



SIERRA LEONE GOVERNMENT

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

DELIVERED BY

HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT

DR. JULIUS MAADA BIO G.C.R.S.L

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

**On the Occasion of the State Opening of the Fourth Session of the
Fifth Parliament of the Second Republic of Sierra Leone**

In the Chamber of Parliament Building
Tower Hill, Freetown

On Tuesday, 18th May 2021 at 10:00a.m.

MR. SPEAKER.
HONOURABLE VICE PRESIDENT.
HONOURABLE CHIEF JUSTICE,
THE FIRST LADY,
HONOURABLE SPEAKER OF THE ECOWAS PARLIAMENT,
MINISTERS OF GOVERNMENT,
HONOURABLE MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT,
MEMBERS OF THE DIPLOMATIC AND CONSULAR CORPS,
DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS,
DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

1. For this 60th anniversary of our nation's independence, I propose that we re-design the pathway of our endeavour to build a Sierra Leone that works for all of us.

2. Citizens should understand their rights, roles, and responsibilities; why it is important to abide by rules and laws; what equality and leadership mean; what public accountability entails; why respect for diversity and national cohesion matters; and what it means to care for the environment.

3. These are essential elements of a disciplined, inclusive, peaceful, progressive, and resilient society.

HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT

4. Without inclusive and sustainable development, there can be no sustainable future for Sierra Leone. We cannot forever be blinded by cosmetic and short term infrastructural and other tokens. We must create a society where every child is nurtured, nourished, protected, and equipped with the knowledge and skills required to realise his or her full potential. That is beyond ethnicity. That is beyond party politics. After 60 years of Independence, there can be no better tribute to our nation's founding fathers than a determination to operationalise meaningful Human Capital Development.

5. Human Capital Development is not a slogan. It is inclusive. It is the key to achieving sustainable development with our own human resources, using home-grown solutions, empowering our local communities, and enabling innovation, creativity, and technology to bridge the development gap.

COVID-19 AND HEALTHCARE

6. Let me, from the outset, express our nation's gratitude to our healthcare workers, security personnel, public and private sector workers, civil society and community members, development partners, and everyone who has contributed to making us a low-risk nation.

7. We have achieved this as a result of proactive engagement, rigorous planning, central coordination, and thoughtful action that have been informed by data and expert advice. We have leveraged home-built technology solutions. We have also prioritised protecting lives and livelihoods and supported the most vulnerable of our citizens throughout our COVID-19 response.

8. As we transition into the vaccination stage, my Government will take action to maintain healthcare financing at sustainable levels; continue to reduce maternal and under-five mortality rates; recruit and train more healthcare staff; invest in quality mental healthcare; improve patient referral, transportation, and blood services; upgrade medical and diagnostic equipment; and upgrade healthcare infrastructure.

9. My Government will work with partners to provide more hospital beds, train more midwives, and deliver advanced diagnostic services in-country.

AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SECURITY

10. Consistent with the National Agricultural Transformation Programme, my Government remains committed to implementing programmes and activities to boost rice self-sufficiency, crop diversification, livestock development, and sustainable forest and biodiversity management.

11. My Government will provide higher seed quality to achieve higher yields, establish new plantations of cash crops, and undertake comprehensive soil surveys to determine what crop type or livestock is best suited and what soil management techniques farmers may need.

12. My Government will support agriculture financing with a \$50 million credit facility, e-vouchers for input and mechanisation services, extension services, and make pre-positioned machine rings available to private sector and smallholder farmers across the country.

13. The \$54 million investment in rice cultivation in the Rhombe swamps by AgroElite LLC, and an additional \$30 Million secured from the EXIM Bank to develop the water management and irrigation infrastructure to support rice cultivation around Torma Bum, are already underway.

BASIC AND SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL EDUCATION

14. More than at any time in the nation's history, more children, including girls and other excluded child populations, are now in school at no expense to their parents and guardians. They are provided with free learning materials, more school facilities and infrastructure, school-feeding facilities, and school buses.

15. We have affirmed the right to education with our policy of radical inclusion that has irreversibly overturned the ban on pregnant girls, championed menstruation health, campaigned nationwide against early child marriage, and provided more support for students with disabilities.

16. My Government is working with partners to prioritise Early Childhood Development (ECD) with a comprehensive ECD policy, curriculum framework, and ECD centres. We are also making available community learning facilities throughout the country.

17. We are recruiting and training thousands of teachers and hiring and deploying more school inspectors to every district. If training the future workforce of this nation and making it globally competitive is called "raising the wage bill," then that is good for the future development of this nation.

