



LEADERSHIP IN TROUBLED TIMES - THE SIERRA LEONE EXAMPLE

DELIVERED BY

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On the Occasion of

**A SIERRA LEONE-FOCUSED EVENT AT THE HOUSE OF LORDS
LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM**

Monday, November 21, 2022

The Right Honorable Andrew Mitchell, Minister of State for Development and Africa

Lord Dolar Popat, Prime Minister's Trade Envoy to Uganda, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Afternoon

1. I stand before you today, completely humbled by the arduous task of leadership in troubled times. I am grateful for your warm welcome and for singling me out on this significant occasion at the historic House of Lords. And above all, mindful of the generosity and cooperation between the United Kingdom and Sierra Leone.
2. Please allow me to present my "Kusheh" (greetings) to your Noble Lords on behalf of the people of Sierra Leone. I would like to especially thank our Host, Lord Dolar Popat, for graciously hosting us this afternoon. Your hospitality is not lost on us, and we look forward to an opportunity to host you in the grand Sierra Leonean tradition.
3. Thank you to the distinguished African Leadership Magazine for organising this event and Dr Ken Giami and his able team for documenting my Government's achievements in the last four and a half years.
4. We come here, standing on a long history of partnership and engagement, to strengthen our relationships and create new mutually beneficial alliances between our countries and entities.
5. We particularly remember the British Government's political, financial, logistical and security support to Sierra Leone, which was critical in restoring peace during our nation's darkest moments. As you know, we have come a long way from there to a place of stability and a firm commitment to democracy, peace and the rule of law.
6. It is always a great privilege to speak on behalf of our nation with such rich history and great potential and on behalf of an illustrious population, which I am privileged to serve as their President.

7. LEADERSHIP IN TROUBLED TIMES – THE SIERRA LEONE EXAMPLE.

8. In the words of Martin Luther King - "**The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.**"
9. As we all know, we are facing unprecedented, multiple interlocking challenges, which started in 2019 with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, barely a year after I was elected to office as President of our great Republic.
10. The pandemic reversed decades of hard-won macroeconomic, socioeconomic and governance gains in Africa. Over 50 million Africans have plunged into extreme poverty, and most African economies have teetered on the brink of economic depression.
11. As if the pandemic did not cause enough damage, the Russia/Ukraine war has also come along with its profound implications. Completely disrupting Africa's promising recovery by raising food and fuel prices causing significant inflation and financial instability, interrupting trade, tightening fiscal space and reducing development finance flows to Africa, among many others. We are currently being challenged, tried and tested.
12. The last few years have reaffirmed that all our fortunes are inextricably intertwined. We have seen how a few people infected with a disease in one town can lead to deaths globally.
13. We have also witnessed a crisis in one geographical region of the world having a widespread impact across the globe. This attests to the fact that we have a shared destiny, and the sooner we work collectively towards a common global good, the better for our generation and our children.

14. How rewarding will it be if prosperity, equity, and relationships in one part of the world lead to prosperity elsewhere?
15. Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen. If the events of the past few years have taught us anything, it is that people are far more important than any possessions or politics and that our success depends on each other.
16. We have been starkly reminded of the value of those who might be deemed to be on the lower rungs of society all over the world. The workers who harvest our food. The delivery persons who ensure packages get to us. People many referred to as unskilled.
17. We were reminded of the value of the human touch. Of family. Of friends. Of community. We mourned our inability to socialise.
18. As the pandemic spread and we lost loved ones, we relied upon each other to act in ways that would end the spread. We learned very clearly how central people are to all our economies and political stability everywhere.
19. As a human race, our ultimate strength has definitely been tested in the past few years. Through it all, we have shown resilience, grit, ingenuity and determination to evolve stronger from the troubled times we're passing through.
20. Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen. In Sierra Leone, despite our natural resources, we have acknowledged that our most substantial asset is our human resources, comprised mainly of a young and dynamic population.
21. My Government has always put people at the heart of its agenda. This is why Human Capital Development is central to our national development plan. Our vibrant population is a great asset to sustainable economic growth and development. Hence, we made Free Quality School Education for all our flagship national development program.

