



**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY HIS
EXCELLENCY, PRESIDENT DR. JULIUS
MAADA BIO, AT THE SITE VISIT OF
MIRO FORESTRY COMPANY,
WEDNESDAY 15TH JUNE 2022 AT
11:00AM**

Mr. Chairman
Madam First Lady
Cabinet Ministers Present
Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps
The Host Paramount Chief and other Traditional Authorities Present
Members of Parliament Present
The Group CEO of the Miro Forestry and Timber Products
The Management and other Staff of the Miro Forestry Sierra Leone
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

Good afternoon

1. Normally, when we think about meeting the resource needs of a growing population, issues of food and water security often come to mind, but there is another type of resource that also deserves equal attention. The rising demand for it, not only presents a supply problem for consumers, but also, it has direct and devastating impacts on our natural ecosystems and on our climate – that resource is **WOOD**.
2. Unfortunately, most of the global demand for wood has historically been met by cutting down natural forests. Although agriculture continues to be the leading driver of global deforestation and degradation, demand for wood has had greater deforestation impacts in certain areas.
3. Deforestation is also a major contributor of global carbon dioxide emissions, second only to fossil fuels. However, forest plantations are in a position to change this trend now. This is why I am particularly delighted to be here at this MIRO operating site because we have a shared belief that trees are the primary solution to reducing atmospheric carbon dioxide.
4. Undoubtedly, forest plantations provide a multitude of benefits that can be categorized as economic, ecological, and social. Forest plantations are business alternatives that help curb the accelerated loss of natural forests, improve degraded land, sequester carbon dioxide and therefore combat climate change, improve local livelihoods by providing employment and revenue and bolstering national economies.
5. The main benefit is that by ensuring wood production through sustainable sources, forest plantations take pressure off our natural forests, because the more wood and fiber products derived from the plantations, the less it will be necessary to extract from the natural forests which will be conserved for other values.

6. It is commendable to note that for over a decade in Sierra Leone, MIRO has been engaged in the setting up of and the building of largescale forestry plantations and processing facilities of wood products.
7. As the Group CEO, Andrew Collins, earlier stated MIRO has planted over 10,000 hectares and 10 million trees over the past five years and have also employed approximately 1,500 people. I hope this trend will continue to increase every year with the establishment of new forest plantations and working very closely with the Ministry of the Environment that supervises the Forestry Department.
8. I was also heartened Andrew, when you stated that the finger-jointed Edge Glue Boards produced in Sierra Leone are exported to Europe with great prominence promoting "Made in Sierra Leone". Therefore, let me use this opportunity to encourage MIRO to accelerate its plan to export the MIRO's Electricity Poles, made in Sierra Leone, to other West African Countries.
9. As a responsible Government, let me reaffirm the recent commitments made at the UNFCCC COP 26 held in Glasgow in 2021, regarding, Climate Change and the Paris Agreement, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the UN Convention to Combat Desertification, the Sustainable Development Goals, Sustainable Land Use, and the Conservation, Protection, Sustainable Management and Restoration of Forests, and other Terrestrial Ecosystems.
10. We commit to halting and reversing forest loss and land degradation by 2030 while delivering sustainable development and promoting an inclusive rural transformation. We have embarked on a National Tree Planting Project since 2018 to increase public awareness around deforestation and the benefits of increased community involvement in establishing forests. My Government is committed to implementing policies and practices that would support sustainable forest management and biodiversity conservation.
11. Five million trees will be planted by 2023 on approximately 12,500 hectares of degraded lands and coastal areas all over Sierra Leone. Last year, over 3,000 hectares of degraded lands were restored by planting 1.2 million trees. This created 750 permanent and over 6,000 temporary jobs.
12. This year, 1.6 million trees will be planted again using the Community-Based Forest Management (CBFM) approach which constitutes a paradigm shift from a centrally controlled forest development and governance to a local community-based leadership across the board. The Ministry of the Environment has identified qualified NGOs, CBOs and youth groups as Service providers for the out planting and maintenance of the tree seedlings.

