



GOVERNMENT OF SIERRA LEONE

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

DELIVERED BY

HIS EXCELLENCY, DR. JULIUS MAADA BIO, GCRSL,

President of The Republic and Commander-In-Chief of the Republic of
Sierra Leone Armed Forces

**On the Occasion of the Dissolution of the Fifth Parliament of the
Second Republic of Sierra Leone**

In the Chamber of Parliament Building

Tower Hill, Freetown

On Tuesday, 25th April 2023, at 3:00 pm

Honourable Vice President,

Honourable Speaker of Parliament,

Madam First Lady,

Honourable Speaker of the ECOWAS Parliament

The Honourable Chief Justice,

Members of the Judiciary,

Ministers of Government,

Honourable Members of Parliament,

Our Revered Traditional and Local Government

Leaders,

Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps,

Members of the Security and Intelligence Services,

Members of the Fourth Estate,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Fellow Sierra Leoneans,

- 1.** It is with great honour that I address this August House for the sixth time on this auspicious occasion of the dissolution of the Fifth Parliament of the Second Republic of Sierra Leone.

- 2.** We are a nation defined by our hope and resilience forged in zeal and devotion. Our forefathers spread knowledge and truth, and mighty was the nation they led. Their struggle for independence steered our great country into a democracy we freely enjoy today.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members of Parliament

3. Death is the inevitable fate of all our destinies, and only the heart that mourns knows the sorrow of parting. Over the last five years, we've sadly lost some compatriots in our collective quest to build a prosperous nation.

4. Before proceeding with my address, may I humbly ask this August gathering to rise for a moment of silent prayers for the honourable members of our Parliament who have transitioned to the afterlife: Honourable Momodu Eskimo Mansaray, Honourable Alimamy O. Kamara, Honourable Samuel Genewai Panda, Honourable Aloysius Bockarie Ansumana, Honourable Ahmed Samba Turay, and Honourable P. C. Kandeh Wusu Sesay

II. May the Almighty God reward them for their loyal service to our great nation. May their souls and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members,

- 5.** I want to thank this Parliament for the excellent service to our great nation over the last five years. As President of the Republic, I thank you immensely for working closely with my Government. Even with a hung Parliament, we have repealed, amended, and enacted over seventy (70) laws. That is as commendable as it is unprecedented in our nation's history.

- 6.** I am truly humbled and in awe of this magnificent institution that is the cornerstone of our democracy. As the heartbeat of our nation, Parliament embodies the values and aspirations of our people, ensuring that their voices are heard, and their interests are represented.

- 7.** It is a testament to the enduring spirit of democracy that we gather here today in this Noble House charged with the solemn duty of overseeing the actions of the Executive and delivering the dividends of democracy to our fellow citizens. Though no relationship is perfect, I firmly believe in the pivotal role of Parliament in

upholding the tenets of democracy and ensuring good governance prevails.

8. In my experience, working with Parliament has been a defining moment in my career. I have been privileged to witness firsthand the unyielding dedication you bring to your work, the unwavering commitment to serving the people, and the tireless pursuit of excellence. Through your leadership, our legislative dreams have been brought to fruition; for that, I am eternally grateful.

9. As we stand at the cusp of a new era beset by challenges and uncertainties, it is all the more

imperative that we continue to hold fast to the principles that define us as a nation. Let us continue to work together, in the spirit of unity and cooperation, to build a future characterised by progress, justice, and prosperity for all.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members,

- 10.** You have shown us that, as Sierra Leoneans, we come from every part of our great nation and hold diverse views, as we must. We may not always get along, but as by the words of our National Pledge, we must "**vow to serve [Sierra Leone] faithfully at all times; [. . .] promise to defend her honour and good name; Always work**

for her unity, peace, freedom, and prosperity; And put her interest above all else."

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members,

11. Five years ago, under my leadership, the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) answered the noble call to service by our nation's great people. We chose the path less travelled by committing to building the next generation instead of focusing on the next election.

12. If you will recall, at the start of this SLPP Administration five years ago, I pledged to lead a Government that would work tirelessly to improve

the lives of our fellow citizens. We promised to scale up investment and implement innovative policies to transform our nation's human capital and physical infrastructure. Since then, we have done exactly what we said we would.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members,

- 13.** When I presented our vision for a New Direction national development agenda in 2018, none of us could have predicted the unprecedented global events and economic upheavals of the last three years. The global context remains challenging as we work to keep our Manifesto promises. Like many other countries, Sierra Leone has been hit by the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic

and the inflationary effect of the Ukraine-Russia conflict on global food supply chains.

- 14.** My Government also inherited a dire national economic situation in 2018, characterised by elevated debt levels, poor public financial management, a declining GDP growth rate, sharply rising inflation and high levels of corruption.

- 15.** From the beginning, we emphasised the urgency of implementing wide-sweeping changes to put the country on a new positive trajectory. Within the context of our proactive New Direction transformation agenda set out in our Manifesto,

my Government has thus implemented a range of essential policy interventions and made numerous bold new investments over the past five years. These have led to positive changes in several key sectors, which I will highlight today. The impacts of our policies are noted clearly in available monitoring data. They are also, even more importantly, being felt by our fellow citizens.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members,

- 16.** I wish to depart from the usual format of the Presidential address to Parliament, keeping it more concise. I will concentrate on human capital development as a driver for socio-

economic growth, highlighting the achievements in key sectors, including education, health, agriculture, the economy, energy, infrastructure, mining, and sports. I will also highlight key achievements in cross-cutting areas, including women's and youth empowerment, anti-corruption and climate change.