18. To accelerate long term quality, Government has developed and validated a Basic Education Curriculum framework and subject syllabuses and now developing the Senior Secondary Curriculum Framework. My Government will revise the Basic Education Policy, the 2004 Education Act, the West African Examination Council Act, and the Teaching Service Commission Act.

19. Government has also developed other policies on radical inclusion, comprehensive safety, school feeding, school health, and village schools to further bolster our gains in the basic and senior secondary education sector.

20. We will use more digitalisation and ICT for more school and education centre connectivity, learning assessments, education data, and for continuous professional development for teachers.

21. My Government has introduced and will continue to gradually expand guidance counselling, library and laboratory services, Home Economics centres, and adult and non-formal education.

22. My travels to foreign nations and my engagement with partners have all borne fruit. Today, our education sector benefits from partnerships with Harvard University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Yale University, McMaster University, and the University of Sierra Leone. We have further partnerships with Global Partnerships for Education, United Nations Educational

Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), West African Examinations Council (WAEC), the Education Partnerships Group, EdTech Hub, Geo-Referenced Infrastructure and Demographic Data for Development (GRID3), and the NGO consortium. We are one of the World Bank Accelerator Countries for Human Capital Development. My Government will make good use of such valuable partnerships to continue to develop this country.

23. My Government will begin the construction of the University of Kono this year, invest more in skills development and a national apprenticeship scheme, and ensure more rigour in higher education.

24. All these interventions are what we mean by "Education for Development." Within a decade, the impact of these investments will be evident.

SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, AND INNOVATION

25. When I instituted the first ever Directorate of Science, Technology, and Innovation (DSTI) in the Office of the President, I recognised the immense value of science and technology to help solve some of our nation's challenges, support governance, drive development with innovation, and support the shaping of the future of this nation.

26. Our deployment of home-grown technology solutions during our COVID-19 fight, our national financial data architecture, and our use of technology to strengthen the entrepreneurial ecosystem and augment communications and operations within government, all point to the immense value of innovation in governance. My Government will take further measures to strengthen these gains.

27. As a founding member of the Digital Public Goods Alliance, our country will keep in close view the United Nations Secretary General's vision to realize the potential of digital technologies in advancing human well-being.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS

28. My Government, through this august body, has repealed the obnoxious, fifty-five-year old criminal libel law. No journalist is in prison for the practice of journalism. My Government is working closely with the Independent Media Commission, the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists, and civil society to professionalise and ensure the free, safe, and open practice of journalism. As a result of all this, Sierra Leone has made unprecedented progress on the 2021 World Press Freedom Index moving up ten places in African and World rankings.

29. The National Telecommunications Commission (NATCOM) has improved the regulatory space for telecommunications by passing into law five regulations governing licensing, spectrum, quality of service, type approval, and subscriber identification and registration. Mobile Voice coverage has increased from 79% in 2018 to about 85% in 2020. Internet penetration has improved from 12% in 2018 to 25% in 2020. There is an upward surge in the use of social media. More media houses, more newspapers, more radio stations, and more television stations are operating freely now than at any time in this nation's history. More places can now boast of community radio stations. The Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation is keeping citizens informed about public affairs and fully involved in governance.

30. Recognising that ICT/Telecoms and a robust digital infrastructure are cross-cutting enablers for achieving the priorities set out in the Medium-Term National Development Plan, my Government is expanding the national fibre optic network.

31. My Government is establishing, with the support of Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the European Union (EU), Sierra Leone's first National Computer Security and Incidence Response Centre that will create a resilient and safer cyberspace for current and future generations and especially, to combat borderless cybercrimes that are taking a great social, economic, and security toll on nations. A coherent and comprehensive law that supports the safer use of cyberspace and one that is consistent with international best practices is therefore timely.

32. My Government has initiated engagements to review the 2011 Copyright law, holistically support the development of the music industry, delineate a coherent film policy and structure the growth of the film industry, and bolster up the development of the creative industries in Sierra Leone. I believe these are massive job creators and incubators for nurturing Sierra Leonean talent and thus further rebrand our nation.

GOVERNANCE REFORM

33. The United States of America's Millennium Corporation Challenge (MCC) has declared Sierra Leone eligible to develop a compact in recognition of our Government's performance in investing in people, ruling justly, and economic freedom. Our incremental successes for clamping down on corruption over these three successive years indicate that our successes are good for the image and standing of our country, good for governance, good for business, and good for development.

34. My Government will act to implement necessary legislative and other policy changes to fast-track devolution and local government reform. We are also working to strengthen community mobilisation and local council service delivery. This social capital approach keeps citizens informed and development is community-driven.

