These two instruments concretise in law the role of youth in development and governance and the country's commitment to its young people.

What is unclear in the act, and perhaps warrants more discussion, is the specific issue of youth participation in political governance. What is provided for in this act is broad. So, for instance, the National Youth Policy defines, among other rights for young people, the right to participate in all decision-making processes relating to youth and the right to participate in governance issues.

It states that youth have a responsibility to promote and defend democracy through active participation in the democratic process at all levels. It describes what should be done but it is silent about how it should be done. For instance,

it does not seem to mandate all political parties to integrate youth capacity building into the strategic plans of their respective parties. Youth groups remain largely amorphous and ill-defined both within parties and even when parties are in governance.

So What Have We Done as a Government with NAYCOM and the Youth Ministry?

In a broad sense, my government prioritises youth involvement in development programming through NAYCOM, youth associations and youth serving organizations. We focus on capacity building and training of the youth at all governance levels in order to improve opportunities and livelihoods.

The Sierra Leone's Youth Service Corps Programme integrates and prepares youth for the world of work and grants them access to decent employment and entrepreneurial opportunities. in the country. At all other devolved levels, youth are organised to promote leadership, good governance, democratic engagement and responsible citizenship.

Your Excellences, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, what is THE WAY FORWARD for Youth Inclusiveness in Governance. What are some of the strategy and policy options?

I have discussed commitments made at the continental and international levels on youth inclusiveness in governance and development. I have laid the general barriers to youth inclusion in governance. I have further pointed out the policy and structural interventions that are in force in Sierra Leone.

I propose that beyond the intellectual and multilateral conversations, governments should seek to implement clearly developed strategies for putting youth at the centre of governance and development.

Democratic Inclusion, Governance, and Political Leadership

A dedicated line Ministry, a national commission for youth, a national youth policy which is aligned with the African Youth Charter, are all existing mechanisms my government is using to mainstream youth in governance.

Within governments also, young people should be actively engaged as agents of change. I would argue that young people should be given leadership roles to play. Those roles should be central to setting a forward-looking agenda within government and should be at the heart of policy and decision-making.

In Sierra Leone, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, the Chief Innovation Officer and Head of the Directorate Science Technology, and Innovation; the Head of the Anti-Corruption Commission, the Director General of the Petroleum Directorate and several other key governance departments are young persons.

We are also actively engaged with civil society through a dedicated ministry (Ministry of Political Affairs), with a view to expanding democratic spaces and enhancing the meaningful participation of young people, including girls and other vulnerable populations.

It is also my submission that creating viable forums for dialogue with youth at all levels of governance will align government and youth policy choices and strategies. In particular, as ICT penetration increases, I believe that government should engage youth through channels favoured by youth. Yes, the social media is a governance space that governments should not cede to the opposition or potentially subversive groups.

The voices and participation of young persons must be sustained within a wider context of strengthening governance institutions, reforming governance processes, and promoting accountability and transparency in governance. Ultimately,

winning the trust and confidence of young people in how they are governed promotes national and ultimately regional stability. It also helps tamp down the otherwise deleterious effects of identify and partisan politics or the politics or grievance and disaffection.

Education and Skills Training

In both the formal and informal education sectors, governments should commit to promoting universal and inclusive access to free quality education. To my mind, training the human resource of a nation is a critical accelerator of national development. Skills learned and knowledge attained thus enhance the upward economic mobility of young people and makes them fit for purpose in the digital economy of the twenty-first century. Quality education and skills training also enhances livelihood opportunities.

Entrepreneurship

In addition to creating a conducive macro-economic environment and private sector investment space, government should also be intentional about providing equal, sustainable, and inclusive access to finance and training in entrepreneurship for young people. They should be trained and able to create, own, and operate sustainable businesses that create jobs and contribute to economic development.

Social Responsibility

Government should also strongly encourage youth-led initiatives that encourage productive change and development. Youths could lead in skills and technology transfer in areas as diverse as ecotourism, sustainable agriculture and farming practices, new livelihood possibilities in value-chain production and other such ventures that will have multiplier effects for national development.

Young people should be encouraged to advocate and provide leadership on key issues that affect them – access to education, health, and opportunity or other social and environmental factors that hamper their inclusion in the national agenda.

Government can also invest in creative youth culture by actively encouraging start-ups, entrepreneurship, as well as management and production streams of those businesses. When harnessed, youth creativity contributes to the overall resilience of governance institutions and processes.

Data and Legal Frameworks

Government policy and decisions should be predicated on reliable and extensive data about young people. Data-driven policies mean that youth-specific interventions have more impact and governments can successfully track outcomes.

The legal framework that empowers young people must be flexible and agile so that emerging issues can be accounted for while governments continue fluxing out innovative ways of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and the AU Agenda 2063.

At a recent TED talk, I defined leadership as a "a mission to listen with empathy to the craziest of ideas, the hopes and aspirations of a younger generation who are just looking for a chance to BE better, and to make their countries better."

It is about letting those young people know that their dreams matter. It is about standing with them and asking, "Why not" when they ask seemingly impossible questions. It is about exploring, making, and owning a shared vision with young people.

As leaders therefore, let us ask young people "Why not," and make bold choices with them for and about their future, and ensure those bold choices happen. I submit, in conclusion, that at the regional levels, governments should cooperate in harmonising and sharing best practices and experiences. Building the capacity of young people is not an option, it is at the heart of good governance and sustainable development. It fosters healthier, more educated, more peaceful, and more prosperous nations.

I thank you.