- 17.** I am mindful of the profound importance of human capital development in our quest for sustainable socio-economic transformation. For as long as our nation endures, the strength and resilience of our people will be the bedrock upon which we build our future.

- 18.** The true measure of a nation's greatness is not in the wealth of its resources but in the wealth of its people. And so, we must continue to invest in our citizens, their skills, and their well-being. We must empower them to be the architects of their own destinies, chart their own course through the turbulent waters of life, and seize the opportunities that abound in a world constantly in flux.
- 19.** As we focus on these key sectors, please note that regarding other issues, a more comprehensive report on the significant progress made by my Government amidst serious global headwinds will be laid on the table of this House.

A. INVESTING IN PEOPLE: EDUCATION

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members,

20. Developing our nation's human capital through our Free Quality School Education (FQSE) Program has been the utmost priority of my Administration.

21. In the words of the former President of Malawi, Dr Joyce Banda, "**The seeds of success in every nation on Earth are best planted in women and children.**" The sustainable development and success of Sierra Leone depend on the seeds of education we plant in our children now. In the past five years, my Government has invested heavily in our young and dynamic population as

we recognise that our most substantial asset is our human resources.

- 22.** Amidst the unprecedented global headwinds causing economic disruptions since 2020, our investment in education increased from under 15% in 2018 to 22% of our annual budgetary allocation to support primary, secondary, higher, technical and vocational education and training.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members,

- 23.** It is deeply satisfying and encouraging to witness first-hand the positive impact of our Free Quality School Education initiative on citizens. Permit me to recount one of the testimonies that have

stayed with me of a dynamic young woman called Aminata Leithombo from Konia village, Kpaka Chiefdom, in Pujehun District.

- 24.** Before the FQSE, Aminata walked more than four miles daily to and from her village to the nearby school in search of education. Unfortunately, she dropped out of school at age 15 because her parents could not afford her fees. This young girl, filled with latent potential, was relegated to helping her parents do subsistence farming to support the family for two years.

25. Fortunately, her passion for getting an education was rekindled when she heard about our Administration's FQSE, and she re-enrolled at school in 2020. Following her return to the classroom, this brilliant young woman, at the age of 18 years, achieved the best BECE results in Pujehun district.

26. Because of Aminata's outstanding performance, my Government selected her among other high-performing school children and youth to participate in the Transforming Education Summit hosted by the United Nations Secretary-General with me as Co-Chair in Washington DC in September 2022. It was her first time travelling

outside Pujehun District. Imagine what a life-transforming moment it was for Aminata to be among global leaders, policy-makers and fellow youths rethinking innovative ways to transform education in our ever-changing world. Aminata is currently in Freetown, excelling in her secondary school education and pursuing her valid dreams.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members,

- 27.** Aminata's experience is just one example of the success of our Government's Radical Inclusion strategy in the field of education, which has also caught the attention of the international community.

28. The impact and success of Sierra Leone's new transformational education policy have been lauded globally and solidified our nation's position as a Champion for Education. Our global standing was highlighted when I was unanimously appointed to co-chair the UNESCO High-Level Steering Committee on the UN Sustainable Development Goal 4 to "**ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.**"

29. Furthermore, Sierra Leone's global standing for promoting universal access to education was highlighted when I co-chaired the global Transforming Education Summit with the UN

Secretary-General António Guterres in 2022 and made one of the Global Champions for Foundational Learning through our 2022-2026 Partnership Compact with the Global Partnership for Education (GPE).

30. International recognition is important. It helps to project a positive narrative of the transformation underway in our country. Let me assure Sierra Leoneans, however, that our policies' impact on young people's lives will always be most important to me and my Government.

31. As the nation's leader, my gratitude for being accorded the opportunity of education by my

uneducated mother, a visionary of her time, drives my steadfast commitment to implement our Administration's bold agenda for the education transformation of this nation. After five years of hard work, we now have a solid foundation from which to scale up, and scale up we must, fast!

32. In a relatively short time, we have galvanised significant support from partners and judiciously used our domestic resources to increase education funding to LE 4.1 trillion (Old Leones) over the past five years. Our resource mobilisation efforts have crowded in over US\$ 200 million for the education sector since 2018.

33. This investment has enabled us to support over 80% of schools with Government subsidies, recruit over 12,000 new teachers and train double that number. At the same time, we have added around 1 million new learners and recruited over 300 education monitoring officers (up from 13 officers in 2018). Our investments have also improved learning outcomes, with over 10 million books and teaching and learning materials supplied to learners. Additionally, we have provided school feeding for over 600,000 learners, projected to 800,000 by the extension to the Western Area.