22. Since assuming political leadership in May 2018, rather than focusing on digging in the ground and mining the natural resources – like diamonds – that Sierra Leone is renowned for, our New Direction Agenda focuses on nurturing the potential of our children and then mining their talents to become productive citizens.
23. Investing in quality education for the future generation is the most valuable and the only truly renewable resource in the world today. My Government's New Direction Agenda is premised on what I like to call the "**Sierra Leone Brain Mining Company (SLBMC)**" – **we nurture the talents and would eventually mine the full potential of every child in Sierra Leone.**
24. It is significant to note that even a global pandemic that caused and is causing unprecedented disruptions, irrational spikes, and uncertainties within the global economy has not weakened our resolve to keep investing in human capital development and build sustainable education systems. Granted this, — and the war in Europe — makes the task at hand more challenging, but we remain confident that this investment is the right thing to do.
25. I am proud to say that despite these global challenges, our investment in education increased from 11% to 22% of our annual budgetary allocation to support primary, secondary, higher, technical and vocational education and training. My Government's flagship Free Quality School Education program caters to 2 million pupils nationwide.
26. This is in addition to the gains we have already made in education by improving school governance, building more school infrastructure, expanding school feeding, accelerating the use of technology and innovation in education delivery and management, publishing developmentally appropriate learning resources and materials, and implementing a new school curriculum.
27. Over 600,000 additional children, especially girls, accessed schools last year. Over 5,000 additional qualified teachers were recruited, and we recorded a higher success rate in public examinations at all levels.

28. My Government particularly takes the education of girls very seriously. As a result of our policy assuring free STEM education for girls, we have recorded ground-breaking numbers of girls who are now opting to study STEM disciplines and doing exceptionally well.
29. Many parents no longer resist sending their daughters to school, knowing that our Government pays for their tuition, teaching and learning materials, and public examination fees. As we say, **THE FUTURE OF SIERRA LEONE IS FEMALE.**
30. We also have legislations supporting reforms in education, like the Universities Act of 2021 and the Sierra Leone Students' Loan Scheme Act of 2021, that have opened up more access to technical and higher education.
31. I do not speak of education here merely as a means of producing skilled labour for investors in our country, but I speak of education as a means of liberating our citizens and empowering them with the tools to lead healthy, productive, fulfilling, and even prosperous lives.
32. I often say that the future is stolen from those who do not prepare for it today. Indeed, beneath every great nation and people lies a foundation that was laid yesterday. We want education to be that foundation for it intersects with every aspect of national development – from health to infrastructure, energy to justice, and agriculture to technology.
33. My Government's impressive achievements in the education sector in four and a half years, despite the worldwide challenges, have solidified Sierra Leone's position as a global champion for Education.
34. Our resolve to transform education in our great nation against all odds has me as Co-Chair of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal Four (SDG 4) High-Level Steering Committee (HLSC) to "***Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all***"; and a Global Champion for Foundational Learning advocating for basic

literacy, numeracy, and transferable skills, that are the building blocks for a life of learning.

35. Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, may I crave your indulgence with some personal remarks to give you a better perspective on my strong commitment to providing every child with the opportunity to unlock their highest potential through formal education.

36. I was born into a modest and large family. The son of a Paramount Chief whom I lost at the tender age of four and an industrious mother of blessed memory who was not formally educated.

37. However, my mother greatly valued learning and education, ensuring that her children had the opportunities she did not get growing up.

38. Because of the educational opportunities I was given against all odds, a young boy from humble beginnings in a village called Tihun in Bonthe District, Sierra Leone, can work hard, persevere in life, aspire and become President of our great nation.

39. A good and quality foundation in education is why I am standing here addressing you all at the House of Lords. My passion for education is rooted in my DNA. I will not rest until every child in Sierra Leone and beyond has the opportunity for equitable and quality education.

40. Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, as part of my Government's focus on Human Capital Development, we believe that all people in Sierra Leone should enjoy inclusive, affordable, and equitable access to quality health services, whether public or private, at all times, and without any undue financial hardship.

41. In line with these Universal Health Coverage goals, my Government has developed a new national Health Sector Strategic Plan and a Health Financing Strategy (2021-2025) that increases budgetary allocation for health and sanitation to 12% to maximise efficiency in the health sector.