13. Specific reference will be made to the establishment of forest plantations with priority species that are in high demand including but not limited to *Pterocarpus erinaceus* (Gbenie) and *Azelia Africana* (Doussie). The overall objective of this fully-funded Government Project will ensure sustainability of globally endangered species and serve as a mitigating measure aimed at minimising the impacts of climate change and in fulfillment of the commitments in my country's Medium-Term National Development Plan and other international obligations.
14. For these commitments, we understand the challenges to be faced and the need for a long-term strategy that should focus on the following:
 - i. Promoting the expansion of Local Industries in the provinces in support of my Government's drive of "One Industry one District";
 - ii. Encouraging the establishment of sustainable economic centres in rural areas and large scale foreign direct investment in the Forestry sector in Sierra Leone;
 - iii. Continuing the expansion of local production of wood and fiber products for the local and export markets;
 - iv. Increasing the established production capacity of Forestry Projects so as to alleviate its dependency on imported products and boost exports and balance of trade;
 - v. Welcoming labor-intensive industries which provide stable income and training to its workforce;
 - vi. Supporting the natural regeneration of forests and aiding to it via planting of trees suitable to our ecosystems;
 - vii. Expanding our environmental education program that aims at addressing the root causes of land degradation and deforestation, with the goal of finding a permanent and sustainable forestry solution;
 - viii. Continuing with our efforts to offer alternative livelihood support to the communities with the aim of permanently changing their behaviours that is detrimental to our environment and our assumed commitments.
15. I will continue to urge all Sierra Leoneans to take tree planting as a habit and a culture and establish forest plantations nationwide, using MIRO Forestry and Timber Products as an example to emulate. Trees remain an important

source of energy and a pillar of livelihoods in our developing country, therefore it is imperative that with every tree that falls for a useful purpose, another must be planted for the preservation of the environment.

16. MIRO is more than just forest plantations; it is also about investment and creating job opportunities for Sierra Leoneans. Therefore, I am delighted to hear from Andrew that they have secured a \$13 million USD funding for the construction of a Plywood Factory.
17. As a Government, we are grateful to all the shareholders of Miro Forestry and Timber Products including the Governments of the United Kingdom, The Netherlands, Canada and Finland for this \$13 million USD investment which demonstrates confidence not only in the investment climate in Sierra Leone but also in our ongoing reforms in the private sector.
18. My Government will continue to do more in developing the private sector by attracting credible foreign direct investment, reducing the cost and risk of doing business, increasing access to finance, promoting local entrepreneurship, improving the environment for manufacturing industrialization and promoting regional trade integration to promote export.
19. In many communities where private companies operate, delivering on corporate social responsibility has been the driving force to a great working relationship between a company and the operating communities. Hence, let me commend Miro Forestry Sierra Leone for embarking on many CSR projects in Yoni and Masimera communities. I am informed that you have constructed 16 Bore Holes in the various communities; supported 400Ha of rice farming activities since 2018; provided over 400 scholarships to students in operational areas before the introduction of the Free Quality Education Programme and continue to support tertiary education; constructed or rehabilitated over 1,200km feeder roads in your operational areas and constructed or rehabilitated 7 stream crossing and bridges.
20. However, one issue very close to my heart is the employment of women in private companies. According to the Human Resource Profile of Miro Forestry Sierra Leone, currently, there are 532 permanent workers and 800 casual workers. Out of these workers, 86% are males and only 14% are females. This is not acceptable, and I know Miro Forestry Sierra Leone can do better. Although, I am informed that you have already developed a Gender Action Plan, I urge Andrew and his team to expediate mainstreaming gender equity in MIRO's operations especially employment. This is because, it is my conviction that having more women in companies can make a huge difference in the productivity and overall success.

21. As I conclude, let me state that planting trees and the patience of growing a tree is the same as building a functional democracy. Therefore, I encourage our local and international partners to establish different forest plantations across the nation for democracy, for peace, for love and for a greener, healthier, and more resilient future for us all.

I thank you all for your attention.