FOREIGN POLICY

35. Our foreign policy will continue to enhance Sierra Leone's voice, legitimacy, and representation in the international arena. Premised on the thrust of our diplomacy, we have expanded full diplomatic representation to the Republic of Turkey and the Kingdom of Morocco.

36. My Government has increased and will continue to work on increasing the level of representation of our nationals in regional and international organizations including the International Criminal Court, the African Union, and the United Nations.

37. Mindful of a changing diplomatic landscape, My Government, with the support of the People's Republic of China, has turned sod for an ultra-modern Foreign Service Academy to train our diplomats to advance our country's foreign policy objectives.

38. My Government continues to deepen relationships with friendly states and international organisations and Sierra Leone has gained a lot from mutual cooperation and assistance especially during this period of the COVID-19 pandemic from friendly nations and institutions.

39. Sierra Leone remains deeply committed to multilateralism and to the strengthening of the international system and institutions. With our leadership of the African Union Committee of Ten Heads of State, Sierra Leone will continue to advocate and canvass the African Common Position on United Nations Security Council reform.

DEVELOPMENT PLANNING

40. My Government has validated, popularised, and is now implementing the priorities set out in the Medium Term National Development Plan. District Development Coordination Committees have been piloted in Karene, Falaba, Bonthe, and Pujehun Districts.

41. In recognition of my Government's focused approach to development planning and service delivery using credible data, the World Bank has committed \$30 million to supporting Statistics Sierra Leone to implement the first electronic mid-term population and housing census in Sierra Leone, conduct the Sierra Leone Integrated Household Surveys which will generate the latest poverty maps

and statistics of Sierra Leone; design and implement a coherent survey of enterprises in both formal and informal sectors in Sierra Leone to improve enterprise statistics; design and implement a comprehensive agricultural census -- the first in forty years --, followed by an agricultural survey to improve agricultural statistics; modernize the National Accounts and Price Statistics to a more recent base year so that our GDP and Inflation Indices will be more consistent with international methodologies; and, enhance data accessibility and dissemination at both national and regional levels to ensure that decisions by Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) and other stakeholders are data-driven.

42. My Government also urges all citizens and residents to participate in the nationwide confirmation and registration exercise between May 6 to July 28. The unique multipurpose National ID Card with a National Identification Number from this exercise will inform a National Identity Database and make it easier to confirm and verify identity, access social services, prevent identity fraud, and ensure transparency and accountability in governance and service delivery. The digitalisation of past records of vital events is in progress with support from the Irish Aid, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the EU.

43. Within the framework of the G7+, Sierra Leone continues to advocate for debt cancellation to mitigate the impact of COVID 19. Sierra Leone also advocates for equitable and widespread access to COVID-19 vaccines if this global scourge is to be defeated.

SOCIAL PROTECTION

44. My Government is committed to achieving a stronger recovery and greater community resilience in the post COVID-19 period. The National Commission for Social Action's (NaCSA) activities have revolved mainly around protecting the most vulnerable by building school and community infrastructure, supporting microfinance and entrepreneurship, and boosting agriculture.

INFRASTRUCTURE

45. My Government has argued from the outset that purposeful infrastructural projects will expand the economy, support job creation, and support service delivery right across the country.

46. We have made significant progress in constructing over 200 kilometres of major township and trunk roads in the Western Area and some parts of the provinces. Among these are the Lumley-Tokeh Road; the Hill Side Bye Pass Road Phase Two; the Moyamba-Moyamba Junction and three bridges; the Bo- Bandajuma Road; the Pendembu-Kailahun Road; the Bo-Tikonko Road; the Wellington-Masiaka Road; the Bandajuma-Mano River Union Bridge; and

the Limkokwing University-Regent Road. Citizens can see the great progress this Government has made on each of those well-constructed roads. Work is either already in progress or will soon start on additional critical roads in the East end, Central District, and West end of Freetown, Funkia/Goderich, Waterloo, Bo, Kenema, and Bonthe.

47. Re-gravelling works are underway for forty selected roads nationwide totalling 1,780 kilometres. These roads are linked by key feeder roads that will enhance connectivity and access to market and services.

48. My Government will forward to Parliament a review of the Professional Engineering Registration Council Act 1990 to regulate the practice of engineering. When enacted, the law will ensure that quality standards are met on all infrastructural projects thereby reducing the high public expenditure on works maintenance projects and the safety risks associated with poor quality construction.

