



KEYNOTE STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY, DR. JULIUS MAADA BIO, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE ON AFRICAN LEADERS FOR CHANGE: PROMOTING UNIVERSAL HEALTHCARE - EURO-AFRICAN COOPERATION AND PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP IN THE FIELD OF HEALTHCARE, ORGANISED BY THE EUROPEAN CORPORATE COUNCIL ON AFRICA AND THE MIDDLE EAST, BRUSSELS, BELGIUM – 17 FEBRUARY 2022

Excellencies,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. Let me, from the outset, thank the organisers, the European Corporate Council on Africa and the Middle East, for providing this critical platform for a thoroughgoing engagement on investing in people as a key driver for long-term sustainable development.

2. While reviewing the programme's blurb, I was touched by Kamel Ghribi's statement that the council's work sits at the confluence of philanthropy, business, and governance and that the council's approach is to interrogate conventional thinking with innovative mindsets and insights.

3. In Sierra Leone, over the last four years, my leadership has been driven by that mindset - that there are better, more innovative, and more sustainable ways of achieving long-term sustainable development -- a new direction.

4. We believe that by investing in people – human capital development – we will be able to achieve accelerated and sustainable gains in all facets of our social and economic development. We believe that by investing in quality education, accessible and quality healthcare, food security, and critical infrastructure, Sierra Leone will be a more productive, more resilient, and a more prosperous nation.

5. In spite of the adverse effects of the COVID pandemic, we have kept the faith, and we have made laudable gains that have been recognised globally by our international partners.

6. More children, and especially more girls, more children with disabilities, more children from poor homes and rural areas are now in school, stay in school, complete and are more successful in school, than ever before. We have escalated investments in school infrastructure, school feeding, teacher training, and teaching and learning materials. As a result of our policy of radical inclusion, our fight against sexual and gender-based violence, and the First Lady's successful advocacy against early child marriage and other cultural practices, school is now a safer place where every child can work hard to reach his or her fullest potential.

7. We are making gains towards food security. We have increased mechanisation, provided improved seeds and fertilisers, more arable land has been put under cultivation, and we are increasing overall agricultural yield. We have

8. We have increased energy access, improved road networks, expanded communications network, speed, and penetration as a result of our infrastructure investments.

9. But more significantly, independent international assessments indicate that we have improved governance, institutional effectiveness, and lowered corruption. We are the fourth most peaceful country in Africa. We have an improved win-win business ecosystem with generous and attractive taxes and other incentives.

10. So, coming back to Kamel Ghribi's statement, permit me therefore to say that where the leadership embraces innovative thinking on achieving sustainable development and where the governance and business ecosystems are favourable, philanthropy will always thrive.

11. We are not quite where we would like to be. But I am pleased that past dialogues, such as the 2018 Africa-Europe Alliance foreground "deepening trade and economic relations," "strengthening the business environment and investment climate" and investing in education and skills training. Sierra Leone stands ready for enhanced cooperation in each of those foregoing areas.

12. But permit me to focus on the final baluster of our human capital development priority – the health sector. Accessible and quality healthcare is central to my government's manifesto commitment and our medium-term national development plan. We have a strong commitment to universal health coverage built on the backbone of accessible primary health care.

13. Since assuming office in 2018, my government has increased our investment in healthcare from a mere 6% to more than 11.6% of GDP. We have expanded Primary Health Care facilities to 1,500, spread throughout the country. Most citizens now have access to a health facility within a five-

mile radius of where they live. We have reduced maternal mortality by 16%; infant mortality by 18%; and malaria rates by 45%.

14. But we must sustain these successes. With the onset of the COVID pandemic, we have had to cope with severe fiscal constraints -- as I would imagine for the rest of Africa. It is difficult to maintain increasing levels of public expenditure on public healthcare. With dwindling public healthcare financing and the attendant poor management, and poor provision of healthcare services, we may be unable to assure our citizens health security at affordable costs.

