

**ADDRESS BY**  
**HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT, ALHAJI DR AHMAD TEJAN KABBAH**  
**On The Occasion Of The Special Session Of The Second**  
**Parliament Of The Second Republic Of Sierra Leone**  
**19th JUNE 2007**

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**DEFINING MOMENTS OF MY PRESIDENTIAL JOURNEY**

1. I am addressing you today at this special session of Parliament as in a matter of weeks, I will be retiring as President of the Republic of Sierra Leone after eleven rewarding but sometimes difficult years. I would like, once more, to express my gratitude to you all. You have provided close and valuable support to me and my government. Thanks to your cooperation, understanding and resilience, the dark days in our country's tragic history are over and together, we have courageously brought back peace, security and hope to ourselves.

2. It was with an enormous sense of patriotism, responsibility and commitment that in 1996, I yielded to considerable pressure to assume the leadership role in a country that was at the brink of state failure, underpinned by the victory of guns over normal politics, mired in one of the bloodiest civil conflicts in history, torn by fear, criminal activities and killings and governed by groups of bloodthirsty and fortune seeking warmongers who thrived on conflict and denied freedom to our people. In the midst of so much internal strife and human misery, these warlords became a veritable threat to peace, national security and development.

3. The entire country had crumbled beneath the burden of warfare, economic ruin, rampant corruption, and autocracy. Public administration was weak and law and order, justice, accountability, public services, job creation, donor support and investor confidence were all practically dead. I knew, nonetheless, that there were very many true, honest and patriotic Sierra Leoneans who were determined to provide for the people of this noble country the opportunity for a better future. We can now reflect on the good old days and learn from our past mistakes to help bring back hope to a country that was forced into a senseless war and untold suffering.

4. My challenge at that time was not only to address state failure and threats to our hard earned democracy, but also to stop and contain the process of such failure before it deteriorated any farther into something more disastrous. It was all too evident that as state failure set in, the balance of power shifted ominously against ordinary citizens and much in favour of a minority group that operated outside the law to fulfill its selfish ends through the force of violence.

5. Indeed on my assumption of office, the Herculean task that confronted me was how to reverse the downward trend of a failing state, create the conditions for putting the country back on its feet and restoring vibrant hope in a population that had been demoralized, and rendered desperate by a horrendous internal war that had affected every citizen in every corner of Sierra Leone.

6. My immediate reaction was to structure a corporate strategy utilizing the limited human and material resources available then, to bring the war to an end, pursue a proactive and sustainable peace process and carry out nationwide rehabilitation, reconstruction and development.

7. In this regard, I had to provide not only the leadership but also the vision and ability to act as principal task manager for the realisation of this corporate strategy. I had to create a holistic framework with which all stakeholders could identify. With the assistance of the United Nations and patriotic fellow countrymen and women, I promulgated our 2025 Vision which continues to guide and inspire our socio-economic development up to this day. This entailed the building of a progressive and prosperous country devoid of the ills of the past.

8. My underlying vision was therefore, to put in place a clean and effective government that was responsive, caring, impartial, free from corruption and able to provide Sierra Leoneans with an improved quality of life within a safe and secure environment. My principal responsibility, as I saw it, was to create the opportunity for every Sierra Leonean to realize his or her own potential. This, in addition to my priority objective of ending the war, was the main theme of my campaign. I shall do my best to demonstrate in the rest of this address, how I and my Government tried to achieve this objective.

9. As we all are too aware, the war officially ended in January 2002 leaving in its wake a trail of destruction, suffering and misery. The causes of the war have been blamed on poor governance and the appalling economic and social conditions under which the people were living. And yet at Independence on April 27 1961, and given our abundant human and natural resources, our country Sierra Leone had most of the attributes for becoming a viable democratic state with a strong socio-political and economic base. However, long years of authoritarian single party rule and successive military regimes undermined democracy, destabilized the state, increased poverty and eventually led to the outbreak of the rebel war.

10. But even before the war, a state of economic emergency was declared because of severe shortages of essential commodities. There were queues for basic necessities including our staple food rice, for which chits were issued to the privileged few. Long petrol queues forced people to sleep in their vehicles while waiting to purchase no more than a few gallons of fuel. Workers in the public sector went without salary for months. Even those with money in the bank practically had to bribe in order to make withdrawals from their accounts. The police and the military were ill equipped, lacking the most basic tools for the effective performance of their duties such as, transportation, communication sets and even proper uniforms.

11. Honourable members, you will have no difficulty in recalling that painful period. I have called attention to it for the benefit of those who were in the country at the time but who, because of the current improved situation, may have forgotten this fact. It is also necessary to bring these facts to the knowledge of those who were not in this country and who are not aware of the difficulties the people then encountered.

12. The war left behind a trail of human tragedy and extensive destruction of social and physical infrastructure. The damage involved significant loss of life and property, destruction of roads and bridges, extensive burning of public buildings, private homes, factories, schools, hospitals, religious, cultural and sacred places; the indiscriminate amputation of hands and limbs and the killing and abduction of children and women many of whom were gang raped and forcibly held as sex slaves. Large numbers of people were displaced with hundreds of thousands seeking refuge in other countries while millions sought shelter in different parts of the country and abroad.

Health services and other government institutions became non functional and the economy totally collapsed.

13. In addition, there was almost total breakdown of law and order, giving rise to tremendous human rights abuses. In terms of quantitative estimates, about 20,000 people were killed, many thousands maimed and over two million were displaced, 500,000 of whom fled to neighbouring countries. The population of Freetown , the capital city, more than doubled to around two million, severely constraining the basic services that were available.

14. Thus, at the end of the war, there was never a more urgent need than to consolidate the peace and to fight against the massive poverty that had engulfed the country. Today, five years on, thanks to the visionary leadership of my Government coupled with the resilience of our people, Sierra Leone is now a safe, secure and stable country; enjoying peace, security and democracy; attracting investments; generating employment and economic growth and improving the livelihoods of most of its people.

#### NATIONAL SECURITY

15. The horrible experiences of the rebel war vividly demonstrated to every Sierra Leonean that there could be "no sustainable development without security". I was convinced that if we did not take prompt measures to build and maintain a strong national security apparatus, then the nation's drive to achieve the vision of a peaceful, prosperous and progressive society would remain an empty dream. Security therefore became a matter of priority and urgency for my government. The areas of concentration in the security sector included: peace-keeping and peace-building, consolidation of state authority and restructuring and strengthening the security Forces.

16. As I have already mentioned, Sierra Leone was on the verge of state failure in 1996. National Security was compromised as the national borders were violated and penetrated by numerous foreign forces bent on destroying our country. Government presence in much of the country was none existent and vast pieces of territory were still under the control of renegade forces of the Revolutionary United Front and their allies who had demonstrated their opposition to democracy in no uncertain terms.

17. The general population defied tremendous intimidation from these renegade forces in order to vote in these elections. The greatest challenge to me and my Government then was to reestablish government authority throughout the country, seal its porous borders, as well as commence the process of rebuilding the security apparatus. This process was temporarily derailed by the mutinous intervention of the AFRC regime in 1997. Upon resuming office in 1998, I recommenced the task of establishing national security like I had set out to do in 1996. My Government then undertook the restructuring of the Army and the Police and improving the conditions of service of both forces.

18. The greatest opportunity and prospect for rebuilding the national security apparatus of the state came with the conclusion of the war and the cessation of armed hostilities in 2002. With help from various international partners, demobilization, disarmament and reintegration of ex-combatants proceeded in earnest and were successfully concluded in 2004.

Under this programme, more than 71,000 ex-combatants were targeted. By February 2004, a total of 72,490 combatants were disarmed, 71,043 demobilised, including 6,845 child soldiers and 55,122 ex-combatants who had also received support for their re-integration into active community life.

19. The International Military Assistance and Training Team (IMATT) spearheaded the retraining and reorganization of the security forces while UNAMSIL was at the forefront of the DDR program. We want to thank ECOMOG, led by Nigeria and supported by Guinea and Ghana and the British-led International Military Advisory and Training Team (IMATT), which is continuing to carry out the training and strengthening of our national security forces. The Office of National Security, the Sierra Leone Police and the Armed Forces of the Republic of Sierra Leone were also instrumental in helping me to meet the challenges of reconstituting the national security of the state.

20. When the United Nations Peacekeeping Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) was withdrawn in December 2005, the security of the state rested squarely on the shoulders of our Armed Forces. It can be said without any shadow of doubt that our forces have so far acquitted themselves remarkably well

21. A Truth and Reconciliation Commission, established as a mechanism to help heal the "wounds of war", successfully concluded its task and published its Report while the Special Court , established with the cooperation of the United Nations and my Government, is functioning to bring to book those that bear the greatest responsibility for the war. While our development partners have provided funds for the Special Court , funding for the implementation of the TRC recommendations has not been forthcoming. This notwithstanding, and in spite of our limited resources, my Government has implemented a number of those recommendations such as:

- " The provision of free basic education;
- " Free transportation and housing for amputees;
- " The setting up of a national procurement agency to cut down on the opportunities for corruption;
- " The enactment of legislation for the protection of women and children;
- " The development of strategies to create employment for youth, e.g. the youth employment scheme;
- " The establishment of the Human Rights Commission.