49. Government is also working with the European Union and the World Bank to replace 13 cable ferry crossings in the country with modern bridges. In response to the collapse of the Savage Street Bridge in September 2020, my Government completed the reconstruction of the bridge and opened it to traffic within three months as promised. My Government will, in the future, engage much more proactively to prevent such crises.

50. My Government is also constructing, comprehensively rehabilitating, and making disable-friendly public buildings nationwide.

51. My Government has successfully planned, designed, and negotiated the construction of the New Airport terminal Project at Lungi. This \$270 million project by the Turkish developer, the SUMMA Group, will construct a new passenger terminal, a new Presidential/VIP terminal, a new parallel taxiway to the existing runway, a new Air Traffic Control Tower, a new Search & Rescue and Fire Fighting facility, as well as rehabilitate the existing runway with ultra-modern navigational aids. This is a Build-Operate-Transfer agreement that requires no funding from the Government. During the COVID-19 period, this is the single largest investment from the Republic of Turkey to an African country.

52. For urban road safety, my Government is considering installing 7 Pedestrian bridges, about 35 traffic lights, and 500 street lights in Freetown.

53. My Government has completed the pre-feasibility study of the Lungi Bridge and the cable-stayed design concept has been reviewed to reduce the total cost of the bridge to \$1.2 Billion. A developer to finance the bridge construction has also been identified and once ratified by Parliament, work will start.

TRANSPORTATION SECTOR

54. Civil works for the Sierra Leone Integrated Urban Mobility Project are advanced and public transportation in the Freetown area will be modernised as a consequence. Commuters will soon have a large fleet of buses (including private sector operators), transit terminals, overpass bridges, bus stops, and a market at Lumley.

55. Marine safety and travel have been enhanced with key interventions in jetties, communications, weather forecasts, and greater enforcement.

56. Sierra Leone is committed to enhancing global civil aviation safety and security by complying with International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) mandatory standards and recommended practices.

57. To improve road safety and the roadworthiness of vehicles, the Ministry of Transport and Aviation (MOT) test and safe-driver training and testing facilities will be established in district headquarter towns. Government will also develop and enforce a road user policy.

58. In addition to anticipated legislative reforms, Government intends to develop a consolidated transportation database to facilitate effective planning, coordination, and communication.

THE ECONOMY, MONETARY POLICY, AND TRADE

59. Like all other countries globally, Sierra Leone's economy has been adversely affected by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Notwithstanding, the Government, through the Ministry of Finance continues to implement sound economic policies and public financial management reforms that are geared towards maintaining a stable economy and responding to the financial and socio-economic shocks brought about by the pandemic.

60. We will continue to implement prudent public financial management policies focused on enhancing domestic revenue mobilisation, rationalising expenditures, working towards single digit inflation, maintaining sustainable debt levels, a stable exchange rate, and increasing reserves to support inclusive growth.

61. Government created a Le500 Billion Special Credit Facility to support the production, importation, and distribution of essential commodities. The National Revenue Authority deferred taxes due on the importation of essential commodities, especially for rice, fuel, and other health supplies.

62. Government is implementing the National Micro-Finance Programme (MUNAFU FUND) to provide finance to targeted Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs). Government also provided cash transfers to over a hundred thousand poor and vulnerable families and informal sector workers.

63. Government also provided over Le19 Billion in critical financial support for parastatals most affected by the pandemic including the Sierra Leone Airports Authority, Sierra Leone Civil Aviation Authority, Sierra Leone Road Transport Corporation, and the Sierra Leone Postal Services.

64. Government made advanced payments to keep public works on course and to maintain thousands of jobs in the rehabilitation of trunk roads and township streets. Government also continues to ameliorate the country's current debt situation.

65. The resumption of operations at iron ore mines, and slight recoveries in the agriculture and tourism sectors may support an uptick in the economy. Domestic revenue mobilised by the National Revenue Authority (NRA) increased marginally and will continue to do so with various revenue-enhancing measures to be implemented by the NRA including the introduction of the Electronic Cash Register, International Tax Administration System, and the efficient implementation of the 2021 Finance Act.

66. International development partners mobilised substantial resources to Sierra Leone in respect of the Government's record of commitment to fighting corruption, improving public financial management, and good governance.