34. My SLPP Administration has increased teachers' salaries throughout the five years – including an increase of 10% for junior teachers in 2019 as transportation allowance; a 30% salary increase in 2020 for all teachers; a 45% increase in teachers' salaries for the next three years, 2023 to 2025 academic year; and an increase of staff wages by 75% of tertiary education institutions.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members,

35. I am also pleased to highlight the positive changes in the gender dimension of education in Sierra Leone since I assumed office. The data is there for all to see. We have achieved gender

parity in schools. Girls have higher retention and pass rates in all national transition examinations. More girls are now studying STEM disciplines, and today they have higher transition rates into tertiary and vocational institutions.

36. In line with our long-term vision to train more women engineers, doctors, scientists and innovators, we have also implemented a policy that funds a free education from primary school through university for all girls studying STEM disciplines.

37. The "Hands off Our Girls" campaign championed by our First Lady has contributed to the 37%

increase in girls in school since 2018. Teenage pregnancy dropped by 33%, from 62,589 in 2019 to 41,943 in 2022. Early marriage figures have also dropped dramatically. Sierra Leone now has the highest rate of girls completing primary education in the entire West Africa sub-region.

- 38.** We are, and should be, very proud of our girls. They are future leaders of this nation in various fields, including medicine, engineering and politics. They are also among the future mothers of the country. Ensuring they receive the best possible education is a national priority investment. We must continue to do all we can to equip girls with essential skills to thrive in the 21st

century and nurture their potential as we scale up the investment in the education of all our children.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members,

- 39.** Within this new millennium's evolving employment and business creation needs, basic and senior secondary-level reforms have been matched with extensive reforms and investments in tertiary and vocational education.
- 40.** An amended Universities Act has removed political control over tertiary education and created three new technical universities: Milton Margai Technical University, Eastern Technical University and Kono University of Science and

Technology, currently under construction. More students benefit from grants-in-aid, and my Government launched the Students' Loan Scheme for tertiary institutions, a Manifesto commitment to opening up more technical and higher education access.

- 41.** Nearly a dozen technical and vocational training centres have been established or rehabilitated and are now operational in all regions of this country. We continue to work with partners to invest heavily in technical skills programmes across industries to support industrialisation and meet the needs of our growing economy.

B. MODERNISING HEALTHCARE

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members,

42. Improving the health of this nation is another primary focus of my Government's human capital development agenda. It should be no surprise then that our investments in healthcare are unprecedented.

43. My Government has increased its annual budgetary allocation to healthcare from 6% in 2018 to 11.6% in 2021. We have constructed or rehabilitated 200 more healthcare facilities, supported the specialist training of our doctors in-country, and recruited and trained over 5,000 more pin-coded staff and an additional 8,700

Community Health Workers recruited (a 50% increase since 2018). Additionally, we rolled out the hospital-on-wheels project that serves over 20,000 patients in 12 districts and installed four dialysis stations for treating over 700 patients. We introduced cervical cancer screening at 8 health facilities.

44. The timely availability of essential drugs has improved by 90%. Free HPV vaccines have been provided for nearly two hundred thousand (200,000) girls, and hundreds of solar refrigerators are now available nationwide for vaccine storage.

45. Due to these and many more investments in healthcare, we have made great progress on many health indicators in the last five years. Within our region, Sierra Leone is performing well on several key indicators. Infant and maternal mortality have been reduced to far lower than the West African average; children's immunisation rates are among the highest in Africa; stunting rates among children under five are lower than the African average.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members,

46. International partners have applauded my Government's pandemic preparedness and response because it was well-structured, effective, and informed by science. Our policy choices and actions also minimised fatalities (one of the lowest in Africa) and the social impacts of the pandemic on the poorest and most vulnerable of our citizens.

47. The social protection and safety nets we have implemented have continued supporting our most vulnerable citizens throughout the crisis through targeted cash transfers for livelihood sustenance. Our Government secured additional

grant financing of US\$30 million from the World Bank for the Social Safety Nets (SSN) Project. This additional financing enabled the Government to expand the coverage of cash transfers implemented by the National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA) from 35,000 to over 100,000 extremely poor households. The SSN Project has established the key building blocks for a basic national safety net system in Sierra Leone.

- 48.** Due to the successful implementation of the US\$30 million SSN Project, which ends in June of this year, my Government has secured another World Bank funding of US\$40 million for an expanded safety net program. The Productive Social Safety Net

and Youth Empowerment (PSSNYE) Project focuses on improving access to social safety nets and income-generating opportunities for youths in urban and rural areas.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members,

- 49.** We have also registered some of the highest COVID-19 vaccination rates in the sub-region. Over 3.6 million citizens (73.2%) are fully vaccinated, with 87.6% having received at least one dose of the vaccine.

C. INVESTING IN AGRICULTURE

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members,

- 50.** The steep rise in global food prices due to the COVID-19 pandemic disruptions and the Ukraine-Russia war continues to impact consumers' household budgets everywhere.
- 51.** My Government is particularly concerned by the increase in food insecurity that so many of our fellow citizens face. Investing more smartly in the agriculture sector thus remains a core priority to address this challenge. As Sierra Leoneans, we are blessed with fertile land with great potential to produce more than enough food to meet our needs.

52. My working visit to Vietnam last year was an eye-opener that provided a vivid example of the challenge and opportunities before us. The agricultural similarities between our two nations are clear. So is the stark contrast of farming outcomes.