15. In Sierra Leone, we see this challenge as an opportunity. 56% of citizens are willing to spend on their healthcare if they are assured of receiving high-quality services. In the circumstance, therefore, the argument for public-private partnership (PPP) models is very simple. The public is assured that the standards of quality service delivery are set and met. The private sector brings in capital investment and management efficiencies and flexibilities. The net outcome is quality service delivery to citizens at affordable prices. I would imagine that all this happens smoothly if all parties can manage and mitigate risks within the right decision-making and regulatory frameworks.

16. Permit me to briefly discuss some of several possibilities and opportunities in Sierra Leone.

Pharmaceutical Manufacturing

17. We recognise that for health resilience to take deep root, we must establish a pharmaceutical sector in Sierra Leone. At the moment, Sierra Leone does not manufacture pharmaceutical products. All essential drugs and non-essential drugs are imported. The country spends over \$250 million a year on imported pharmaceutical products. There is also a very lucrative Mano River Union and sub-regional West African market. Local pharmaceutical production capacity (especially of essential drugs) will enhance health resilience in Sierra Leone and also serve the sub-regional market.

Nutritional Supplement Manufacturing

18. Malnutrition is a threat to human capital development and especially for health and education outcomes in Sierra and in the sub-region as a whole. Sierra Leone has an excellent plant-based nutritional supplement for infants with the brand name "Bennimix." With the basic ingredients of sesame seeds, peanuts, and beans, this locally manufactured, protein-packed, infant meal could drastically reduce malnutrition in infants in the country. This product has potential for export, especially to places facing humanitarian crises.

19. The challenge is to expand manufacturing to scale for this agro-based industry using a PPP model. The expansion will provide for the nutritional needs of children, and an opportunity to create more income for small-scale farmers to grow the raw materials used as ingredients.

Ambulance Services

20. Sierra Leone has a fleet of about 100 old ambulances. Already the data suggests that since the introduction of the national emergency medical service, hundreds of lives have been saved.

21. We think a robust emergency ambulance service on a PPP model can save even more lives. The opportunities include an increase in the size of the fleet, possible outsourcing and decentralisation of maintenance services, a fuel programme, or an improved digitalised call and referral system with effective tracking and monitoring systems.

Cost Recovery Pharmacy Services

22. Another viable PPP approach is the outsourcing of specialised services within public hospitals. At a cost of \$2.4 million annually, government provides free quality medicines for the most vulnerable members of our society; Pregnant and lactating women, infants, the disabled, and Ebola survivors.

23. For persons who are ineligible, the Government of Sierra Leone, through the Pharmacy Board, is entering into partnerships with commercial pharmacies to establish private pharmacies within public hospitals. A pilot programme at Connaught Hospital (the tertiary hospital in Freetown), has shown some success because drugs are readily available at a price point that allows no more than a 10% markup. All parties (Government, patients, the private company) are happy with this pilot programme. There are 46 district hospitals to which this service can be introduced for a win-win for all parties.

Modern Hospitals

24. Other opportunities for exploring a PPP model include the construction and operation of new hospitals using private finance. We have existing or just-concluded partnerships with interested parties to build and operate up to 5 new 150-300-bed multi-specialty hospitals on a PPP model. These should complement other investments in primary health care.

25. Choithrams hospital is one of the larger hospitals in the capital that is operated on a PPP model. Other large hospital projects underway include the 155-bed hospital at Kerry Town. The medical tourism market is growing and diversifying in West Africa and options in more peaceful and more accessible service hubs like Sierra Leone can be quite profitable.

Health Insurance

26. There is also an opportunity to invest in a budding national health insurance program, Sierra Leone Social Health Insurance (SLeSHI). With potential across the formal and informal sectors, there are opportunities for capital investments in developing and operating parts of this new market that we will launch sometime this year.

27. So distinguished ladies and gentlemen, let me close by reminding us that with greater market integration and free movement of people across West Africa, there is real potential for various PPP models in the healthcare sector. Sierra Leone stands ready to discuss and support models that will augment and expand existing healthcare services.

28. Let me once more thank the European Corporate Council on Africa and the Middle East for this opportunity to share our local experiences and views on how we can work together to make lives better.

I thank you for your kind attention.