67. My Government has also undertaken extensive reforms in public financial management including (i) the automation of revenue collection and management processes by the NRA; (ii) strengthening of the legal framework for domestic revenue mobilisation; (iii) strengthening of payroll management; (iv) expanding the coverage of the Integrated Financial Management Information System; (v) strengthening commitment controls for goods and services expenditures; (vi) rolling out the electronic Public Expenditure Tracking Survey (PETS) form and regular production of price norms by the National Public Procurement Authority to guide procuring entities; (vii) established an information management system to record, track, monitor, and report on the execution of all Government contracts; (viii) strengthening the fiduciary oversight of State Owned Enterprises, resulting in the reduction in their liabilities; (ix) the reconstitution of functional Audit Committees in 15 MDAs and Local Councils and strengthening them to follow up on audit recommendations; and (x) continuing to provide real-time financial management guidance to The National COVID-19 Emergency Response Centre (NaCOVERC). These actions have maintained macroeconomic stability and transparency in public financial management.

68. The Bank of Sierra Leone's astute monetary policy reduced inflation to single digits for the first time in six years, stabilised the exchange rate of the Leone against regional and major world currencies, and significantly increased international reserves to unprecedented levels.

69. The commercial banking sector has also witnessed robust growth as a consequence of prudent management and policies. In the last three years for instance, our state-owned Rokel Commercial Bank and Sierra Leone Commercial Bank have been transformed from loss-making entities to profit-making banks as a result of astute management and digitalization.

70. Investors who were here in 2018 are still here and doing business in 2021 and even more investors have come to Sierra Leone in the last three years. My Government will continue to make the investment climate more predictable, flexible, and transparent with pro-business incentives. Local manufacturing has been boosted as a consequence.

71. Even through COVID-19, the Petroleum Regulatory Agency is constructing a second petroleum jetty, maintained an open-market policy, developed a new tank farm to hold strategic stock, introduced guidelines for downstream activities, maintained price stability based on a transparent pricing formula in spite of supply chain disruptions, and significantly improved petroleum revenue and service delivery in the downstream petroleum sector.

MINES AND MINERAL RESOURCES

72. Natural resource extraction has not had the requisite impact on developing our economy. Ineffective legal and regulatory regimes for the sector weakened the state's capacity to generate revenues for its social and economic programmes. It further left mining communities poorer and condemned to live with the consequences of environmental degradation and associated problems.

73. In spite of shrinking investment capital and supply chain and logistics constraints as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the mining sector has remained relatively buoyant. New mining companies have started operations.

74. Our development strategy for the sector includes revising the Mines and Minerals Act to ensure effective governance and transparency in the sector, developing shared infrastructure around mining, and optimising local participation in the sector. Beyond job creation, we want to use proceeds from mining as a catalyst for development.

FISHERIES

75. My Government has put in place effective fisheries management and governance policies to achieve our sustainable fisheries and biodiversity conservation goals through a strengthened policy and regulatory framework, scientific fish stock assessments and data collection, and by deterring and minimizing illegal, unreported, and unregulated activities in our territorial waters.

76. There is now, more than ever before in the history of this country, greater transparency in the fisheries sector. On the website of the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources, we now publish a registry of vessels with Vessel Monitoring Systems, fisheries management measures, and revenue generated from licensing, fines, and other charges.

77. My Government has improved infrastructure for fisheries development and access to international markets. I recently commissioned the Sierra Fishing Company's ultra-modern fish processing facility at Kissy Dock Yard that will enhance fish value addition for domestic and international markets. To further boost fish production through aquaculture, Government has collaborated with the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) to acquire a fish/poultry feed-making machine.

78. Under the international belt and road initiative, my Government has received a \$55 Million grant from the People's Republic of China to construct a fish harbour and its ancillary structures. Landowners will be fully compensated and all environmental due diligence will be done. The Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources will work with all stakeholders for the effective implementation of this project. When fully operational, the fish harbour will support the growth of the fisheries sector.

ENVIRONMENT - SUSTAINABILITY AND RESILIENCE

79. Addressing environmental issues is critical for sustainable development. To improve environmental outcomes, Government is reviewing and updating various legislation, promoting sustainable environmental protection including national reforestation and timber management initiatives, managing and conserving wetlands, and furthering community-based environmental education.

80. My Government believes that a green recovery from COVID-19 is achievable, more sustainable, and in the best interests of our development as a nation. My Government will implement a number of binding Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Actions and take necessary measures to support a green growth in all sectors of the economy. We have an opportunity to invest in a green economy that minimises the environmental impacts of biodiversity loss, waste management, and plastics pollution. We will therefore associate closely with all international action on a green recovery.

81. The National Disaster Management Agency, my Government instituted, is fully operational. NACSA has also completed pilot registration of disaster-prone areas of Freetown, Kambia and Pujehun as part of disaster preparedness planning.

82. My Government will enact the National Reforestation and Timber Governance Agency Act that provides for sustainable forest resource management and reforestation.