42. In working to achieve food security, we have established that out-moded and inefficient methods of agricultural production must end and that we must move fully to climate and nutrition-smart agriculture. With all we know about how climate change is affecting our world, all our efforts are geared towards making our agricultural systems more productive and less wasteful, but above all, more sustainable.
43. As stewards of Sierra Leone's commonwealth, my Government has effectively managed and overseen the mining sector, enacting a new Mines and Minerals Act 2022, which adheres to the EITI standards, an expansion in mining activities and the granting of new large-scale mineral rights.
44. We provide full support and promote initiatives that improve the mining sector, including gender parity in the workforce, more technology and a mix of renewable energy, and more support for vocational training and the upskilling of workers.
45. We do all this while ensuring compliance with environmental, health, safety, production, and auditing regulations. We are committed to ensuring accountability and transparency in the sector, as demonstrated by our 2022 EITI Validation Report's high overall score of 87.5 % in implementing the 2019 EITI standards.
46. Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, without a healthy democracy, we cannot assure our people and partners of a stable country. As part of our commitment to democracy, I am proud to say that we have repealed seditious libel laws and made journalism easier to practice without hindrance. I dare say that no journalist is in prison for practising journalism.
47. Without the fourth estate, democracy will be in great peril. Indeed, as Edmund Burke asserts, the fourth estate is the greatest of the branches of Government. It is no wonder we keep progressing on the World Press Freedom Index, moving 29 places from its 75th place in 2021 to 46th this year.

48. In addition, the 2022 report published by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) recognises that Sierra Leone's media sector is pluralist and generally independent, and freedom of the press is guaranteed by law.
49. As we pursue economic prosperity, we know that without a place to call home, we will all be working for nothing. We are committed to playing our part in changing the way we treat the environment because our survival depends upon it.
50. My Government remains committed to the sustainable management of forests and has committed to planting five million trees in the next five years to tackle our peculiar vulnerability to climate change.
51. According to one of Britain's most revered politicians, Sir Winston Churchill – **SUCCESS IS NOT FINAL; FAILURE IS NOT FATAL: IT IS THE COURAGE TO CONTINUE THAT COUNTS.**
52. We cannot change the past. We cannot know the future. But we must work resolutely in the present to surmount any challenges that stand in the way of peace, progress and prosperity.
53. Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, every investment is a risk. We recognise the courage it requires to take that risk. But we say to our current and future partners and friends – look at our track record, look at our policies, but most of all, look at our people and make that calculated risk to support us on our path to sustainable economic development and prosperity.
54. As our world becomes ever so complex and unpredictable, we anticipate more challenges to our capacity to provide stable democratic leadership to our people.
55. But we are undeterred, ready to provide the kind of leadership required to navigate new and existing challenges. In doing this, we enlist the full participation of all in our society – women, men and youth.

56. My Government remains committed to working with partners and friends on the African continent and worldwide, for we can only rise above our challenges when we work together.
57. As Christine Lagarde noted, **we are faced with growing distrust and division, both within and across societies, and we need leaders who can build bridges and find common ground where it exists.**
58. Now more than ever, the world needs leaders that are calm but decisive, thoughtful but bold, fearless but kind, strong and efficient.
59. Within our country, we are committed to supporting women and youth in politics. On the African continent, we are committed to sustaining and developing democratic principles and respect for human rights, the rule of law and good governance. In this respect, I am proud to be engaged at the African Union (AU) as the current Chairperson of The African Peer Review Forum of Heads of State and Government. This is the African Peer Review Mechanism's (APRM) highest decision-making authority – for AU Member States to voluntarily self-monitor their governance performance.
60. In all our endeavours as a government, in all our interventions on behalf of those who elected us and whose trust we hold dear, we act resolutely and confidently, but never arrogantly, for that is the way of dictators, not democrats.
61. Again, I invoke Churchill, who said that **courage is what it takes to stand up and speak; courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen.** So, we keep listening to our people and their needs. We listen to our women, whom we consider equal members of society, without whom we would be nothing. And we listen to our young people, whose brilliance dazzles us, whose energy drives us, and whose questions challenge us to rethink the way we do things constantly.
62. I will end with a clarion call to strengthen ties with Sierra Leone. As we turn our near recession from the pandemic and the

Russia/Ukraine war into recovery, we need all the support from our friends and partners in the UK.

63. The sector presentations today will give a panoramic view of reforms we have introduced to improve the business landscape over the last four and a half years; and showcase Sierra Leone's great opportunities on offer in key productive sectors such as mining, agriculture, and oil and gas.
64. We need investments in critical sectors, including education, agriculture, health, infrastructure and the extractive sector. My Government welcomes all potential investors.
65. The perception of risk is high, but we have deliberately made tough policy choices to attract and retain investors in Sierra Leone.
66. Coupled with the hard work and resilience of Sierra Leoneans – THE SKY IS OUR LIMIT. We can work together to sustain and build on the momentum and successes of my administration to move the country to the next level.

THANK YOU