



**REMARKS BY HIS EXCELLENCY, DR.
JULIUS MAADA BIO, PRESIDENT OF THE
REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE, AT THE
CORNERSTONE LAYING CEREMONY BY
LEONE ROCK, KINGHO TONKOLILI MINE
SITE - 30th MARCH 2023**

Madam First Lady,
Ministers of Government,
Honourable Members of Parliament,
Ambassador Wang Qing, Ambassador
Our revered traditional leaders,
The Chief Executive and Staff of Leone Rock Metals,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,
Good afternoon,

1. It is a real pleasure to be here today to jointly celebrate the clear outcomes of the many policy and governance reforms we clearly laid out in our 2018 manifesto for transforming the mining sector.

2. First, we have proved that in spite of a very tough global investment climate as a result of COVID-19 and other global crises, it is possible to create and maintain a healthy investment climate that is attractive to and conducive for investors in the mining sector.

3. We are, therefore, grateful that investors from the People's Republic of China have kept faith in our economy. At a broader level, this is a deep manifestation of the close solidarity between our two countries that is based on mutual trust and respect, a shared vision, and a shared interest in our mutual prosperity. That is the basis of over half a century of close friendship and mutual cooperation. I, therefore, wish to express our nation's deep sense of gratitude to President Xi Jinping and the Government and people of the People's Republic of China.

4. Since 2018, we have maintained a clear view of the future of a sustainable mining sector in our country that is based on a transparent regulatory regime where everyone -- patient investors, the community, workers, and the government -- know the rules and play by the rules; and, a clear set of incentives that is good for business, good for the community, and good for the country.

5. Secondly, as a Government, we have proved that it is possible to forge a close partnership in which investors are guaranteed that their money is secured and that they can make a healthy profit that they can both re-invest or repatriate.

6. We also believe that beyond the financial books, the mining sector can adopt a comprehensive framework where data and reporting matter; a framework that is environmentally friendly, ethical, socially responsible, and attentive to compliance.

7. Next, we believe that the mining sector should and can create well-paid jobs for thousands of young persons. This supports my Government's poverty reduction initiatives. In addition to the job experience in the sector, we expect that young persons can also benefit from reskilling and upskilling opportunities that will support and enhance their technical skills. This falls within the broader human capital development drive by my Government since 2018.

8. Furthermore, we believe that mining communities should benefit significantly from mining activities in their areas. Hitherto, there was very little evidence that the paltry 0.001% paid by mining companies was even received by the communities. For ten years of mining in the Tonkolili District, there is no direct community development footprint from community development agreements negotiated before 2018. My Government believes that communities can achieve better development outcomes when more resources are directly provided to take care of their stated development needs. There is a saying in popular lore that "diamonds are not forever." Mining is not forever but mining communities deserve to be better off even when mining operations close down or are scaled down.

9. I want to thank Leone Rock-Kingho for maintaining its commitment to pay 1% of revenue as an investment in local sustainable livelihood and community development projects. As I have indicated, the CDA will not only support the economic viability and resilience of this community, but mining will also leave a positive footprint in these communities.

10. The last time we were here, the Honourable Member of Parliament pointed out the impact of these reforms in supporting education in Mabonthor, the rehabilitation of health centres in Dankawalie and Kamedugu, and the support for agriculture in other areas. She also acknowledged that I was the first head of state to facilitate a CDA payment from a mining company in Tonkolili District without headache or strike action.

The community must therefore do everything to support the peaceful operations of Leone Rock Metals-Kingho and to protect the company's assets. If we do, my Government can do even more. Last year, my Government worked with Leone Rock-Kingho to put Le5 Billion into the community's account. This year, I am proud that the amount has quadrupled to Le20 Billion.

11. Last year, I reiterated that ore optimisation and value-addition are critical elements of my Government's vision of the future of mining. I noted that the dips and falls of commodity prices on the global market have adversely affected the profit margins of the lower-grade ore of the Tonkolili deposit. Operations have had to be shut down during bad spells thereby denting investor confidence and causing mass unemployment on site among other negative impacts.

12. My government does not want to see the mines close anymore. Leone Rock-Kingho has assured me that the ore optimisation plants to be constructed will add value to the Iron Ore before export.

13. I am informed that Leone Rock Metals- Kingho will invest significantly in ore optimisation. Clearly, more revenue for the enhanced value of ore means more money for the community.

14. I am therefore most pleased to be laying the cornerstone for the company's phase II Stage II processing plant.

I thank you for your kind attention.