SPORTS

83. My Government has reviewed the regulatory and policy instruments for sports development, increased budgetary support to sports, and instituted an operational National Sports Authority to govern and develop sports in Sierra Leone

84. Just over a week ago, facilitated by the Sierra Leone Football Association leadership, I met with the FIFA and Confederation of African Football (CAF) Presidents - the first time in our nation's history a President has ever met with both leaders. We discussed sports infrastructure, the development of youth and women's football, technical support and training, and broad support for a Sierra Leone bid to host the African Nation's Cup Finals.

85. My Government has signed a Memorandum of Understanding for the second phase renovation of the National Stadium and all its facilities to international standards. These will include the main bowl, hostels, swimming pools, the practice field, an ultra-modern volley ball court, the basketball court, and the tennis court.

PUBLIC SAFETY AND SECURITY, IMMIGRATION, AND PEACEKEEPING

86. My Government has completed the first fire stations in Kailahun, Pujehun, Western Rural, and Kabala. Additional fire stations will be constructed in the coming year in Port Loko, Bonthe, and Tonkolili.

87. We will purchase additional fire engines, recruit more fire fighters, and present to Parliament the first ever Fire Safety Policy and Bill.

88. The Office of National Security has conducted vulnerability assessments of all Critical National Infrastructure including MDAs and hospitality sites with a view to identifying security gaps and proffering recommendations. My Government has reintroduced *visa-on-arrival* to ease travel to Sierra Leone, introduced a comprehensive immigration strategy, and enhanced border patrol and immigration services nationwide. Measures will be presented to enhance secure national infrastructure and borders.

89. My Government has strengthened coordination among various agencies to tackle statelessness, deter trafficking in persons, curtail the proliferation of small arms, and prevent the illegal trade in narcotics. Sierra Leone has been commended by the United States State Department for its actions in interdicting trafficking in persons, charging and convicting offenders, and Sierra Leone has been placed on Tier 2 for the first time in this nation's history. Legislation will be presented to consolidate these gains.

90. We are decongesting prisons and we have invested more in the safe, secure, and humane custody of inmates. We have maintained the moratorium on the death penalty. My government believes that the death penalty is cruel, inhumane, and unusual. Legislation will be brought forward for the abolition of the death penalty.

91. We have recruited more law enforcement officers including a larger cohort of women, continued professionalising the Police Force, and expanded their operations from supporting NACOVERC and fighting transnational crime to supporting advocacy and deterrence of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).

92. The Sierra Leone Police is contributing to maintaining world peace with three deployments of 239 peacekeepers to three Missions: UNAMID in Sudan, UNMISS in South Sudan, and AMISOM in Somalia. My Government is also fully committed to enabling the participation of the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) in maintaining international peace and security.

REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE ARMED FORCES

93. At the strategic level, my Government is developing a Defence Policy framework that commits the RSLAF to both operating effectively and supporting national development. My Government is constructing accommodation facilities, rolling out a 25% salary increment over three years, expanding the mandate of the Armed Forces Technical Education College, investing in the Armed Forces Agricultural Unit, and establishing a full-scale Army Engineering Unit.

94. To expand defence cooperation that will enhance the capacity of our armed forces, I have authorised the appointment of Defence Attachés to our missions in the United Arab Emirates and the Republic of Turkey.

LABOUR AND SOCIAL SECURITY

95. My Government has harmonised and enforced labour laws, maintained a close eye on worker migration, monitored occupational health and safety, operationalised a central employment exchange and a work permit bureau, and successfully arbitrated industrial relations disputes.

96. Following a technical audit, the National Social Security and Insurance Trust (NASSIT) will soon reappraise its entire portfolio: placements with commercial banks, equity companies, shares and stocks, debentures and real estate, and new investment opportunities. NASSIT services will also migrate to a fully functional Web-Based Integrated Biometric Pension Operating System.

97. The NASSIT Act will soon be reviewed to enhance compliance with best practice in the administration of pension funds and for the long-term sustainability of the social security system.

TOURISM

98. Tourism is critical to economic diversification and job creation. In spite of COVID-19, my Government has engaged partners and local communities to produce a tourism assets register, develop eco-tourism and other tourism products, clean and beautify beaches, provide skills training for entrepreneurs and stakeholders in tourism, and to take other steps to promote tourism in Sierra Leone.

99. More African American brothers and sisters have laid their rightful claim to Sierra Leonean citizenship through genealogy. They bring immeasurable advantages to our country. The homecoming of beauty pageants and the reapplication of the organisers of the Budapest to Freetown rally are solid votes of confidence in our country as a tourist destination.