22. Most noteworthy of our achievements in the area of national security was the visionary leadership that I offered in handling the difficult rounds of negotiations with the RUF in Abidjan and Lome which resulted in the final ushering in of the much-desired peace to the people of Sierra Leone . The most important dividend of the peace agreement was a stable and secure environment in which economic activities for national development could commence. Honourable members, you may recall that this was a war that my government inherited and which two previous regimes, one civilian and one military, had been unable to conclude. In fact, the military had claimed that ending the war was the reason for seizing power.

The Security Forces.

23. In line with our commitment to develop a strong and effective security system, my Government took measures to establish a modern, well trained, well equipped, highly motivated and dependable security force that has both the capability and the means to effectively police the country internally and defend it against all external aggression.

24. Joint army and police patrols have been established to monitor border crossings around the country to deter undesirable elements from violating our national territory. In terms of institutional development, we have established the Office of National Security to coordinate the activities of the security establishment. The restructuring of the Police Force which began in 1998 under the Government Policing Charter has resulted in increased accountability and transparency in the activities of the force. Police personnel have received specialized training to increase their capacity to handle public order events. Other achievements in the national security sector during my stewardship include the following:

- The creation of specialized investigation units such as the Major Incident Support Team (MIST) and the Family Support Unit (FSU), which have resulted in increased police response to community needs;
- Crime statistics have shown a gradual decline in crime rates over a three-year period;
- Improved logistics capability of the Police and Military forces through the acquisition of vehicles, communications equipment, uniforms etc. with funding provided by the Government of Sierra Leone, DFID, UNDP and UNIOSIL. The Police Force now has over seven hundred vehicles including motorbikes, over one thousand hand held communications sets, mobile high frequency communications sets (in vehicles) and some 80 VHF base sets;
- The rebuilding of police stations, barracks etc. that were destroyed by the war and the construction of new ones where none had existed before;
- The resuscitation of links between the Sierra Leone Police and INTERPOL to enhance the capacity of the force to combat international crime;
- Increased policing of local communities through the formation of Local Policing Partnership Boards and regular press briefings to disseminate police activities to the general public;
- Under the elections preparedness strategy, the capacity of the force has been enhanced to handle the security needs of the 2007 elections;
- Promoted effective coordination and cooperation between the Police and the Army.

Pademba Road Prisons and the Shopping Mall

25. It is a common occurrence that whenever serious upheavals occur in the country, especially in the capital, the focus always turns to Pademba Road prisons. Be it coup makers or rebels or serious rioters, these destabilizing forces always march to Pademba Road prisons to forcibly release prisoners from within who they then use to cause mayhem in the city. The incarceration of high profile individuals in the prison also creates serious traffic chaos as the road often has to be closed for security reasons. In short, Pademba Road prisons has a high nuisance value and is a danger to normalcy in the area. It is therefore my plan to relocate the prison to Masankay for convicted prisoners and Waterloo Prisons training facilities for remand prisoners. We have already secured an initial grant of US\$2 million for these relocations.

26. The area vacated will be used to develop a modern shopping mall offering a wide-range of facilities and services including shops and parking areas. This development should be done through the creation of a public company where Sierra Leoneans from all works of life using the soon-to-be-opened stock exchange can buy shares in the shopping mall holding company. Sierra Leoneans can thus, utilize the stock exchange to contribute to national development and improve their financial status through acquiring shares in the venture.

#### FOREIGN RELATIONS

27. Economic development and security of our nation are the priority concerns of our foreign policy. In this regard, we continued to intensify multilateral and bilateral engagements with our development partners, African neighbours and other African countries so as to enhance social and political stability and accelerate our economic growth. We have maintained excellent relations with many countries and received cooperation particularly from the governments of the United Kingdom , the United States of America , Nigeria , China , Guinea , Liberia , Ghana , Libya and many others. These excellent relations have brought numerous benefits to our country.

28. I have joined President Lansana Conte of Guinea and President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf of Liberia in a number of Mano-River Union summits to resolve outstanding issues concerning our three states. I wish to state here that the issue of Yenga has almost been resolved. It is now only a matter of time before Guinean troops withdraw from the area.

29. Honourable Members, I am glad to report the official opening of the Mano River Union Bridge , which confirms the existing excellent relations between Sierra Leone and Liberia .

#### Peace Corps

30. Honorable members, I am pleased to inform you that a Peace Corp evaluation mission is currently in Sierra Leone to discuss with us the return of the Peace Corp to our country after over thirty years of absence. It is now almost certain that the Peace Corp will reopen their office in Sierra Leone in September this year and will be here to help in our developmental efforts specifically in the areas of manpower needs and training.

#### GOOD GOVERNANCE

31. The history of governance in Sierra Leone has been characterized by frequent military coups and more recently, by a devastating rebel war. Good Governance is the ability of government to formulate and implement public policies, to respond to the basic needs of the people and to conduct public affairs in a transparent and accountable manner. It is therefore the most cherished entity in the political vision of Sierra Leoneans and is considered to be the most effective means of restoring stability to the country and ensuring that the country does not revert to chaos and violence. Consequently, my Government, in close collaboration with the International Community, NGOs, bilateral and multilateral partners, embarked upon rebuilding a democratic political system, improving the legal system, combating corruption, promoting human rights and enhancing grass roots participation in national development.

This was to be achieved by giving the people greater opportunities for wider participation in governance through Strengthening Local Government and decentralization, reforming the Public and Justice Sectors and fighting Corruption.

32. Pervasive corruption at all levels of public life for decades, has been a major obstacle to the rapid political, economic and social advancement of the country. Left unchecked by past governments, it had led to the debilitating situation wherein public officials could not distinguish between public and private interest. Public office for them was nothing more than a means for accumulating and amassing wealth. This unpatriotic parasitic attitude was found in its crudest form in the Creole saying 'usai den tie cow nar dae e dae eat grass', literally translated, 'wherever one finds oneself employed, is where one is naturally entitled to enrich oneself'.

33. My Government immediately set up the Unit for Monitoring, Transparency and Accountability (UMAT), which became a precursor of the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC). My Government, with assistance from DFID set up the Anti-Corruption Commission through an Act of Parliament. Its extensive mandate provides for the prevention of corruption within clearly defined policies and guidelines for fighting corruption. The Commission and its mandate have been reviewed and an expatriate judge and expatriate prosecutors have been provided to fast track the prosecution and trial of cases of corruption.

34. To limit further opportunities for corruption, Government has introduced the following measures:

- " Passage of the Government Budgeting and Accountability Act, 2004 which ensures transparent and participatory preparation and execution of the budget;
- " Passage of the Public Procurement Act, 2004 which removes the opportunity for corruption in the procurement process;
- " Implementation of a Public Expenditure Tracking Surveys (PETS) which ensures that goods and services are actually delivered to the target beneficiary;
- " Implementation of the Integrated Financial Management Information Systems (IFMS).

35. Far too much emphasis has been put on the prosecution of high profile individuals as a means of fighting corruption as if no high profile individuals have ever been prosecuted for corruption. As a matter of fact, we have indeed prosecuted several high profile individuals including Ministers and Court of Appeal Judges. While I accept this because of the powerful message it sends to the public about the seriousness with which Government views corruption, I believe that preventive measures such as public education, institutional and policy reforms as outlined above are a necessary and effective complement in tackling corruption on a national scale. There is already evidence that this is having a positive impact.

#### Local Government

36. The political and financial decentralised system of Government that existed at independence was progressively dismantled culminating in a highly centralised regime that undermined the effective functioning of local government. The concentration of power and resources in the capital

city, Freetown tended to deprive the rural population of infrastructure, education and health care. This situation gave rise to deep-rooted corruption, violation of human rights and above all, the exclusion and marginalization and near destruction of rural Sierra Leone .

37. The restoration of local governance was therefore, a key factor for post-war recovery and poverty reduction. To devolve power to local communities, Government formulated a new Local Government Policy and enacted the accompanying legislation on Local Government, "The Local Government Act 2004". The Decentralization Secretariat was put in place to coordinate the devolution process as well as to provide logistical support to local government administrations. A decentralised system of local Government was established with re-oriented roles and responsibilities, which made them more responsive to the present realities of the Sierra Leonean situation.

38. Since the enactment of the Local Government Act in 2004, Local Government elections have been held in all of the 19 Local Councils the first, since the suspension of District Councils by the APC Government 30 years ago. Chieftaincy elections were subsequently held immediately after the general election to fill 63 vacant chieftaincies. The devolution process is on schedule and over 475 councilors have been elected.

39. The reactivation of Local Government has brought back government closer to the people, created more opportunities for participatory democracy and community driven development.

#### The Public Sector.

40. I assumed office at a time when morale among the cadre of the public service was at its lowest ebb. Following years of conflict that was preceded by a succession of unaccountable military regimes and a notoriously corrupt one-party dictatorship, the public service had virtually collapsed. The immediate challenge to my government included reconstituting and motivating the public workforce for the task of national development.

41. At the time I took office, salaries were so low that some government clerks took home no more than four thousand Leones per month. My first move was therefore to conduct a poverty survey one of whose recommendations was that no one should be paid a salary less than Le21.000 per month. We then passed the Minimum Wage Act making it a criminal offence to pay any worker less than that amount. Our intention was to be able to peg salaries to a living wage index so that salaries and pensions would be adjusted according to increases in the cost of living. Regrettably, this exercise could not be implemented because the data base kept at the Secretariat Building was destroyed when the rebels invaded Freetown and burnt down that building. The Government has now taken measures to rebuild the data base so that work can continue on this exercise.

