



**STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY, DR. JULIUS MAADA
BIO, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE
ON THE OCCASION OF THE COMMISSIONING OF
PROJECTS AT THE MILTON MARGAI COLLEGE OF
EDUCATION AND TECHNOLOGY. FREETOWN,
GODERICH, SATURDAY, 6th DECEMBER, 2020**

Honourable Ministers of Government,
Honourable Members of Parliament,
The Principal, The Milton Margai College of Education and Technology (MMCET),
Faculty and Staff of the MMCET,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,
Good Morning.

1. The APRM's very encouraging assessment this week follows global recognition from the Centre for Diseases Control and World Health Organisation that

Sierra Leone's response to COVID-19 has been truly outstanding. Let us congratulate one another with a big round of applause.

2. Although we have kept case fatality ratio and infection rates very low, the COVID 19 pandemic continues to ravage and kill all over the world. Let us continue to adhere to all healthcare directives and remind ourselves that it is our responsibility to keep one another safe.
3. We may be a small nation, but the world is praising us, deservedly, for getting a lot of things right – from COVID to corruption, governance, women's empowerment, the fight against SGBV, to education and more. We do what we do because we want to address vulnerability and poverty within the bigger context of our national development. Our medium term aspiration as a nation is to transform our economy for national development.
4. We believe, among other things, that a skilled and resourceful labour force can unlock rapid national development through relevant training in science, technology, and innovation.
5. I have argued that Africa is lagging behind in development only because it has not sufficiently invested in quality education and total workforce development. With the African youth bulge getting even bigger within a decade, income and national development disparities will widen even further.
6. So if the fourth industrial revolution and the future of global trade and investment is about automation, big data, artificial intelligence, advanced robotics, efficient machines, then our workforce of the future must be equipped with the requisite skills to participate meaningfully in that global economy. Asian countries have strengthened their economies and lifted millions out of poverty because they have created the right skills to attract huge investments into their economies.
7. The argument is therefore simple: if we invest in workforce development and equip our future workers with the right skillset, we stand a greater chance of becoming a favourable investment destination, a less poor and less vulnerable society, and a much developed nation.
8. Workforce development through basic training, reskilling, and upskilling is the precursor for innovation, manufacturing, and for economic transformation. So our investments in education are guided by two key questions: a) What skillsets will a productive Sierra Leonean need over the next twenty years, and, b) What skillsets do we need for economic expansion?
9. These are the questions that have informed our policy on technical and vocational education (TVETS) in general and guided our thinking on transforming polytechnics into technical universities.

10. We acknowledged in the New Direction manifesto the appalling state and neglect of technical and vocational education in Sierra Leone – from the lack of clarity about the TVET mission to challenges with perceptions of TVET education, the curriculum, funding, locations, to even more.
11. We assert in both the New Direction Manifesto and the Medium Term National Development Plan that technical skills development is critical for improving infrastructure, manufacturing, healthcare, general public service delivery, and private services delivery.
12. We believe that technical universities, should help advance our strategic goals in the technical and vocational training sectors more vigorously. Students must be granted the opportunity to achieve the highest qualifications in technical education from an accredited university. There must be a clear pathway from technical secondary education to degree level education and training. This removes the scourge of inferiority associated with the polytechnic as an institution and creates advanced career and training possibilities for young people.
13. So what is the value of a technical university? One would argue then that an agriculture extension worker from a technical university who helps farmers triple their rice production is measurably more valuable for national development than a holder of a Master's degree in Latin or Bible Studies from our nation's top university. One could also say that a diagnostic lab technician, a pre-K teacher, a water systems mechanic from a technical university is more critical for national development than a graduate with a PhD in classical music from an established university.
14. So upgrading a polytechnic to a technical university therefore diversifies tertiary level course offerings, broadens and deepens the value of relevant technical education for national development, narrows gaps between workforce development and employer needs, and establishes much-needed parity in the tertiary education sector.
15. Also, technical universities will predominantly focus on TVET courses, Science, Technology and innovation. They will be practice-oriented, have smaller class sizes, and maintain more contact hours between students and lecturers and instructors.
16. So there are very strong arguments to make for transforming polytechnics into technical universities.
17. A number of very favourable developments (I repeat), very favourable developments, now mean that we are closer to elevating polytechnics to technical universities than we have ever been in the history of this nation.
18. As an intentional Government, we have considered five key elements to the process.