YOUTH POLICY

100. My Government sees the youth bulge in Sierra Leone as an opportunity, hence the heavy investment in human capital development at all levels. As a demonstration of that commitment to build the capacity of youth, create jobs, and generate new career pathways for youth, my Government has revised the National Youth Policy and developed a five -year sector strategic plan.

101. Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, hundreds of youth have been engaged in various farming activities, trained in various entrepreneurial and business management skills, and Government has worked with development partners on employment promotion initiatives.

102. Youth populations have been involved in de-risking initiatives, anti-SGBV campaigns, and in civic engagements on peace consolidation, violence, and drug abuse.

103. My Government constructed and fitted 70 fishing boats with outboard engines, navigation equipment, and accessories at a total cost of Le5.5 Billion Leones to support youth employment and empowerment in the seven coastal districts and communities.

104. To support youth livelihood skills, my Government has constructed ten carwash centres in the Western Area. A further 28 carwash centres are being constructed nationwide. This initiative will create thousands of jobs for young people.

105. To date, the National Youth Service has trained and deployed over one thousand graduates as Service Corps to MDAs for internship opportunities.

106. Several other youth training programmes will focus on providing disadvantaged young women and girls with a digital learning and resource centre where they will acquire skills in entrepreneurship, financial literacy, transformational leadership and social change, and business start-up funds.

INCREASING ENERGY ACCESS

107. My Government sees vigorous energy sector reform as critical to economic growth, health, and social well-being. More households are now connected to the grid than in 2018.

108. We have increased electricity generation and transmission capacity over the last year. We will augment generation capacity with 87 Megawatts of confirmed investment in the sector and we will soon commission a 6 Megawatt solar park in Newton.

109. Electricity supply has been restored to Lunsar. 39 Communities are to be electrified along the CLSG/West Africa Power Pool's 225kV transmission network including Zimmi and Potoru in the south; Kangama Gorahun and Njaiama Nimikoro to the east; and Masingbi, Bumbuna, Matotoka, Kamalo, Kamakwie, Binkolo, and Fadugu to the north.

110. We now generate sufficient electricity in Freetown. But we inherited a defective and decadent transmission and distribution system that is incapable of evacuating and transmitting the power that is generated. This is made worse by the deliberate vandalism by ill-motivated citizens of transformers and installed equipment. Therefore, let me state that citizens who are engaged in such vandalism activities will face the full force of the law. With support from the World Bank, my Government is currently addressing the perennial problem of load-shedding and massive inefficiencies in power evacuation and distribution in Freetown by expanding or upgrading the 33 kV / 11 kV grid in Freetown. Distribution transformers and lines are also being installed in 33 unserved communities. A vendor supply process for electricity meters means that meters are now easily available.

111. In collaboration with partners, we have commissioned 50 rural mini-grids and 4 smaller pilot systems in 54 chiefdoms with 8,000 household connections in beneficiary communities, and another 44 mini-grids are being developed in 44 chiefdoms.

112. Planning and rural electrification units have been set up to supervise rural electrification activities, develop regulations, and develop cost-reflective tariffs.

113. The electrification of 7 District towns -- Kabala, Kambia, Moyamba, Kailahun, Pujehun, Bonthe and Mattru Jong -- is well underway. Phase II expansion of the Bumbuna Hydroelectric dam is also in progress.

ACCESS TO WATER

114. My Government will present legislation for better management of interventions in the water and sanitation sector. Additional measures have been developed for dam safety, water use and catchments, ground water use, pollution control, water consumer service, and service provider reporting rules.

115. With support from the World Bank, my Government is rehabilitating the water treatment plant at the Babadorie Dam and installing a 4 kilometer distribution network for improving water supply to Gbangbayila, Malama and Kaningo communities.

116. With funding support from the Millennium Challenge Corporation, we have started universal water metering in the Western Area with the near completion of water kiosks -- 5 in Aberdeen and 6 in Kingtom --, and the installation of 2 kilometres of distribution pipes.

117. Government is also installing gravity-fed water supply systems across several communities in Waterloo, Mambo, and Hamilton, and additional gravity fed water systems in Kono and Koinadugu that will serve thousands of citizens. Government has procured thirteen bowsers to support community water supply efforts in poorly-served areas in Freetown during the dry season months.

118. A six-town Rural Water Supply project, funded by my Government, will benefit 1.5 million citizens. It will rehabilitate, optimize, and expand existing water facilities such as water intakes, treatment plants, transmission mains, distribution networks, and metering.

119. Solar-powered Boreholes with stand-posts and distribution lines have been installed in various communities to serve thousands of people. More measures will be taken to increase access to potable water.