42. As a result of collaborative efforts with the World Bank, UNDP and DFID, management and functional reviews have been conducted on selected key ministries, the Cabinet Secretariat has been strengthened, new personnel regulations incorporating a code of ethics and a performance appraisal system have been finalized and staff rationalisation instituted

43. In order to improve performance and motivate the Civil Service, I set up a Presidential Commission on the Civil Service whose recommendations led to the establishment of a Senior Executive Service which is to be implemented soon. Its main purpose is to establish a structured and recognized public sector management cadre to fill the higher non-political positions in government so as to strengthen the long-term effectiveness and competence of the management levels of the civil service. The Senior Executive Service will serve as the engine of the civil service and will consist of highly experienced, trained and well-motivated corps of civil servants recruited on the basis of merit and rewarded on the basis of performance.

#### Justice and the Judiciary

44. Many of the ills of our society were blamed on the lack of justice particularly for the weak and poor. It is also well known that there could be no sustainable human development where there is no justice and where the basic human rights of the citizens are trampled. Reform of the Justice Sector is therefore indispensable for the promotion of the rule of law, the protection of Human Rights, delivery of justice, good governance and economic and social progress. The efforts of my Government to reform the Justice Sector have been supported by a number of Donor interventions notably UNDP, UNAMSIL, DFID and the Commonwealth. UNAMSIL and UNCIVIPOL have been involved in Human Rights training and a Bill for the establishment of a Human Rights Commission has been enacted and the Commission set up. UNICEF is undertaking the strengthening of the Juvenile Justice System in Sierra Leone . Furthermore, my government has appointed Justices of the Peace in order to address severe manpower shortages and to ensure the functioning of the courts in the districts and the chiefdoms to address minor cases.

45. We have now held two general and presidential elections and one local council election that were not only free and fair but devoid of any violence. These elections were also highly acclaimed by both local and international observers. We have also established the Political Parties Registration Commission which registers political parties and makes rules and regulations to ensure that political parties adhere to democratic principles and practices.

46. As I have always said, elections should be regarded as a peaceful and friendly contest. If we could hold General Elections barely four months after the war had been declared officially ended in an atmosphere that has been acclaimed as free, fair and non-violent, there is no reason why our forthcoming elections could not be just as free, fair and non-violent. This is my plea to all contestants. Let us show the world that we have come a long way on the road to democracy and have now left behind us that history of electoral fraud, violence and intimidation.

47. Let us follow the example that Dr. Karefa-Smart and I set when he and I went up to Fourah Bay College to diffuse a potentially explosive situation in 1996 by jointly addressing the students and dissuading them from engaging in any disorderly behaviour.

## The Media

48 Our Government has always recognized the significant role the media plays in our society through the transmission of information and its potential for promoting and safeguarding democracy. We have therefore taken measures to create an enabling environment for the operation of the media, a factor which has given rise to the phenomenal growth in the number of Newspapers and radio stations since we came into office. As at last count, there were close to 60 newspapers and 39 radio stations. 32 of these radio stations are privately owned whilst 7 are public. Newspapers on the other hand, are practically all private. This is a far cry from the paltry 14 newspapers and a handful of radio stations when we assumed office. It is also noteworthy that during our ten years in office, no publishing house has been attacked or vandalized by government agencies nor any journalist detained for criticizing the government. As a matter of fact, our government seems to have empowered the critics by regularly advertising in their newspapers.

49. I am therefore appealing to editors and proprietors to research lead thoroughly and to desist from publishing unsubstantiated stories especially where they needlessly impinge on the character and integrity of innocent citizens. They should project a more positive image of our country like the American and European media do for their countries.

## EDUCATION

50. We all have our dreams for the things we love. My dream for Education is of a system that provides for and meets the needs of society. A system that does not only recognize the rights of all but also ensures the provision of opportunities for each individual to realize his or her potential. All Sierra Leoneans should be able to contribute meaningfully to the development of their community and hence the nation. That was the thrust of our Educational policies.

51. In order to achieve our dream, we had to address and overcome the challenges that confronted us. In this endeavour, we as a government, took the lead and commenced addressing the critical issue of getting our adult population to be able to read and write so that they can no more be fooled by the 'conjurers of words'. From a literacy rate of 21% in 1995, we have in less than 10 years almost doubled the literacy rate to 39% by the time of the 2004 Population Census.

52. However, an illiterate adult is as a consequence of being an illiterate child. My Government therefore embarked on advocacy and sensitisation of parents to allow their children or wards attend school. The number of children in primary schools increased from a mere 400,000 in 1996 to over 1.2 million by the end of my term, a three fold increase. What a phenomenal gain! We demonstrated our compassion and desire to provide access to education for all by developing transitional programs such as the Complimentary Rapid Education for Primary Schools (CREPS) to provide opportunities to the over-aged that missed out on formal schooling. This is because unlike the previous APC government, we see education not as a privilege but as a right that every individual should have an opportunity to exercise.

53. The gains we have made have been at a price - but a price borne by this government on behalf of our people. Realizing the depth of poverty caused by our decade of conflict we took the decision to reduce the financial burden on parents by:

- ¢ Paying tuition fees for all pupils at the Primary level;
- ¢ Paying examination fees for all students in public and private schools taking the NPSE, BECE and WASSCE;
- ¢ Providing free core textbooks and teaching/learning materials for children in primary school;
- ¢ Providing free junior secondary education for girls in the Eastern and Northern Regions and
- ¢ Introducing a primary school feeding programme in districts with special needs.

54. In furtherance of this dream, my government successfully integrated funding from both the World Bank (WB) and the African Development Bank (ADB) into a project that is providing opportunities for many that would never have had the opportunity of accessing formal education of quality. This project now carries the household name SABABU.

55. Along with interventions from my government and other funding agents, over eight hundred primary schools have been rehabilitated or constructed since 1996. Today, even remote villages can boast of a proper primary school with teachers. The drive to achieve the desired teacher-pupil ratio led to a rise in the recruitment of teachers from 17,000 in 1996 to 33,000 in 2007 although some are not professionally qualified. However, this latter group has an opportunity to improve their teaching skills by registering in a Distance Education Programme. In addition to the provision of teaching and learning materials, the creation of School Management Committees now gives a sense of ownership of schools to communities, a factor impacting positively on the quality of service delivery.

56. Honourable members, as part of our effort to consolidate our tremendous gains, I am pleased to announce that as from September, at the start of the 2007/2008 academic year, primary education will be not only free but also compulsory.

57. As a people, we should cherish the intellect of every Sierra Leonean, be it male or female. We therefore must ensure that our female folks are given every opportunity to reach the optimum of their natural potential by providing formal education and training for them. In this regard, we currently provide fees, uniforms, textbooks, etc. to girls in the Northern and Eastern Regions who pass the National Primary School Exams (NPSE). This support has resulted in a 300 % increase in the number of girls accessing junior secondary schools in the two regions in the four years of operation of the programme.

58. Mr. Speaker, Honorable Members, I am pleased to announce that girls in the Southern Region and Western Area are to receive similar support on passing the NPSE beginning September 2007. We are convinced that these steps will contribute significantly to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) for education.

59. Yes, we were known as the "Athens of West Africa". Yet 46 out of 149 chiefdoms of our country never had a secondary school in their history. My government is currently engaged in putting up at least one junior secondary school in each of these 46 chiefdoms of which 25 are completed and functioning. Currently, we operate - number of secondary schools as against -number of secondary schools in 1996.

60. My government has also completed a Country Status Report which is a thorough and complete diagnostic analysis of the current status of our educational provisions.

Based on this report, we have been able to produce a 10 year Education Sector Plan that has received world-wide acclaim and made it possible for Sierra Leone to be the first 'post-conflict state' to receive funds from the Education For All - Fast Track Initiative Steering Committee in support of its plan for primary education. I am proud to say that the Minister will make copies of both documents available to you. It is this Sector Plan that subsequent governments and all donors will use to guide activities and interventions in the education sector in Sierra Leone for the next ten years.

61. In readiness for the groundswell coming through secondary education, my government has put the foundation for accreditation, validation and quality output in the tertiary sector.

62. After a hundred and eighty years of higher education in Sierra Leone , only a single university existed to provide leadership and expertise for the development of the country. My government recognized that the scope of course options and the numbers graduating would not allow Sierra Leone to develop at the pace required. We therefore legislated a new University Act that paved the way for the establishment of a second public University. It was indeed a happy day when degrees were awarded by Njala University in Bo Town; the first time a university convocation was held in the provinces in Sierra Leone .

63. Furthermore, the creation of the National Council for Technical and Vocational Awards (NCTVA) and the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) ensure the quality of our tertiary institutions and the parity of their output especially that of our newly constituted Polytechnics.

64. Thus, in Sierra Leone today, irrespective of age, gender, tribe or creed, a man can proudly graduate in carpentry, automobile engineering or medical laboratory technology with the same pomp and pageantry as someone receiving a Higher Teachers Certificate or a degree from our Polytechnics. Such is the scope of programmes and study modes on offer that now civil servants and private sector workers are able to compete for space for courses in our tertiary Institutions.

65. I am proud to note that notwithstanding the period of carnage, we have been able to guide my people to appreciate the value of education, be it in a rural or urban setting, to the extent that we now truly strive towards the adage ONE PEOPLE ONE COUNTRY.

