



**Convocation Address Delivered by His
Excellency, Dr. Julius Maada Bio,
President of the Republic of Sierra
Leone, at the First Convocation and
Graduation Ceremony at the Ernest Bai
Koroma University of Science and
Technology. Magburaka, 25 January
2020.**

The Pro Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, I thank you all most gratefully for the warm welcome and generous hospitality accorded me and my entourage by the great people of Kholifa Rowala Chiefdom, Magburaka, Tonkolili District.

Our thoroughgoing commitment to achieving human capital development throughout Sierra Leone is evident in my government's unambiguous support for the continuing operations of the Ernest Bai Koroma University of Science and Technology.

We will associate with, promote, and fully support the development of all institutions that are critical for Sierra Leone's national development.

The Ernest Bai Koroma University of Science and Technology is one such institution.

And so to my mind, as President of Sierra Leone, no matter who you are, and no matter where you are from, my Government will give equal opportunity to every Sierra Leonean to achieve his or her boundless potential and fully contribute her or his fair share to national development.

Let us therefore thank the parents and guardians who invested their limited resources in your education and held out abundant hopes in order to make this day possible for each of you graduates.

Let us give them a standing ovation.

Let us also thank the administration, faculty, and staff of this young University for their tenacity in the face of adversity; for their determination to succeed when the odds were stacked against this institution;

for their herculean endeavour to hew out this crop of new graduates at all the campuses in Magburaka, Makeni and Port Loko.

Congratulations to each faculty and staff member. They truly deserve a standing ovation. Let us congratulate everybody else who has worked, prayed, and hoped that graduates today will enrich their communities and nation with the skills and knowledge they have gained from this university.

So let us celebrate their sterling achievements today. Congratulations again, graduating Class of 2019. Most of you may be the first in your family or community to enter university; first in your family or community to acquire a university education.

That may be well and good.

Ask yourself the next logical question: "How can I be the first to make a real difference in the lives of my family, my community, and my nation?"

That is both a question and a challenge.

Wager the possibility with me: What is the likelihood of the 33rd of 35 children whose father died when that child was only 4 years old; that child was brought up by an illiterate mother; that child grew up in a small dusty village without shoes, pipe-borne water, electricity, or a telephone...

What is the likelihood of that child attaining a superior education with several degrees and serving his community and his nation as a teacher, a soldier, and a President?

That is my story.

It is a story of character wrought out of adversity; of personal resilience and faith in spite of dire circumstances; of the abiding

belief that challenges are temporary and everything is possible as long as one is determined to achieve it.

Graduates, you have motivated yourself against all odds to succeed at this university. I want you to go beyond mere motivation and challenge yourself to make a real difference in your families, communities, and nation.

Make goalsetting and a disciplined approach to achieving those goals a habit.

Opportunity and success do not look for people or come through mere luck or coincidence.

Successful people are those who find and make use of opportunity.

So I challenge you today to find and use opportunities in the private sector in order to enhance your own lives, grow the economy, create jobs, and be whatever you wish to be.

I challenge you to innovate, add value to the ordinary and the everyday and make the lives of others and yours better.

Dare and do! That is the stuff that success is made of.

So as you leave here today, I challenge you to map your pathway to success and achieve success with resounding honours.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, we celebrate a series of firsts here too. Today, I become the first post-republican era President to voluntarily step down as Chancellor.

Today is the first congregation ceremony at the first public University in the north. It is also the first University congregation in 2020.

Above all, this the first ever congregation to be held in Magburaka – a true citadel of learning that once bragged of centres of learning excellence in Magburaka Boys High School and Mathora Girls School.

My Government will soon demonstrate that commitment by completely refurbishing Magburaka Boys School and Mathora Girls High School, improving their administration and management, and thus improve learning outcomes for students to truly outstanding levels.

That's the crop of students we want to provide to this university. And so, this University's bright start today portends a very promising future, a glowing tradition, and an outstanding place in this nation's development.