LAND REFORM AND HOUSING

120. My Government believes that land reform should focus on legally framing and safeguarding rights within the context of tensions between formal and informal/customary rights; streamlining and modernizing land delivery; encouraging the sustainable use of land and responsible investment; maintaining

a coherent database of all land; and, providing fair mechanisms for land disputes resolution. My Government's position is that Sierra Leoneans who wish to invest in land, should have land available to them without hindrance or discrimination.

121. My Government intends to tackle the urban housing problem by using a private sector-led ecosystem of reforms, innovative designs, and financing reforms. Safe and affordable housing is supportive of our human capital development priorities and aligns with our country's aspiration to meet the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 11.

NATIONAL COHESION AND DEMOCRACY

122. Legislation that establishes an Independent Commission for Peace and National Cohesion has been ratified. The National Commission for Democracy and the National Council for Civic Education and Development are leading on civic-oriented activities aimed at fostering good citizenship that is favourable to the functioning of our democracy.

123. The National Electoral Commission has developed a strategic plan with ten pillars that support transparent and credible elections within international best practices.

124. Sierra Leone can further strengthen and consolidate its democracy when minority populations and communities are represented. Measures will be considered for making our democracy more inclusive and more representative.

125. The Government has constituted a technical team to review the White Paper on the Justice Cowan Constitutional Review Committee. Key provisions that strengthen our democracy and protect the human and constitutional rights of citizens will be duly considered.

INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS AND REFORM

126. Government remains committed to strengthening public sector institutions and public service delivery. A Public Service Bill will be brought forward and my Government will review the Civil Service Code.

127. In a changing world of technology, Government remains committed to automating the recruitment to retirement process of personnel across 80% of the civil service. To enhance institutional effectiveness, the Ministry of Planning and Development will normalise performance management assessments to include Departments, Agencies, Parastatals, and State-Owned Enterprises. Management and structural reviews of MDAs have been undertaken with a view to proposing necessary strategic alignments. There is progress on establishing a Wages and Compensation Commission.

JUDICIARY/JUSTICE SECTOR REFORM

128. Every citizen should benefit from a fair, impartial, and effective justice system. My government has supported the appointment of 15 more High Court judges and 11 more magistrates. There are now regular High Court criminal sessions in Pujehun, Tonkolili, Bonthe, Kambia, Koinadugu, Kailahun, Moyamba, Port Loko, and Kono districts.

129. More qualified women now serve in senior management positions in the judiciary. These include the Master and Registrar, Court Operations Manager, Human Resource Manager, Deputy Master and Registrar, and Court of Appeal Registrar. Added to them are 2 female judges in the Supreme Court, 5 in the Court of Appeal, and 5 in the High Court.

130. Through Constitutional Instrument, the High Court has been divided into eight divisions with three specialised courts adjudicating corruption cases, dealing with industrial and social security disputes, and handling sexual offences cases. Digitalisation of court processes is ongoing. Caseloads are now lower and prosecution and conviction rates have improved in all courts.

131. My Government has improved the landscape for commercial law by acceding to international instruments. A small claims commercial court has been set up to fast track cases in Magistrate court with claims of under 50 million Leones.

GENDER, WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT, SGBV, SOCIAL WELFARE, AND HUMAN RIGHTS

132. My Government will take more action to protect especially women and girls from sexual and gender based violence. The Child Rights Act (2007) will be updated and a National Street Children Strategy will be presented.

133. More measures to concretise and operationalise the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment policy will be presented. Over the coming year, women's empowerment programmes will be a priority.

134. As a consequence of our concerted action to fight SGBV, Sierra Leone is among 9 countries in the world to serve as Board Member for the Women, Peace and Security, and Humanitarian Action Compact. Sierra Leone has also clinched the Presidency of the UN Women Board, a UN Entity for gender equality and women's empowerment.

135. My Government has also consented to sponsor a UN resolution on a survivor's bill of rights for sexual and gender based violence.

136. Measures to address disability including addressing stigma and discrimination, inclusive education, socio-economic empowerment, innovation and technology, disaggregated data, and women with disabilities will be presented. We will also act to maintain and improve on our enviable global reputation for peaceful inter-faith coexistence and religious tolerance.

137. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members of Parliament, additional measures will be laid before you. I implore us all, on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of our independence, to unite our country around values of discipline, fairness, equal access, equal opportunity, respect for diversity, and more that make us Sierra Leoneans. May God/Allah Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala grant us wisdom and grace during this legislative session.

I thank you all

God bless you all

God bless Sierra Leone

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