66. With these achievements, we are now in a better position to attack and defeat our three biggest enemies - poverty, ignorance and corruption. It is my considered opinion that with the developments happening in the educational sector, we can move beyond hope and be assured of a very bright future for Sierra Leoneans in the not too distant future.

## HEALTH AND SANITATION

67. On assuming office and in light of the devastation in the health sector during the rebel war, I was determined not only to restore medical services but also to develop an efficient and affordable health care system that will be available to all Sierra Leoneans in all parts of the country.

68. As was the case in many of the sectors of development, government inherited a deplorable public healthcare delivery system in 1996. Like their counterparts in other public sectors, morale

among healthcare workers was at the lowest ebb. Hospitals and clinics, some dating to the colonial period, lacked even the most basic of equipment and facilities. Infant mortality and unnecessary deaths from malaria were at an all time high; a situation made much worse by the rebel war which did not spare even medical facilities from destruction. The alarming prevalence and spread of communicable diseases such as HIV/AIDS was also a cause for concern.

69. As a government, we were determined to meet the challenges posed by the health sector head on as good health and well being are invaluable requisites for every country particularly a developing one like Sierra Leone . Towards this end, government embarked upon the implementation of a number of policies to meet these challenges including the provision of basic health care services, free of charge, to children under five years of age, all school-going children, pregnant women and breast-feeding mothers.

70. Working with international development partners and local agencies such as NACSA, the government rehabilitated existing buildings and constructed new health facilities to ensure that every chiefdom has at least one health centre. Government continued also to strengthen the financial management system in all health institutions so as to enhance accountability, transparency as well as the fiscal decentralization of the public healthcare system from the central government to district and local councils. Under the District Hospital Boards Act 2003, local communities were empowered to take control of the management and delivery of health care services in their localities. In 2002, the government established a National HIV/AIDS Secretariat to combat the growing spread of the disease. To further underline the premium that I placed on combating and halting the spread of the disease among Sierra Leoneans, the National HIV/AIDS Secretariat was placed under my direct supervision.

71. As I prepare to leave office, I can look back with satisfaction at the progress that has been made in the health sector. Some of these achievements include the following:

- The construction and rehabilitation of referral hospitals including: Connaught , P.C.M.H., Children's Hospitals, and the Kissy Mental Home in the Western Area.
- The major reconstruction and extension of hospitals in Kono, Kailahun, Kabala and Kambia in the provinces, following the conclusion of the war.
- The construction of a new modern referral hospital with all facilities in Makeni;
- In 2002, only 16 government hospitals were functioning fully in the country. That number has now increased to 24.
- The devolution of Primary Health Care responsibilities to the local councils as of 2005, which enhances the accessibility of healthcare to the general population;
- Rehabilitation of devastated Peripheral Health Units (PHUs). As of 2006 about 800 PHUs are providing medical services to people in the rural areas, a significant increase from the original 350 in 2002.
- Significant strides have also been made to reduce morbidity and mortality attributed to malaria, formerly a major killer among the population, a factor which gave Sierra Leone a low rating in the UN Human Development Index. The percentage of Children that sleep under Insecticide Treated Bed Nets (ITN) has increased from about 2% in 2000 to over 51% at present. Malaria is no longer the scourge that it used to be thanks to new treatments and preventive measures.

72. I can now go into retirement with the full satisfaction that our efforts and interventions in the health sector have not gone in vain. The general population of Sierra Leone is a lot healthier today than when I assumed office in 1996.

## THE ECONOMY

73. The first half of the 1990s was characterised by serious economic and social difficulties. Economic growth was negative, inflation was over 30 per cent, government's overall fiscal position was in severe imbalance and the country's international reserves were less than US\$10 million covering less than twelve weeks of imports. The financial sector was weak with severe cash shortage that resulted in rationing payments to customers.

74. The legacy of the war and decades of mismanagement left the economy in shambles. Key standard indicators attest to this.

75. The return to constitutionality in 1996, witnessed the beginning of remarkable developments in the socio-economic arena. The macro economic gains which followed the restoration of democracy were however, disrupted by a military interregnum from May 1997 to March 1998 with grave consequences. Real GDP growth plummeted to minus 17.6 percent, Gross Domestic Investment as a percentage of GDP fell to minus 2.4 percent and the public finance of the country worsened with government's overall fiscal deficit rising further from 6.9 percent of GDP in 1996 to minus 7.5 percent in 1997.

76. The recovery of the economy, following the restoration of constitutional government in March 1998, was adversely affected by the escalation of the rebel war and the subsequent invasion of the capital city in January 1999. Government did not however relent and was able to record significant progress towards a return to normalcy and economic rejuvenation.

### Creating the Enabling Environment

77. In order to provide the enabling environment to facilitate economic and social transformation, the highest priority was accorded to the creation of a secure environment that enabled the free and unhindered movement of people, goods and services across the country. The first step in this regard, and as was stated earlier, was the implementation of the Disarmament Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) Programme and the restructuring, retraining and equipping of the army and the police within the framework of a comprehensive national security policy.

78. The second priority focused on enhancing efficient budgetary management, reducing the debt burden and augmenting public expenditure in the social sectors, education, health and infrastructure.

79. A third priority was improving access to basic education and health care and enhancing income and employment opportunities.

## Economic Reconstruction

80. In pursuit of the key objectives of removing distortions in the economy, for achieving rapid sustainable growth and equitable social and economic development, wide ranging structural and institutional reforms have been put in place since 2004. With the support of development partners, the key initiatives in this area were the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF) arrangement with the IMF; the World Bank's third Economic Recovery and Rehabilitation Credit (ERRLIII); the ten year Poverty Reduction Framework Arrangement (PRFA) with the United Kingdom and Ireland; the European Union's post-conflict Budgetary Support and the PRSP, a multi-donor arrangement. In addition to the underpinning quantitative targets, performance under these programmes was largely assessed by progress made in the following broad areas of reforms: Peace and security, good governance, public service reform, strengthening fiscal and public finance management systems and promoting private sector development.

81. The results from these policy initiatives have been outstanding. On 18th December 2006, Sierra Leone became the twenty-first country to reach completion point under the Enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative. The World Bank's International Development Agency (IDA) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) decided that the country had made "sufficiently good progress towards sustained macroeconomic stability" and thus became eligible for debt relief from multilateral, bilateral and commercial creditors to the tune of approximately US\$994 million in nominal terms. The additional funds provided to the Government through debt relief, would be used to fund development programmes under the country's Poverty Reduction Strategy.

82. The macro indicators have also improved significantly, compared with the situation in 1996/97 when the Government assumed office. For example real GDP, which had plummeted to minus 17.6 per cent in 1997, is now estimated at 7.5 per cent in 2006, higher than the average annual African growth of 5.2 per cent. Inflation rate, which skyrocketed to 66.9 per cent by the close of 1997, is now 11.6 per cent in 2007 rising from a single digit of 9 per cent in December 2006. The official exchange rate of the Leone to the US Dollar which has experienced massive depreciation of over 50 per cent in 1997 has in 2007 stabilised around Le2, 950 to the Dollar in the official market. and Le3,000 in the parallel market. The banking system now has enough dollars for business transactions.

83. The country's gross international reserves, which stood at less than US\$20 million when my Government assumed office, now stand around US\$200 million enabling us to meet most of our international payment obligations.

## Financial Sector

84. The banking system has remained very stable, largely on account of the critical evaluation of new entrants into the industry and the effective supervision and monitoring of existing institutions by the Central Bank. The number of operational commercial banks is now eight and Commercial bank branches have increased from twenty-two in 2003 to thirty eight in 2007.

85. The banks have also introduced new products and services to meet the needs of customers including on-line banking, mobile banking, local personal money transfer (Salone link), salaried account loan scheme, and School Fees Savings Plan Facility. The number of deposit accounts stood at 168,544 as in 30th September 2006 and presently over 200,000 accounts. The challenge here is enormous and banks are encouraged to tailor their products to bring more customers into the banking system, especially the large number of people operating in the informal sector.

#### Rural Financial Services

86. The need to enhance rural financial intermediation and mobilise domestic resources, remains a major preoccupation of government. Under the supervision of the Central Bank, four community banks are in operation with two additional banks to follow soon. The community banks have made considerable progress in increasing their outreach, and providing demand-driven services to the rural communities, in which they operate. They have continued to focus their activities on the mobilisation of financial resources from individuals, institutions and donor agencies for financing economic activities in the rural communities, as well as for the provision of microfinance loans to low income groups and small business operators in these communities.

87. Furthermore, to reinforce the Community Banking Scheme and ensure that financial intermediation reaches a wide spectrum of rural communities throughout the country, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), through the Rural Finance and Community Improvement Programme (RFCIP), has agreed to provide support to the existing community banks by strengthening their capital base to enable them enhance their outreach. IFAD has also agreed to support the community banking system through the creation of ten new community banks throughout the country and to support the creation of an apex institution for the supervision and regulation of the community banks.

88. The growth of foreign exchange bureaux has also been significant with their number rising from forty-six in 2005 to fifty nine in 2007.