53. Vietnam and Sierra Leone have more than 5 million hectares of arable land and receive more than five months of heavy rainfall. Vietnam uses that to produce 44 million metric tonnes of rice and is a net rice exporter. Here in Sierra Leone, we produce less than 1 million metric tonnes of rice. We are net rice importers mainly due to our

unsustainable small-scale subsistence farming methods.

54. This must change. We must put more seeds into our fertile soil and raise more livestock and poultry. Only by improving our local food production can we cushion the effects of global disruptions on our food prices, ensure food self-sufficiency, and transform our economy.

55. Over the last five years, my Government has implemented a policy shift in agriculture to drive this change. Using a Public-Private Partnership model, we established a US\$10 million agriculture

credit facility to de-risk and support private-sector agricultural investment.

- 56.** We have provided seeds, fertiliser, pesticides and other agricultural inputs to over 12,000 farmers annually through the e-voucher system to boost food production. Also, we have established mechanised services, including 15 machine rings with over four hundred tractors and power tillers nationwide. We have also reviewed and revamped the Sierra Leone Agriculture Research Act to address food insecurity.

57. Following the productive mission at the Dakar 2 Summit on Food Sovereignty and Resilience convened by the African Development Bank (ADB), our nation is now actively engaged with the Bank to develop an agricultural compact of over US\$500 million to improve agricultural productivity and food security.

58. Due to this agriculture transformation policy shift and these investments, there is now more private-sector activity in rice value chains. This has resulted in a 21% increase in rice production, greater engagement of rural youth and women in agribusinesses, and a 35% reduction in input distribution.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members,

- 59.** Agriculture remains the predominant sector of our economy, accounting for an average of 51% of the GDP over the last decade and employs approximately 65% of the labour force but mainly subsistence farming.
- 60.** While our great nation possesses high agricultural potential, agriculture yields and labour productivity remain extremely low – partly due to our huge infrastructure bottlenecks and financing gap.
- 61.** To feed our people, we must transition from being a net food importer to developing agro-allied

industrial zones in our rural areas to becoming a net exporter of primary agricultural commodities.

62. My SLPP Administration's future aspiration is to take advantage of our nation's soil wealth, grow agriculture as a business in climate-smart ways, and leverage it as a fundamental source of jobs and wealth creation for national prosperity. This will inspire citizens, especially the youth, to see agriculture as a profitable and sustainable business.

D. BUILDING A MORE RESILIENT AND INCLUSIVE ECONOMY

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members,

63. These transformational investments and impactful results since May 2018 that I have highlighted so far have been significantly enabled by our Government's efforts to improve the nation's economic and debt management as soon as we assumed office.

64. Our immediate reforms produced positive outcomes until the COVID-19 pandemic struck. GDP growth increased from 3.7% in 2018 to 5.5% by 2019. Revenue generation surpassed 15% of GDP annually. We reduced the debt burden and brought inflation down to single digits.

65. We have since been re-admitted to the IMF Extended Credit Facility programme (after being excluded during the previous Administration). We have diversified and broadened the economic base by boosting mining, agriculture, fisheries, tourism, SMEs, and manufacturing productivity. Made-in-Sierra Leone vegetable oil, soap, fruit juice, coffee, chocolate, and plastics now exist. These essential products are consumed locally and exported to sub-regional and other markets.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members,

66. I am acutely aware of the difficulties we face as we navigate through the stormy waters of supply

chain disruptions, rising shipping costs, and skyrocketing food and fuel prices. These global economic challenges have put immense pressure on our local economies, causing inflationary pressures that have hit the poorest members of our society the hardest. But in the face of these daunting obstacles, we must not falter. Instead, we must rise to the occasion and show the world the true strength of Sierra Leone.

- 67.** As we stand together in solidarity and resilience, knowing that our perseverance and hard work will ultimately lead us to a brighter future, let us draw strength from our shared history and culture as we work towards a more prosperous and equitable

future for all. The road ahead may be difficult, but I am confident that with determination, grit, and a steadfast commitment to our values, we will overcome these challenges and emerge stronger and more resilient than ever before.

- 68.** To cushion the impact of these global headwinds, my Government's Quick Action Economic Response Programme (QAERP) has been put in place, providing, among other things, (1) a Special Credit Facility through the Bank of Sierra Leone with two tranches of US\$50 million each during the COVID-19 pandemic to support the

importation of essential commodities; (2) another Food Facility of US\$50 million during the ongoing Ukraine-Russia crisis to support the importation of rice, flour and sugar, and (3) a US\$36 million Reserve Fuel Facility for fuel importation.

- 69.** Furthermore, to avoid the shortage of essential commodities and stabilise prices, my Government has maintained zero import duty and GST on imported rice, deferred taxes on the importation of essential supplies during the COVID-19 pandemic, and reduced taxes on certain essential items, including cement and iron rods.

70. Beyond that, we have also prioritised local food and agricultural production, even securing a US\$1.8 million grant from the ADB under the African Emergency Food Production Facility to support farmers with agricultural inputs. Over 30,000 hectares of rice have been cultivated, and there was a 21% increase in production between 2021 and 2022. I am happy to report that we did not import rice seeds for the first time in decades for the 2021/2022 planting season.