19. First, for the overarching global questions, what are the prospects for the success of an institution as a technical university? What is the value and correlation of the technical university curriculum to national development? What is the possibility that as a technical university, this institution can consistently support expanded post-training-to-entrepreneurship programmes?
20. Second are the legal and procedural questions. Evidently, as a Government, we have closely examined the enabling legal and regulatory requirements. A draft Universities Act has been reviewed and approved by cabinet and it will soon be tabled in parliament for debate and approval. I am informed that the Tertiary Education Commission has concluded all due diligence checks and given the all clear. Cabinet is unambiguous. Milton Margai College of Education and Technology **is going to become Milton Margai University of Education and Technology**. PAOPA. I repeat: Milton Margai College of Education and Technology **is going to become Milton Margai University of Education and Technology**.
21. Third is the question of institutional readiness. Has the curriculum been reviewed to ensure compliance with the national quality education agenda? Can we track this institution's performance over a period of time? Is there demonstrated leadership at this institution that will ably midwife that transition to a technical university? Do we have a critical mass of qualified lecturers in place to serve the technical university? Must we not start thinking about establishing and constituting the administrative structures of the university - (that is the University Court, Senate, Faculty Boards) and searching for a substantive Vice Chancellor and Principal, Registrar and other levels of University administrative staff?
22. Fourth, there is the question of funding readiness? Are there sufficient funds to establish and pay for the operations of the university? Our Government's investments in education leave no doubt about why it is a priority.
23. Finally, there is the question of infrastructural readiness. Do we have sufficient infrastructure for instruction, administration, utilities, housing and more?
24. It is in this area too that I must state how proud I am of the Principal of this institution, Dr. Philip Kanu, and his team of dedicated staff for the tremendous progress they have made here at this institution with the support of my Government and international partners.
25. The Refurbished Great Hall, the New Staff complex, and the Health Centre are all testament to my Government's work to upgrade this institution to a Technical University

26. And there is even more. The International Atomic Energy Agency has provided equipment and reagents to transform the Science Laboratory into a state of the art lab. Laboratory staff are also being trained.
27. Funds have been secured under a BADEA Project to rehabilitate and expand the Goderich Campus.
28. Under the Enhanced Integrated Framework for sustainable Tourism Development and Promotion project, funds have been secured through the National Tourist Board and implemented through the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Trade for extensive reconstruction work at the Brookfields Campus of this institution. Some of that funding will go toward reviewing the curriculum and training staff.
29. Also, at the Brookfields Campus, the National Youth Commission has implemented the skills development project by providing a huge supply of equipment for the hospitality department at that Campus and supporting capacity-training of faculty members. The World Bank, through the Skills Development Funds supervised by the Ministry of Technical and Higher Education, is also working closely to provide grants for upskilling staff in the same hospitality department.
30. Government has provided initial funds to rehabilitate the Congo-cross Campus. Discussions for a matching grant from the Skills Development Fund to support this rehabilitation work are at an advanced stage.
31. At the Goderich Campus, my Government has provided funds for the rehabilitation of the Great Hall, the Health Centre, the College Library, all the toilets in the student hotels, and for constructing a decent Staff Complex and the Peace Amphitheatre.
32. Government has also worked with the Principal and staff to purchase two new 16 seater Toyota Hiace buses. These will serve for shuttle runs among the campuses. My Government has also made available a 30 seater Toyota Coaster bus to ferry students and faculty to internship sites and to support the supervision of teaching practice placements.
33. For security, CCTV cameras have been installed on all the three Campuses and a biometric attendance device has also been installed to monitor staff and student attendance.
34. This institution was borne out of a vision by Sir Milton Margai, the first Prime Minister, to train teachers who would deliver quality education to our new nation.
35. During the National Provisional Ruling Council interregnum, the college became a degree granting institution.

36. During the tenure of Dr. Ahmad Tejan Kabba, the institution was upgraded to Polytechnic status in 2001. The hostels and the classrooms at the Ocean View were constructed under the SLPP but our brothers transformed those lecturer rooms to dwelling houses. The buildings must revert to the purpose for which they were originally constructed.
37. For all of these developments, the pattern speaks volumes: human capital development and real transformation of the institution. From the vision of our founding father to now, one set of leaders who have shared a common ideology, has cared most about transforming this institution. The legacy continues. The transformation continues.
38. Let me conclude by thanking and congratulating the Principal and the entire MMCET community, the Western Rural District community, friends and well-wishers of MMCET for your kind invitation to be with you today to commission the series of infrastructural projects and to discuss irreversible progress towards university status. I wish to assure you that I will always be an advocate and an ambassador for technical universities and technical education in the Republic of Sierra Leone.
39. It therefore gives me great pleasure to launch the Skills Development Fund valued at Le3.5 billion and formally commission the series of infrastructural improvements I have already highlighted.

Thank you very much and may God bless us all.