#### Finance Sector Governance

89. The global fight against money laundering and terrorism has been seriously taken up by Government. An Anti-Money Laundering Law was enacted in 2005 and the Bank of Sierra Leone is playing a key role in the implementation of this law through a committee of stakeholders. The committee has approved Currency Reporting Forms for completion by people travelling to and from Sierra Leone who are in possession of currencies or negotiable instruments in excess of US\$10,000.

#### Fiscal Sector Reforms

90. To help mobilise much needed revenue and streamline fiscal management, government has instituted a series of measures:

- o To strengthen tax administration a new Income Tax Act came into effect in April 2000.
- o Government budget is now prepared within a Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF)

predicated on poverty reduction, with the Ministry of Finance issuing MTEF guidelines to all Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) detailing the processes involved in identifying sector strategies and prioritising programmes geared towards achieving the objective of poverty reduction.

- o In order to establish a legal and regulatory framework with clear definitions of financial management and accountability and to enhance decentralised budget execution, an Integrated Financial Management Information Systems (IFMIS) has been established with support from the World Bank under the Institutional Reform and Capacity Building (IRCB) project.

- o To enhance transparency and accountability in the management and use of public resources, Public Expenditure Tracking Surveys (PETS) are being implemented by Government. Several rounds of these surveys have been concluded and the implementation of the recommendations contained in the PETS Action Plan has enhanced transparency and accountability in the management of public resources.

- o To strengthen institutional capacity in the various revenue departments and facilitate revenue mobilisation, the National Revenue Authority (NRA) was established in 2003. The NRA has succeeded in fully integrating the Customs and Income Tax Departments into one structure.

- o A stock exchange market will soon be in full operation. This will facilitate investment in the private sector generally as well as enable investors to search for funds, buy equity in listed companies and accelerate the privatization process.

91. In spite of the significant strides that have been made since the famous "War Don Don" declaration in January 2002, enormous challenges still confront our nation's post conflict economic reconstruction. A major challenge is to maintain a stable macro-economic environment that contributes to high and sustainable growth as well as equitable distribution of the benefits of growth. High economic (GDP) growth by itself is a necessary but not sufficient contributor to the well being of the population. Growth must result in job creation, improving education and health delivery services, adequate housing, sustainable energy supply and adequate socio-economic infrastructure. In short, the economy has done remarkably well in terms of the high rate of economic growth, low inflation, stable exchange rate and the availability of foreign exchange for business transactions as well as for meeting our international commitments.

## TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT

92. The evolving world scenario by 1996 lends credence to the belief that it is trade and not aid that will provide the necessary momentum to development if we are to achieve the millennium development goals. During the past ten years, trade and investment received added impetus. The link between the two has become inseparable. Recognizing that the much hoped-for turning point following the signature of the WTO agreement in 1995 is yet to be realized and that the disparity between incomes and the welfare of our people compared with others in the advanced countries was still widening by leaps and bounds, we turned our attention to introducing domestic policies that will make us resilient against external shocks. At the same time, we continued to articulate our position regarding the issues on the multilateral trade agenda such as subsidies, trade in goods, competitions and tariffs.

93. Firstly, we concluded a Sierra Leone trade policy with the help of UNCTAD and other UN agencies which made us conform to a number of international best practices. Furthermore, with the support of the Foreign Investment Advisory Services Section of the World Bank, we developed an investment code with incentives that are transparent, general and consistent. The Act incorporates measures such as: equal entry, settlement of disputes, and no appropriation without compensation. It also eliminates discretions which hitherto bred corruption. The aim was to provide greater employment opportunity and reduce levels of poverty. Of particular significance, was the creation of a "onestop shop" to facilitate trade.

94 Our trade and investment diversification measures opened our market and the country as a whole to other non-traditional investment and trade partners. We utilized the preferences given to us to enhance and widen our markets. Our participation in regional integration efforts has paid us significant dividends in addition to benefits acquired through effective participation in ECOWAS initiatives spelt out in various protocols, for example free movement of people and goods. We also organized a number of successful regional and international trade fairs.

95. The Dual-Citizenship Act that was passed recently should now encourage investors from the Diaspora to invest in Sierra Leone - an advantage evident in the development of Ghana and Nigeria . In particular, I want to see Sierra Leoneans come together to establish investment outlets and create attractive incentive packages in order to take advantage of the vast opportunities that exist in every conceivable sector. By liberalizing our trade, we have accepted what I consider a neutral concept which can be used to great advantage to achieve beneficial results for our country. This will depend to a large extent, on our ability to harness our resources in the best possible way.

96. The policies we have embarked on should now give Sierra Leoneans the opportunity to challenge themselves for the future. They should provide a feeling of self confidence and a sense of well-being to face the future. In particular, the significant achievements of political stability and better macroeconomic performance have led to economic growth and increased investment The investment incentives that have been offered and efforts at improving infrastructure are making Sierra Leone an attractive place for foreign investment. The available raw materials as evident in the discoveries of numerous minerals of varying qualities and quantities, our fisheries resources, our forestry products, the efforts made at improving the quality of education evident in the high proportion of skilled labor etc. These and other factors can continue to make significant contributions to our national development. With all of these, I can look back with pride and smile at our success.

#### Tourism

97. Tourism is an activity that helps to create employment opportunities for our people. We have all the natural resources. What we need is for investors to come and assist in developing the infrastructure. Therefore, we now look forward to Sierra Leoneans to come and invest in this highly profitable industry. The Government is helping to buildup the necessary infrastructure.

98. Tourism cannot thrive well in an insecure environment. It is a commodity every country can offer; the difference is in the quality of its service and the friendliness of its people.

In this regard I have no doubt that we as Sierra Leoneans are acclaimed to be friendly and that we will continue to demonstrate this virtue in order to attract tourist visitors to this country.

#### Dual Citizenship for Sierra Leoneans

99. For years Sierra Leoneans in the Diaspora possessing the citizenship of other countries have been concerned that they could not at the same time become citizens of their own country. With the enactment of the amendment to the Citizenship Act of 1973, the Government has finally responded favorably to the clarion call from those Sierra Leoneans for dual citizenship. This is considered one of the most far reaching pieces of legislation in the life of the present parliament.

100. The rights of dual citizenship carry both constitutional and moral responsibilities. These include a responsibility to make positive and useful contributions to the advancement, progress and well being of the community and the nation at large. Once more, I would like to make a special appeal to our brothers and sisters of the Sierra Leonean Diaspora to invest at home. It is known that the booming economies of China , India , Mexico and the Philippines are fired by remittances from their Diaspora

#### AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SECURITY

101. Sierra Leone is naturally an agricultural country as it is well endowed with vast arable land and abundant water resources. Unfortunately for several years, we have not been able to exploit our natural resources to our advantage. When I became president, I realized that as a nation, we were unable to produce our staple food, rice, in sufficient quantities to feed ourselves and therefore had to spend huge sums of foreign exchange to import food items that could be locally produced. Agriculture plays a pivotal role in the economy accounting for more than 70 percent of employment and is also a major source of foreign exchange earnings. It provides incomes, basic foods and subsistence livelihoods for a large segment of our population.

102. We therefore decided as a government, to strengthen the agricultural sector within the context of an overall programme to reduce poverty, enhance the capacity of individual farmers to undertake income-generating activities and develop our agricultural potential for domestic consumption and export. This required significant investment in agriculture and a strong commitment on the part of the political leadership.

103. The first action of my Government was to create a safe and stable macroeconomic environment in which agricultural production can be undertaken and sustained. This involved the rehabilitation and establishment of new institutions to improve the level and quality of agricultural production. Government therefore formulated attractive incentive packages to support the agricultural sector. These include:

- The procurement of locally produced rice for institutional feeding from farmers;
- The procurement of seed rice directly from farmers themselves to maximize returns on farming;
- The provision of duty waiver facilities on farm machinery and eventually on farm inputs.
- The provision of farm machinery free of cost to the farmers, for example, tractors, power tillers, threshers and cassava graters, and oil pressers free of cost to deserving farmers;

- The opening of (7) Rural Banks to assist farmers in securing loans and plans for opening more banks in the immediate future to make this service available to more farmers.

104. The ten-year civil war was fought primarily in the rural areas where eighty-five percent of inhabitants were farmers or fishermen earning their livelihood from subsistence and small-scale cash-crop farming. As a result, agricultural production dropped remarkably low and the livelihoods of those dependent on the agricultural sector took a plunge. We therefore had to take action to contain the declining trend in agriculture and embark on measures that will enhance productivity. Firstly, government extended a number of benefits to farmers to help meet post-war demands for food production such as:

- Provision of seed rice, fertilizers, oil palm, cashew seedlings and ginger seedlets, tractors and power tillers, pesticides and agro-processing equipment and facilities such as threshers, rice mills, harvesters, drying floors, stores etc.
- In addition to these direct physical input support to farmers, my government and development partners also supported the capacity-building of farmers by establishing: 1,200 Farmer Field Schools, 500 Agricultural Business Units (ABUs); and supported the establishment of the National Association of Farmers of Sierra Leone.
- The introduction of the Presidential Initiative on Cassava based on a commodity chain approach, aimed at commercializing cassava. The initiative has also helped farmers to process cassava into chips, starch, and flour for both the domestic and international markets.

105. Through the collaboration with donors in the international community, my Government implemented several development projects to support agriculture such as:

- The rehabilitation and Community Based Poverty Reduction Project;
- The Sustainable Seed Development Project;
- Diversified Agricultural Production Project;
- Capacity Building for Oil Palm Production, Processing and Marketing Project
- Support to Strengthening the Veterinary Services
- Commencement of the Interim Emergency Assistance for the Prevention, Rapid Detection and Response to Avian Influenza Epidemic.