71. Despite limited development assistance and investment finance inflows due to the continuing global economic downturn, we have maintained strong relationships with our development

partners, kept existing businesses and attracted additional investors, especially in the mining, light manufacturing, and construction sectors. Youth job-creation schemes and access to innovative financing have boosted overall job figures.

72. Salaries and pensions have been increased to keep in step with living costs. Teachers' salaries have received between 10 to 45% increments since 2018. Entrepreneurship promotion initiatives have been implemented, particularly for women and youth. Introducing a digital biometric national ID card and modest reforms in the financial services sector means more financial

inclusion and access to credit, especially for women and young people.

73. According to several objective global indicators, my Government has achieved the highest marks for gender in the economy and access to credit than any of its predecessors. With this reform-minded thrust, I intend to do even more in my second term.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members,

74. I am pleased to highlight that we have been careful in borrowing and spending. It is worth noting that the debts my Administration is servicing were not contracted only in the past five

years but also debts we inherited from the previous APC Administration.

75. Over the last five years, this SLPP Administration have spent money on urgent things, to build schools, roads and bridges, to educate our children and train our young people and equip them to face a competitive world and develop and strengthen our healthcare systems in the face of a deadly pandemic. We have managed public resources judiciously and not over-borrowed or spent recklessly.

76. Indeed, the evidence of how we have utilised public funds to improve our society is nationwide. Our inclusive New Direction transformation agenda has included every district and province.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members,

77. There is still an enormous task ahead to build more schools, tertiary institutions and healthcare facilities and equip them with modern technology and equipment. There is considerable work to be done to turn our rural areas from zones of economic misery to economic prosperity through agriculture. There is more to do to light up and power the remote villages and give them access to potable water, among many things.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members,

78. I will not rest in my efforts to build a more inclusive and resilient economy.

E. PRIORITISING TOURISM

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members,

79. My Government's decision to prioritise tourism as a key policy for economic diversification, job creation and growth is yielding dividends. Just last month, the reputable TIME Magazine's THE WORLD'S GREATEST PLACES OF 2023 ranked the Freetown Peninsula as Africa's new coastal hub and one of the 50 extraordinary destinations to explore, highlighting that (I quote) "**with diverse wildlife, world-class surfing waves, the vibey**

coastal capital of Freetown, and a brand-new airport – all odds are on Sierra Leone to explode on the adventure travel scene. The time to go is now." (end quote). The potential contribution of tourism and the arts to the economy is, therefore, one that we must nurture and emphasise.

F. GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members,

80. Last year, in this August House, I appealed passionately to Honourable Members who believe in an inclusive and equal future for all Sierra Leoneans to vote in favour of the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) bill. I argued then that the future and fortunes of our great

nation are tied to the equal and unfettered representation and participation of women in all facets of our national life, governance, and development.

81. I wholeheartedly thank the Parliament for passing this landmark GEWE ACT in November 2022, which I proudly signed into law on 19th January this year. The GEWE ACT includes provisions to promote women's participation in politics and decision-making processes – at least 30% representation of women in elected and appointed positions in all spheres of our society. The GEWE ACT also ensures equal pay for equal work, addresses gender-based violence, and mainstreams gender into

national decision-making, amongst many other provisions.

82. My pledge to all women of our great nation is that my SLPP Administration will fully apply, even exceed, and monitor the full implementation of all the provisions of the GEWE ACT.

83. There will be a marked difference in the gender balance in the next Parliament as prescribed by this landmark legislation. Notably, we will have more women members of Parliament (MPs). Recognising that women have been historically disadvantaged and discouraged from

participating in local and national politics, my Party, the great SLPP (the "Talk and Do" Party), has waived all fees for women seeking political office. I encourage all political parties to remove all financial, structural and social barriers for women who wish to participate in local and national politics.

G. CONTROL OF CORRUPTION

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members,

- 84.** Our 2018 Manifesto identified corruption as an existential threat. With our committed leadership, a comprehensive National Anti-corruption strategy, and policy and legislative reforms, every reputable international indicator over the last five

consecutive years has scored Sierra Leone as outstanding in its efforts at controlling corruption. We have sustained progression in Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (CPI), from 130 in 2018 to 110 in 2022 – a 20-place move in four years.

85. There have been record convictions and billions of Leones in non-conviction asset-based recoveries. Peer nations have studied and adopted our successful model for preventing and fighting corruption. As a result of this notable success, we have been rewarded with eligibility for Compact worth hundreds of millions of US dollars from the Millennium Challenge

Corporation (MCC) of the United States Government.

H. THE MINING SECTOR

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members,

- 86.** I am also pleased to report positive trends in the extractive industries, one of the most significant sectors of our national economy. Since 2018, there has been a substantial increase in revenues from mining, and over six thousand (6,000) more Sierra Leoneans have been hired by mining companies. Even at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, we worked with investors to keep the mines open.

87. Today, more mining companies are operational than in 2018, operating in compliance with our regulations. At the same time, small-scale alluvial mining operators are now as protected as large-scale operators.

88. With the new Mines and Minerals Development Act 2022, many communities in mining areas are also experiencing more direct benefits from the extractive sector today than ever before. This is how it should be. Surface rent, taxes, and community development agreement (CDA) payments have increased tenfold (from 0.01% to 1%). 20% of royalties now go back into mining communities. The CDA funds are used towards the

sustainable development of the mining communities, including transformational infrastructure such as schools, health centres, WASH access and roads which will remain beyond the lifespan of the mining operations in those areas.