So I am very proud of each person here today who is graduating. I have adopted Free Quality Education as a central baluster of our human capital development priorities.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution is upon us. To be a meaningful part of the twenty first century global economy, we give our children education that is relevant to that global economy.

The pace of change in science and technology is dizzying. Blackberry phones have given way to several generations of telephones that can think faster than humans. Drones have replaced pigeons in flight and can do far more. Human beings have gone beyond using the mere biological abilities and capabilities of the bird.

Human beings have combined the power of biology of the bird, the design and computation of flight, and harnessed the power of artificial intelligence in the drone in order to provide solutions for healthcare, education, agriculture, commerce, climate change, and more.

We can no longer afford to be at the receiving end of another industrial revolution. We are impatient for development. We must therefore foster a culture of innovation around a generation of native technologists who can drive our collective aspirations.

It is not an option and it is not a choice. It is a necessity if we should participate meaningfully as a nation in the twenty-first century and achieve national development.

That is why we have opened access to education to over 2 million children irrespective of gender, tribe, region of origin, age or ability.

That is why we believe early childhood education matters. That is why we believe that numeracy and computation, comprehension and critical thinking, experiential learning and doing, are all core competencies every child must master at an early age.

That is why we believe that there is a direct correlation between teacher training and learning outcomes.

That is why we are soon convening a national forum on the future of education for this nation.

We believe that the nexus among data analytics, critical thinking, artificial intelligence, and development solutions is indisputable. To develop the right solution to a problem, one needs to understand that problem through rigorous critical thinking data collection, interpretation, and analysis.

Then, and only then, can one spend the right effort and the right amount of resources in developing the right solution for that problem.

That is the basis of critical and scientific thinking and knowledge. It is the basis of our governance decisions.

So automating revenue collection and the budgetary process reduces the likelihood of corruption, fraud, waste, and mismanagement.

Business registration and several other governance and other processes have been streamlined with automation.

ICT penetration and capturing national digital identity using block-chain technology are all helping us improve financial inclusion outcomes and associated benefits for citizens.

AI solutions for monitoring maternal health and care have a direct bearing on maternal and infant mortality.

Satellite imagery and drone technology can support water management, drive conservation policies dealing with biodiversity loss and climate change, inform food security and agricultural production and more.

With science and technology, the possibilities are limitless.

Ours is not just science for science's sake BUT Science for national development. As a nation, we may not deploy driverless cars right away, but as part of our national digitisation strategy, we can develop usable, accessible, mobile app solutions for real problems that confront us in education, healthcare, governance, entrepreneurship, agriculture, water management, public sanitation, and more.

It should be no surprise therefore that I established a Directorate for Science, Technology, and Innovation in the Office of the President (another first, I'd dare add), to develop a framework for scientific research and to ensure that we can use science and technology to deliver our national development needs.

So we recognise that the Science, Technology, Engineering, Agriculture, and Maths-based education offered here at EBK University is fundamental to national development. Snakes shed their skins in order to grow; as a nation we must stay relevant by shedding obsolete learning content and skills. So how we teach, learn, and assess science, all matter.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, when I formed the Ministry of Technical and Higher Education, it was because I believe that

we must undertake necessary reform to align our higher education curriculum with national development goals.

I advise that we insist on rigour and excellence in university education because the quality of graduates will show in the quality of our national development.

Clearly, investing in re-organising and repurposing higher education is not cheap and it requires innovative thinking about financing models.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor and Principal, I am informed that the holiday work scheme to assist students to pay their fees has been practical and helpful. Additionally, a contemplated national Students' Loan scheme may broaden access to higher education far more than the burdensome Grants-In-Aid scheme.

The argument is simple to make. Instead of assuming the burden of millions of dollars in debt from a foreign nation, we can train our own critical mass of doctors, engineers, and teachers here, at home, in our own institutions.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, let me end my short address by again congratulating you, the parents, guardians and other relatives and for supporting the graduates through their arduous journey of studentship.

I know the burden of expectation on them but please allow them time to grow in their new lives.

I thank you all for your attention

I will now proceed to formally commission the newly constructed stage and pavilion for your use.