106. We continue to receive support from the multilateral banks providing food security funding for the implementation of several projects both current and in the pipeline worth a little over US \$100 Million. These projects include activities in agriculture, food security, rural development and poverty alleviation. They are well spread throughout the country.

107. In addition, my Government has been increasing subventions to the agricultural and food security sector rising from 2.6 percent of GDP in 2002 to 5.8 percent in 2007. This level of funding has enabled the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security to increase input supplies to farmers in order to increase production levels.

108. The National Association of Farmers of Sierra Leone (NAFSL), the NGO Community and Civil Society groups are also playing a vital role towards the food security programme. My government equally appreciates these efforts. Thus by the end of the fifth year of the food security drive, we as a nation should be proud of our record because much has been achieved so far.

109. The aforementioned interventions into the agricultural sector during my eleven-year stewardship have resulted in the following outstanding achievements:

- The production of rice, the nation's staple food, increased from 422,065 metric tons in 2002 to over 758, 800 metric tons in 2005. These production levels translate into national rice self-sufficiency levels of 85% in 2006. With the exception of Freetown , most of the districts in the country, for the first time in the history of our nation, may achieve over 100% in rice self-sufficiency.
- During my presidency, the production of cassava, sweet potato and groundnuts have increased steadily. Specifically, cassava increased from 1.1 million metric tons in 2003/2004 to 1.8 million metric tons in 2004/2005. The production of sweet potato increased from 84,446 metric tons in 2003/2004 to 153, 196 metric tons in 2004/2005. Groundnut production increased from 70, 500 metric tons in 2003/2004 to 91,128 metric tons in 2004/2005.
- This trend can also be found in livestock production. Under the restocking program undertaken by Government and other development partners, cattle increased from 200,000 heads in 2004 to 250,000 heads in 2005, whilst goats and sheep increased from 350,000 to 450,000 and from 300,000 to 375,000 respectively.
- One of the greatest achievements in the agricultural sector has been in the area of export earnings. Revenue from Cocoa increased from \$5, 659,100 in 2005 to \$6, 841, 652 in the first half of 2006. The value of exports of cashew, cashew nuts, sugar, ginger and groundnuts to other countries have also significantly increased. An even more remarkable achievement is the export of ginger to Europe after a break of 22 years with seedlings obtained from the People's Republic of China and the export of sugar to the Europe for the first time.
- Recently, some quantities of improved rice varieties, worth US\$2.2 million dollars were exported to Liberia to support their food security programme. Once our own internal needs have been met, we would like to be able to export food and other agricultural products to other countries as a way of increasing the income of farmers and bringing in much needed foreign exchange into the country. This will also help to sustain the food security we now enjoy. It will also help us achieve our objective of creating wealth for the nation.

110. Mr. Speaker, this is not to say that there are no problems confronting the food security programme. Farming is still constrained by underdeveloped infrastructure, shortage of input supplies and farm machinery. Credit facilities are negligible and banks charge prohibitive interest rates. The extension services are still weak and agro-processing and marketing facilities defunct. The HIV/AIDS scourge threatens to be a major limiting factor to agricultural productivity. The Avian flu problem still hovers over the region. One of the greatest concerns to my Government is how to sustain the levels of agricultural production that we have achieved so far and expect to achieve in the future. We would like to call on our partners again, particularly FAO, to work with us to create the capacity for us to sustain these efforts.

111. To me, agricultural intensification and the diversification of our diet have provided the best opportunity to achieve sustainable food security and poverty reduction. Through this measure, we can take advantage of areas with high agricultural potentials to increase our earnings from agriculture and protect soil fertility and conserve the natural resource base. Obviously, this will require higher investments in factors of production like good infrastructure such as feeder roads and small to medium scale irrigation, reliable input supply and extension services, accessible and

reliable marketing services and attractive financial rewards to farmers. We will need to modernize agriculture while at the same time strengthen the smallholder farmers who are relatively more efficient in using resources. Whilst we appreciate the assistance from the Government of China, FAO and IFAD, we would like to draw their attention to this particular focus of our Government in the growth and development of the agricultural sector.

112. I believe strongly that in a lifetime, all these things are achievable if we could invest more in agriculture in terms of resources and efforts. Therefore, I will repeat my appeal to all of you to subscribe more to our collective goal of sustaining food security and national prosperity. The private sector should take the lead in this matter. Government will always endeavor to provide the necessary space and encouragement for this purpose.

113. From the foregoing, it can be noted that my government laid the appropriate foundation for a strong agricultural sector. When completed, agricultural projects initiated during my stewardship hold the potential to boost significantly the level of food production in the country and keep the nation on track in maintaining my pledge that no Sierra Leonean will from henceforth go to bed hungry.

#### MINING AND MINERAL RESOURCES

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members,

114. As you are all aware, the mining sector and its mineral resources have always provided the mainstay of our economy in terms of foreign exchange earnings and employment. At its pinnacle, the sector provided 80% of foreign exchange. At the outset of the rebel war however, the sector became a major casualty as the RUF invaded, seized and plundered the mining areas leading to the era of the notorious blood diamonds which were widely used to fuel the war through purchases of arms and hiring of mercenaries.

115. On assuming office, my first task was to restore the mining sector to its preeminent position as a foreign exchange earner and provider of jobs including the expansion of the mineral ore base and venturing into new areas such as petroleum exploration. A guiding principle was also the need to maximize benefits to the country and its people from these strategic mineral resources.

116. In the immediate post-conflict situation, the greatest challenge we faced was to attract and retain foreign investment particularly in the mining sector. My Government however, took proactive measures to create the enabling environment to attract such investment and succeeded in reopening the rutile and kimberlite diamond mining thus creating employment opportunities for Sierra Leoneans and income to run the government.

#### Rutile

117. Sierra Leone is the largest producer of natural rutile and the mine restarted operation in 2005 after a closure of 10 years with an investment of over US\$60 million, half of which was provided by the Government. Furthermore, the Government acquired a 30% equity in the company. It is to be noted that at the time of signing the agreement with the rutile company, Government insisted that income for the Government should change upwards as the world market price for rutile increased.

Government has now decided to review the agreement as the price of rutile has considerably risen since the signing of the agreement. DFID is helping to provide funds to pay consultant fees for the revision of the agreement accordingly.

118. The reopening of the rutile mine has created jobs for over 1000 people potentially benefiting over ten times that number. In 2006, the Company was able to export 90,000 tones of rutile for the first time in ten years and has continued to make significant investment with the hope of raising production to 210,000 tones per annum by 2008.

Bauxite and Alumina

119. The export of bauxite was restarted in 2006 after a closure of the mine in 1995. The production of bauxite from this mine is expected to be maintained at about 1.2 million tones per annum for the next ten years. Efforts are currently underway to complete exploration for bauxite in the Port Loko and Kambia Districts with a view to establishing an alumina factory in the country so as to add value to our exports. This is a new Government Mining Policy. The establishment of an alumina factory in the country will require a capital expenditure of US\$1.5 billion and create more than 4000 jobs providing increased earnings for the state. The Government is geared towards supporting industries that could add value to our minerals and massively boost our earnings from our mineral resources.

Diamonds

120. Sierra Leone has always been associated with diamonds although significant investment in the industry could only be made in the last five years because of rebel activity. With the return of stability to the country, Koidu Holdings reinvested over US\$30 million to restart operations and has produced to date, over 300,000 carats of diamonds valued at over US\$60 million. This has significantly increased Government revenue from royalties and statutory fees. The company employs over 600 people and has contributed to community development through road improvement between Kono and Tongo.

121. With the country's leading role in the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme, the value of diamonds exported from the country has increased from US\$42 million in 2002 to US\$125 million in 2006.

Iron Ore

122. The largest exploration programme undertaken since independence was done by the Sierra Leone Diamond Company (SLDC) in 2004/2005 investing over US\$20 million to carry out the first ever aeromagnetic survey of the whole of the north-east of the country. This has developed into a full-scale exploration of most of the country leading to the discovery of two potential major iron ore deposits in the Marampa and Tonkilili areas.

Gold

123. Cluff Gold, a major player in gold exploration, has invested US\$5 million in the Baomahun area in the Valunia Chiefdom, Bo District. To date, over 800,000 ounces of gold have been proven and the company is in the process of developing a mine to exploit this deposit. .

Oil

Exploration

124. One of our greatest hopes for the future as a nation, is the discovery of oil. After the exploration for oil had laid dormant for several years, there are now prospects that oil will be found in commercial quantities in the not too distant future. The first attempt to search for oil was in 1986 when Mobil and Amoco drilled two dry wells. In early 2000, TGS NOPEC approached my Government to carry out a non-exclusive seismic survey whose data is available for purchase by oil companies wanting to invest in oil exploration in our country. The MOU signed to effect this survey caused much rancour and criticism of my Government, but I am glad to report today that this survey and the subsequent one, resulted in the acquisition of over 5,500 km of data and the demarcation of 7 Blocks most of which have eventually been licensed to companies for oil exploration.