89. Last month, on 30th March, I handed over a cheque of LE20.3 billion (Old Leones) in CDA payments to Chiefdoms in Tonkolili District, where Leone-Rock Metal Group operates. This follows the first CDA payment of LE5.4 billion (Old Leones) to the mining communities in 2022. It is anticipated that Marampa Mines Limited will soon make its

own CDA payment for this year to communities in Port Loko District.

90. Today, transparency and accountability in and governance of the mining sector are also at an all-time high, with Sierra Leone achieving a remarkably high implementation score of 87.5% from the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI).

I. THE ENERGY SECTOR

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members,

91. My Government continues to work hard to provide universal access to "**affordable, reliable,**

sustainable, and modern energy" in line with the UN SDG 7.

92. There have been challenges. The Government has had to pay substantial subsidies to the sector to keep tariffs lower for citizens, especially because of sudden hikes in generation costs. The Government provided subsidies to EDSA amounting to LE508.6 billion (Old Leones) as of September 2022 to support the purchase of fuel for Karpower and payment for imported power under the CLSG Project.

93. The illegal abstraction of electricity by businesses and private citizens costs billions of Leones

annually. Over the five years, and at great cost to the Government in replacements, there have been over 100 incidents of gutted transformers, damaged cables, and even electricity poles set on fire. We have replaced and rehabilitated those assets in line with our mission to provide reliable and affordable electricity to Sierra Leoneans.

- 94.** Consistent with the SLPP Manifesto promises, we have doubled energy access from 16% to 32% in just five years. We have worked with development partners and the private sector to implement sustainable solutions and create a good energy mix. Renewable energy use has grown from less than 35% in 2018 to over 75% in 2022.

- 95.** Sierra Leone's energy sector is being transformed before our eyes at a fast pace. My Government has worked with partners to extend renewable and clean off-grid solar electricity to 97 towns and villages in all districts of the country.
- 96.** Work on grid extensions from Fadugu to Kabala, Potoru to Pujehun, and Bumpeh to Koidu are under consideration. The rehabilitation of the Western Area distribution network is underway, and peri-urban areas of Freetown are now connected to the grid. Electricity distribution

infrastructure for all district headquarter towns has been installed.

- 97.** The implementation of the MCC Compact will see a doubling of generation and distribution capacity as well as the availability of electricity across economic growth corridors.

K. INVESTING IN HARD INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members,

- 98.** With focused planning and our development partners' support, my Government has built, rehabilitated, and expanded more economical infrastructure in five years than our predecessors.

99. In keeping with our commitment to make Sierra Leone a competitive touristic destination and a hub for aviation activities in the sub-region, the ultra-modern Freetown International Airport infrastructure in Lungi, Port Loko District, constructed at zero expense to this country, is without question the newest hard infrastructure and architecturally one of the best in the sub-region. It is fully ICAO certified; it has quadrupled our passenger-handling capacity; its facilities are expansive, and a 1.5MW solar farm powers it.

100.The new airport will attract and accommodate larger/modern carriers and new travel-related infrastructure investments, including a convention centre and international standard hotels. It will also create employment opportunities and skills transfer opportunities for nationals.

101.I am pleased that even the most ardent of critics looked very happy when he used the new airport earlier this month, and he agrees on record that this infrastructure investment is timely and necessary.

102.I am confident the state-of-the-art Freetown International Airport signals a new era for open

skies and economic activities, making Sierra Leone a more attractive destination for tourists and investors.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members,

103. I am pleased to report that my Government, working with the People's Republic of China, has built and commissioned the first Sierra Leone Foreign Service Academy, a state-of-the-art academy of excellence for training foreign service practitioners/diplomats in Sierra Leone and across the region.

104. The Foreign Service Academy will enable us to solidify our efforts to promote our nation's foreign

policy and strengthen cooperation with regional and international partners.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members,

105. I am proud of our work, especially in the road sector. My Government, working with partners, has completed the dual carriage highway (four lanes) with tree-lined medians from Freetown to Masiaka; the route between Bo and Bandajuma (46km) and the Bandajuma-MRU Road (105km) and three major bridges; a highway from Moyamba Junction to Moyamba and four modern bridges (36km); the Pendembu- Kailahun Road (28km); and the Hill Station to Regent Road

completed with modern lighting. The Lumley-Tokeh road is nearing completion. The Hillside Bypass road has been completed and will soon be commissioned.

106. We have expanded or undertaken re-gravelling works and culvert bridges on 1,800km of roads across the country, opening up remote communities and productive agricultural areas. More farmers can now bring their goods to the market, giving citizens easier access to public services.

107. Given unpredictable spikes in the cost of petroleum products and because the downstream petroleum value chain creates thousands of jobs, my Government has

commissioned storage tanks, and oil marketing companies are investing in more storage capacity.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members,

108. Since this SLPP Administration assumed office in 2018, we have completed several virtually-abandoned multi-million-dollar public building projects and constructed new ones. These include the Anti-Corruption Commission headquarters building, the headquarters building of the National Communications Authority, the Cargo Inspection Building at Queen Elizabeth II Quay, the custom-built North-West headquarter office of the

National Social Insurance Trust (NASSIT), and the multi-storey Petroleum Directorate Building.