125. We have had two bid rounds, the first of which I announced on the eve of our Independence anniversary in 2002, resulted in the licensing of 4 blocks (SL4 - 7) to 3 oil companies in 2003. Of these three companies, only the Joint Venture - Repsol( Spain )/Woodside(Australia) has been able to fulfill their work obligation and to conduct a large 3D survey over the two Blocks licensed to them. The data obtained has been processed and interpreted and I recently gave audience to a delegation from the Joint Venture to apprise me of the result of their analysis.

126. I now want to report that Repsol and Woodside have discovered several prospects. However, the most promising of these straddles 2 Blocks but they are determined to start drilling it in early 2008 - probably in January. It should be noted however, that at the current worldwide high activity in oil exploration, very few ships are available for drilling. A newly built drill ship has already been hired and other arrangements are well underway to ensure that we drill this time. As oil can only be discovered by drilling, I have given instructions to allow Repsol to drill what will be our first deep water test well and indeed what could be our first oil well.

Future Prospects in the Mining Sector  
127. As a result of a High Resolution Aero Magnetic (HRAM) Survey undertaken by the Sierra Leone Diamond Company, the following possible mineral deposits have been identified:

- " Two iron ore deposits - Tonkolili and Marampa
- " Bauxite - Port Loko and Kambia
- " Primary Kimberlite deposits - Kono, Marampa, Kamakwei, Tongo and Lake Popei (Bonthe District)
- " Gold and base metal deposits-Loko Hills, Sula Mountains ,Nimini and Gori Hills

128. The Tonkolili iron ore deposit has a reserve of 120 million tones at 56% Fe (iron content) in the upper crust with a possible 4 -5 billion tones below that level. The primary kimberlite deposit identified in Marampa is a spectacular discovery which SLDC is anxious to confirm and exploit.

Auction of Government Mineral Assets by Competitive Bidding  
129. Since we assumed office, my Government has been concerned about the meager benefit that accrues to Government and the average Sierra Leonean from activities in the mining sector and the exploitation of our mineral wealth. We have often heard the statement that there is no reason why

Sierra Leone should be poor given our abundant mineral resources. Our own people have often asked the question, "Where have all our diamonds and other minerals gone? Honourable members, the answer to that question is not blowing in the wind as the song says. Rather, the answer lies with us. It is we who have to take control over the exploitation of our mineral resources and refrain from collaborating with foreigners to steal our diamonds and other assets.

130. As a measure to put Sierra Leoneans firmly in control of their mineral resources, My Government has taken a strategic decision on the advice of an eminent professor of economics from Oxford University who has given similar advice to the British Government to establish an AUCTION SCHEME to enable Government negotiate the sale or disposal of mineral assets through competitive bidding. In this way, it will be the market that would determine the value of our minerals as opposed to the individual discretionary way it has been done in the past which is open to opportunities for corruption. To be able to do this, we must first of all have an inventory of our mineral assets. We have therefore just concluded an agreement with the Henan Institute of Geological Survey of the Peoples Republic of China , an international geological survey group, to undertake this kind of survey so that we will know what types of minerals we have, where they are located, their quantity and quality. This will provide a comprehensive data base on our minerals for potential investors, banks and other lending institutions. The Sierra Leone Diamond Company has also conducted the first ever Airborne Magnetic Geophysics (HRAM) Survey of the country covering 310,000 line kilometers constituting roughly 70% of the country and has made some interesting preliminary discoveries. The various geophysical anomalies that have been identified by this survey will complement the work of the Chinese international survey team .

131. Our major achievements in the mining sector include:

- Initiation of the first ever aeromagnetic survey of the country since independence;
- Re-opened Koidu Kimberlite Mine in Kono belonging to Koidu Holdings;
- Re-opening of Rutile mine in Mobimbi, employing 1000 people in 2005 and exporting close to 10,000 metric tonnes of rutile monthly;
- Government secured 25 million Euros grant from the EU to support the activities of the Company;
- Re-opening of the bauxite mine at Mokbanji employing 400 people and exporting 100,000 metric tonnes of bauxite monthly;
- Re-activated operations at the Baomahun Gold exploration;
- Putting in place Core Minerals Policy;
- Increased diamond exports from US\$1.5 million in 1999 to US\$41 million in 2002 and over US\$125 million in 2006;
- Government initiated the Diamond Area Community Development Fund in January 2001 aimed at providing infrastructural development in diamond mining communities. To date, eleven districts have benefited from the programme with a total disbursement amounting to 9.7 billion leones.

#### Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative-EITI

132. Our mining policies are currently receiving international recognition to the extent that Sierra Leone has been invited to join the global extractive industries Initiative EITI and we became a member in Oslo in 2006.

This now makes our mining sector even more attractive to international investors. The EITI badge confers added assurance that our mining environment is secure, stable, transparent and accountable in terms of full disclosure in the public domain of revenues received from the extractive industries and the developmental activities undertaken by government from these revenues.

#### Environment/Deforestation

133. Hon Members, environmental degradation is a serious threat to our wellbeing because the interaction of man and his environment, when thrown out of balance, impacts negatively on human beings and their livelihoods. In our country, the area of greatest environmental degradation is our forests which not only remove carbon-dioxide from the air, but acts as an important controlling mechanism in water availability both in the rural and urban areas.

134. As you look around the Peninsular mountains, which were once covered by a thick layer of evergreen forests nurtured by nature over centuries, you will not fail to observe the increasing bareness of these mountains. Uncontrolled wood cutting, the burning of charcoal, incessant forest fires and the maddening rush to grab land in these forests, have wreaked irreparable damage in these mountains. At this rate, we risk destroying the catchment areas for water supply and increasing the prospects for landslides in the future.

135. Hon Members, I want to inform you that these Peninsula Forests are protected reserves long established in the colonial era, to ensure the availability of water in the Freetown area. Unfortunately, our own citizens, and sometimes even foreigners, are exploiting these forest reserves with brazen impunity to the detriment of all of us. These forests provide the only sustainable water catchment area to feed the Guma valley dam on which we all depend for our water. No wonder we are now increasingly being exposed to water shortages because of the irresponsible and criminal activities carried out by some Sierra Leoneans in the Peninsula forests

136. It is in the interest of saving our forests and environment from total destruction that I created in 2005, the National Environmental and Forestry Commission (NACEF) for environmental protection, proactive management, renewal and conservation. The Commission is now operational and is active in developing sustainable measures to protect and conserve our environment, be it forests, rivers, fauna, mining areas, swamps and bolilands and to ensure the exploitation of these strategic resources through agricultural production, mining, tourism etc, are not permanently destroyed. We owe it to generations yet unborn to utilize our environment with care, so that we can truly say, that our stewardship of the environment meets the critical criteria of sustainable development.

#### INFRASTRUCTURE - ROADS

137. A good road network is a crucial variable in the development aspirations of any country. On assuming office in 1996, my government inherited a national grid of roads that had all but collapsed. There was a huge backlog of maintenance and the ongoing rebel war had compounded the problem by the deliberate destruction of roads and bridges making some areas unreachable for maintenance crew.

138. The task of restoring the road network to a functional status was clear-cut. As soon as the war ended, my government assiduously embarked upon the task of repairing and restoring the road network with the help of the international donor community. Government undertook extensive road reconstruction/ rehabilitation programs throughout the country constructing several feeder and trunk roads and also jetties and bridges. To cite a few examples, government proceeded with work on the Koribondo-Blama-Gendama Ferry Road in the South; Makeni-Kamakwie road in the North and Kurobonla-Kabala axis also in the North. Work is in progress on several other roads such as the Masiaka to Bo road, the Tokeh to Lumley road thereby completing the Waterloo to Freetown /Pinsular road. Funding was secured for several planned road projects such as the Hillside Bye-Pass Road that will run behind Pademba Road Prison and exit behind Kissy Road Cemetery . Equally, funding has been made available for the Bo to Kenema road, Kenema to Kiondu road, Makeni to Matotoka road, Matotoka to Koidu road, the Songo to Moyamba road and the Moyamba to Moyamba Junction road.

139. In my inaugural address to Parliament in 1996, I mentioned among other things, that I had a plan to connect Freetown with Lungi which did not depend on other means such as ferry, helicopter, hovercraft etc. In pursuit of that plan, we requested the African Development Bank to conduct a study on the best options for achieving my objectives. The African Development Bank provided 2 million US dollars for the feasibility and final engineering studies. The study is almost complete and has identified eight optional routes for the link. Government will now be in a position to choose the best option after which financing will be sought. The consultants held a Press briefing about this but which unfortunately, has not been communicated to the public.

140. In the meantime, SLRA has achieved the following:

- Paved nearly 40 km of roads in the city of Freetown .
- Constructed/reconstructed about 170 km of paved trunk roads.
- Rehabilitated more than 700 km of feeder roads
- Rehabilitated more than 700 km of gravel trunk roads.

141. In addition, funding from the EU has already been obtained for the construction of 650 kilometres of feeder roads in the Portloko, Kambia, Pujehun and Kenema districts. When completed, this will have a positive effect on agricultural productivity.

## TELECOMMUNICATIONS

142. My Government has created the requisite enabling environment to promote private investment in the rapidly expanding telecommunications network in Sierra Leone . Little wonder that there are now 5 mobile phone companies serving the voice and data needs of the country. These facilities have had a positive effect on both internal and external trade, introduced new banking products and improved interpersonal linkages among our people. In short, improved and expanding telecommunications have eased contact, lowered the cost of communications and brought all of us closer to one another.