L. INVESTING IN ICT INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members,

109. Businesses, innovators, the private sector, and the Government, among others, depend on ICT for their daily operations. With our completion of the National Fibre Optic Backbone and the issuing of metro licenses, internet penetration has been expanded four-fold to cover all district headquarters towns and other key locations. There are now many new opportunities to develop a digital economy in Sierra Leone.

110.The Cyber Security and Crime Act enacted by this House seeks to address cybercrimes and protect critical national information infrastructure. My Government is implementing a US\$50 million World Bank-funded Digital Transformation Project to support digital skills, enhance e-governance and promote cyber security in the country.

111.Technology moves fast, and we must seek to remain nimble in this field or risk falling behind. I have therefore established a Directorate for Science, Technology, and Innovation (DSTI) in the Office of the President to serve both as an innovation hub and to design and develop

technology solutions that can be deployed to scale to address governance, the private sector, and public service challenges. DSTI has developed various solutions, including disease surveillance, risk communications, and travel advisories.

M. TOWARD A PEACEFUL, SAFE, INCLUSIVE, REPRESENTATIVE, AND RIGHTS-BASED DEMOCRACY
Mr Speaker, Honourable Members,

112. Today, we live in a country where we enjoy complete freedom of expression, association, assembly, religion, and political affiliation. With the support of this Parliament, my Government has abolished the death penalty, repealed

intolerable press laws and supported the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ). In our five years of Administration, we held no political prisoners or journalists in prison, opened up more democratic spaces and remained open to political dialogue.

113. We have worked closely and consistently with civil society organisations, made the political calendar more predictable by announcing democratic elections over a year in advance, and enacted progressive electoral legislation for more political inclusion, especially to facilitate the participation and representation of women. These achievements are captured in objective and

transparent international assessments and indicators.

N. INVESTING IN YOUTHS

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members

114. Youth economic empowerment through gainful employment and entrepreneurship is a critical priority for my Administration, as young people are the key to building a prosperous and sustainable future for our nation.

115. Over the last five years, beyond the human capital imperatives I have highlighted, my Government has invested in young people by

creating opportunities for training, entrepreneurship, and job creation.

116. We have successfully rolled out numerous innovative initiatives, including **(1)** the National Youth Empowerment Fund, which provides seed money for youth entrepreneurs; **(2)** Youth Connekt Hubs in various parts of the country, which seeks to empower young people through enhancing their knowledge, experiences and skills while investing in their ideas, innovations and initiatives; **(3)** Established 28 car washes which provide direct employment for nearly a thousand young people nationwide; **(4)** Established Youth Farms to support 10,000 young people in agriculture and rural

development; **(5)** Established the Youth in Fisheries initiative to engage 1400 youths as a means of creating jobs and promoting youth economic empowerment in coastal communities; and, **(6)** the National Youth Service which has trained and deployed over 1,523 young people to various institutions across the country.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members

117. All these human capital development gains will be eroded if we do not stop the illegal substance abuse by our youths that is alarmingly on the rise, causing aggravated physical and mental health-related issues and crime problems among young people.

118.It is a clear and present danger to a future of promise for young people. My Government has developed and validated a five-year strategic Master Plan (2022-2026) to fight against substance abuse and illicit drug trafficking in Sierra Leone. Additional investments have been made into drug prevention and education programmes.

119.As we stand on the cusp of a new dispensation, there is no denying the urgency of the youth. Our young people are the vanguard of progress and innovation, the standard bearers of hope and optimism in a world that can sometimes seem

dark and foreboding. They are the harbingers of change, the architects of the future, and the driving force behind our nation's prosperity.

120.The youth matter because they are the engine of our economy. They bring new ideas, fresh perspectives, and an insatiable hunger for innovation that drives growth and prosperity. They are the creators of new industries, the disruptors of old models, and the agents of change that make our economy more dynamic, resilient, and competitive globally.

121.Moreover, focusing on the youth is not just a matter of necessity, it is a matter of justice. It is an

acknowledgement of the tremendous potential that lies within every young person, a recognition of the unique gifts and talents they bring to the table. It is a commitment to ensuring that all of our citizens, regardless of their age or background, have the opportunity to thrive and fulfil their potential.

122. But most importantly, investing in the youth is an investment in human capital development. By equipping our young people with the skills, knowledge, and experience they need to succeed, we are building a better future for them and a better future for all of us. We are investing in our nation's future prosperity, laying the

foundation for a stronger, more resilient, and more vibrant society.

O. INVESTING IN SPORTS

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members,

123. Sport is a powerful tool to promote respect, tolerance and solidarity. Football, like other sports, unites our people, and there is no better time than now to harness the talents of our young people to inspire unity in our nation.

124. My Government has been vindicated for its investment in sports over the last five years. We resolved administrative conflicts within football and provided seed capital to restart the Men's

Football Premier League. The league has become a major source of job creation and for developing a generation of champions. Talent discovery and development at the local level have been major gains from this investment.

125.After an absence of 26 years (since I took the winning key with me in 1996), the mighty Leone Stars national team qualified for the African Cup of Nations in 2021.

126.In line with our Administration's resolve for gender equality and women's empowerment, for the first time in the country's history, a Women's Football Premier League was established and has just

successfully concluded its first season with twelve Teams participating, and the Mogbwemo Queens FC from Bonthe District emerging as the champions.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members,

127.Our Government is committed to ensuring the country's comprehensive development of all sports to promote youth economic empowerment.

128.Sierra Leone's Women's National Cricket team (commonly known as Ladies Patriot) brought

home the bronze medal in the 2023 Women's T20 International Cricket tournament in Lagos this month.

129. Additionally, Sierra Leone has had regional successes in Boxing, Golf, Wrestling, Karate, and Swimming, among others. The last five years have been an era of sporting excellence in our nation.

130. I take this opportunity to extend my gratitude to the Teams once again, the sport's governing bodies, the coaching and the technical teams for their hard work and perseverance.

P. CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members,

131.The impact of climate change is already being felt all around us. It threatens our food security and daily life. In response, we have no option but to scale up climate action holistically. My Government has therefore established a stand-alone Ministry of The Environment to bolster our national institutional and technical capacity for responding to climate change and to strengthen our national mitigation and adaptation strategies.

132.Many solutions are within reach, and we are committed to working with international stakeholders, multilateral agencies, and local stakeholders to implement just, affordable, and effective solutions to this existential crisis.

Q. INTERNATIONAL RESPECTABILITY

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members,

133. Sierra Leone is now highly respected in the global community. The stigma of the past has been replaced with widespread respectability for our values, achievements, and global leadership.

134. To highlight some of the recognition we have received for our work, Sierra Leone has been endorsed by regional and continental bodies to sit on the UN Security Council in the non-permanent category.

135. Sierra Leone chairs the Continental Committee of Ten (C-10) for the reform of the UN Security

Council. As President, I was unanimously elected to serve as Chair of the African Peer Review Forum of Heads of State and Government, the African Peer Review Mechanism's (APRM) highest decision-making authority for AU Member States to voluntarily self-monitor their governance performance.

R. CONCLUSION

In Conclusion, Mr Speaker, Honourable Members of Parliament,

136.In a public address I delivered in March 2019 at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government titled "**Toward a New Renaissance in Sierra Leone: A New, Bolder Vision**," I sounded my resolve to build a Sierra Leone whose reputation was hard to destroy. One that discards stereotypes crafted about the gloomiest strips of its history but instead makes informed choices grounded on democratic governance, accountability, and human capital development.

137.Four years on, I ask Sierra Leoneans to judge me and my Government today on the concrete actions we have taken to realise this bold vision.

138. I am proud that these actions have already resulted in free quality school education, an improvement in women's empowerment and bold steps to protect and promote women's rights.

139. I am proud that my Government finally repealed oppressive press laws and abolished the death penalty.

140. I am proud that we have made huge strides in modernising our national infrastructure, doubled energy access, and created renewed development partner and investor confidence in Sierra Leone.

141. I am also humbled by the task that remains before us as we seek to achieve the New Renaissance — humbled yet energised to continue the leadership journey that we have started.

142. As we look towards the future, let us be reminded of the words of Nelson Mandela, who said, "**After climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb.**" We have already climbed many hills together, and we must continue to do so with hope, resilience, and a belief in the strength of our democratic institutions.

143. Leading our beloved country is the greatest service any citizen can be entrusted with. It has been my privilege to lead Sierra Leone, albeit in unprecedented and turbulent economic times. My Party, the great SLPP, and I are committed to serving with renewed vigour in the next Parliament, and I am excited about a future of new possibilities and hope for our nation.

144. We have come a long way since the Sierra Leone of 1961, with its limited resources and infrastructure. Today, we have a growing population and modern technology that has improved the quality of life for all Sierra Leoneans.

As your President, I have worked tirelessly to champion policies and initiatives that benefit all citizens, and I will continue to do so until my last second in office.

145.As we approach the upcoming elections, we must stand together, united in our commitment to upholding the Constitution and the democratic values of our nation. We must reject the centrifugal forces that seek to divide us and sow seeds of acrimony. Violence has no place in a democracy, and we must be watchful for those who profit from chaos and destruction. We must reject the urge to circumvent the rule of law. We must stand up for democracy.

146. Let us campaign on our development track record and embrace debating our development policies and plans for our people. We must uphold national integration and unity and discourage discrimination based on sex, religion, ethnic or linguistic association or ties.

147. Like every Sierra Leonean, I now look forward to inclusive, free, transparent, and peaceful elections on 24th June 2023.

Finally, Mr Speaker, Honourable Members of Parliament, Fellow Sierra Leoneans

148. As we celebrate our 62nd Independence Day, let us remember our democratic values of unity,

freedom, and justice for all. Let us renew our commitment to these values and the rights of everyone. I wish you all a Happy Independence Day in advance, and may God bless us all and our beloved Sierra Leone, making her great and prosperous.

149. Together, we can climb any hill and overcome any obstacle. Let us stand up for democracy and work towards a brighter future for all Sierra Leoneans. Let us be guided by the belief that no challenge is insurmountable if we stand together as One People, One Nation, under God. May our collective efforts bear fruit that will resonate for generations to come.

THANK YOU, AND GOD BLESS SIERRA LEONE.