143. Our own Sierratel has, to be honest, not experienced the same vigor and thrust as the mobile phone companies mentioned earlier. It has therefore lost a significant portion of the telecom market to its more aggressive competitors. However, with the infusion of funds from notably India and the People's Republic of China , Sierratel is poised to recapture its preeminent position as the main telecom service provider in terms of telephony, electronic data and as repository of the international gateway for the conduit of all international phone calls.

144. Developments in the telecom sector have necessitated the creation, by an act of parliament, of a regulatory body in the form of the National Telecommunications Commission in 2006. Although nascent, the Commission has already realized revenue in excess of 4 Billion Leones from the mobile phone companies and has paid a dividend of over 3 billion leones to Government. Indeed, the rapid expansion and modernization of telecommunications has made Sierra Leone a global village where interlinkages are immediate and constant. Honourable members, I am reminded of an incident where the availability, affordability and pervasiveness of the mobile phone shocked a recent visitor from California, the USA to a village in Sierra Leone to bury his relation. He saw an enterprising palm wine tapper atop his palm tree making a telephone call from his mobile apparently to discuss the price of his commodity with his customer and promptly took a picture of him.

#### ENERGY AND POWER

145. In the area of electricity provision in the country, my government continues to search for solutions to the challenges of providing sustainable electricity supplies. In the provinces, the Bo-Kenema area continues to benefit from appreciable availability of electricity through the Bo thermal station and the Dodo Hydro-Electric plant using the grid line Bo-Kenema to connect the two cities. Some provincial centers like Pujehun, Makeni, Moyamba, and very soon, Kabala and Koidu are already receiving limited electricity supplies.

146. The Bumbuna-Hydroelectric project is almost complete and the electro-mechanical plant is virtually installed. The only constraint in this project is the transmission line from Bumbuna to Freetown which was vandalized by people stealing pieces of it to make pots. However, arrangements are being finalized to complete its restoration.

147. Bilateral cooperation agreements have provided a competent Chinese technical team that is rehabilitating and upgrading the Dodo Hydroelectric facility to produce 6 Megawatts of electricity throughout the year and it is expected that additional work will soon be undertaken to increase the capacity to 12 Megawatts which will provide electricity to Tongo and Koidu including the intervening population centers along the transmission line.

148. Another very successful bilateral programme is our cooperation with the Kingdom of Morocco which has already provided US\$5, 000,000 for a quick action plan to improve electricity generation and distribution in the Freetown area. It is with great joy that I state to you, Honourable Members that this Moroccan programme has once again brought streetlights to the city of Freetown . The Moroccan programme will also provide efficient management for the NPA and the funding for this engagement is the subject of a donor's meeting to be held in Rabat in July 2007.

149. We have also concluded several agreements for the acquisition of thermal power plants totaling 30 Megawatts capacity. Installation of these plants in the Freetown area is expected to commence soon and together with Bumbuna Hydroelectric power my government will finally solve the perennial problem of electricity shortage in Freetown which we inherited from previous regimes.

150. I will be remiss in my duty if I do not mention the vandalism and frequent criminal sabotage of electricity installations by unpatriotic people. These acts have not only made the job of providing electricity to our homes and workplaces very difficult but represent a serious wastage of scarce resources in replacing the distribution wires which people cut to remove the copper and I hear this copper is used for the making of pots and other utensils. Chronic fraud in the billing and collection system has rendered the NPA virtually insolvent and often dependent on government subsidies to maintain their operations. To resolve this problem, my Government has ordered 100,000 prepaid meters which will be installed in all consumer units to ensure, like mobile phones, consumers pay for their electricity before they use it.

## WATER

151. The increased demand for water due to the steep rise in the population Freetown and the effects of reckless deforestation, particularly in the catchment areas surrounding the Guma Valley Dam, has reduced significantly, the volume of water in the Guma Reservoir. In order to address the acute shortage in Freetown and its environs, negotiations are far advanced for a Chinese company to construct a new dam including a water treatment plant in the East End of Freetown. These projects will be undertaken in two phases. The First Phase, which will last for two years involves a weir, pumping station, transmitting pipe, distributing trunk and treatment works with a water supply capacity of about 42,000m<sup>3</sup>/day.

152. The Second Phase which will last for four years involves the construction of a new dam, the Orugu Dam and double pipes. At the completion of this Second Phase, the total water capacity will be 84,000m<sup>3</sup>/day. This will considerably increase access to treated water in the Western Area.

153. Similar actions are being taken to address the problem of water shortage provincial urban towns.

## Fisheries

154. Our territorial waters contain all sorts of fish products including lobsters and shrimps currently being stolen by poachers. It is a very profitable business. However, we are not realizing the full potential of this natural wealth because fish caught in our water have hitherto not been allowed in the European markets, which provides a huge outlet. Fortunately, the EU has recently provided assistance for us in the area of sanitary facilities and repelling poachers which will soon make this market a reality for us. Sierra Leoneans, therefore, should look into the possibility of going into partnerships with foreigners or mobilize their own capital for the exploitation these resources

## SOCIAL SERVICES

### NATIONAL SOCIAL SECURITY AND INSURANCE TRUST - NASSIT

155. One of the abiding legacies of my presidency is the establishment of the National Social Security and Insurance Trust (NASSIT) in 2001. Social security can be generally defined "as body of measures that a society may take to protect its members against social and economic distress in the event of substantial loss of income through contingencies such as: invalidity, death, or old age.

156. Never before has such a scheme been put in place in our country. Employees who retire as a result of old age or any of the contingencies mentioned earlier are exposed to hardship. Some government workers after retirement suddenly look destitute while others to avoid such a fate are constrained to engage in dubious activities to ensure that they have something to fall back on after retirement.

157. In the UN system for example, the pension scheme generally allows retirees to live well. It also takes care of all their medical bills and makes provision for allowances to be paid to widows, widowers and children.

158. It was this personal experience that inspired me to introduce a social security scheme in this country. The source of funding for the scheme is contributions from the workers and their employers from which, NASSIT will pay benefit to you on your retirement or when you are afflicted by anyone of the contingencies mentioned earlier. It is also from these funds that the social safety net will be financed. This is a scheme which provides support to those who are aged sixty years and over, and are without any sources of income. It is meant to help restore some dignity to the destitute and save them from begging in the street. In the future, it should be possible to build homes for the old and destitute as well as provide food for them as they do in some developed countries. Some of the eligible people from all parts of the country are already receiving benefits from the scheme.

159. Since its establishment, NASSIT has promptly paid out generous benefits to people who qualify. For now, 130,795 people are insured in the NASSIT scheme of which 357 people have already received the benefits at a total cost of Le, 1,117,496,667 (One Billion, One Hundred and Seventeen Million, Four Hundred and Ninety-Six Thousand, Six-Hundred and Sixty Seven Leones. In addition, NASSIT is engaged in joint venture schemes ranging from hotels to the construction of modern housing estates and the manufacture of local building materials. To make its presence felt in the provinces, NASSIT has constructed and is operating three ultra modern regional offices in the provincial headquarter towns of Makeni, Bo and Kenema.

### Cemeteries

160. As this is my final address to you, Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, it will be appropriate for me to make a few statements on a matter which should be of great concern to all of us. This matter relates to the condition of our cemeteries. This is not to say that I am about to die soon or, after my resurrection from death, as some had already reported my death, I am about to die again. But rather, I am making these remarks because the condition of our cemeteries is a matter that should concern all of us irrespective of age, social status or political affiliation, or faith.

161. There is an aesthetic air around cemeteries and because of this air, people love visiting cemeteries. This is in addition to their desire to frequent the final resting place of their dear ones. I had wished that our cemeteries looked that way. It was for this reason that I always expressed the desire that our cemeteries should be well maintained and kept clean. But alas! They are eyesores, covered with weeds and littered with sunken graves. They are neglected by the appropriate authorities. One only needs to witness a burial ceremony in one of our cemeteries, especially the burial of high-profile person. Besides the obstruction to traffic the procession to the cemetery may cause, their movement to the grave itself will be fraught with difficulties as there is no proper planning within the cemetery, and the graves are not well laid out.

162. I had recognized the need to improve the situation. That was why from my assumption of office I instructed that the Freetown City Council should collaborate with the relevant government authorities to identify enough piece of land away from built up areas of the city for the relocation of cemeteries. This will then give the city authorities ample leverage (authority) to properly plan such cemeteries dividing the areas for the burial of the believers of the different religious faiths, taking also into consideration the more than 100% increase in the population of Freetown. If transportation of mourners to such relocated cemeteries becomes difficult, standing arrangements could be made with relevant authorities for the hiring of government buses at concessional rates to convey mourners to those cemeteries.

#### Women and Children

163. A cardinal preoccupation of my government is the sustainable empowerment of women as they constitute more than 51 percent of our population and are principally responsible for the development of our children -our future leaders. It is as a result of this that my government has accorded great attention to the rights and the material and socio-economic well being of our women folk. The intervention of government has been pronounced in the areas of poverty alleviation, educational improvement and healthcare, the promotion of adolescence health, property rights, access to land, elimination of early marriages, creating political space for women at all levels of government and promoting affirmative actions to increase women's representation in the public service.

164. In spite of progress made on this front, adequate protection for women against violence remains a serious concern to my government including the prevalence of harmful cultural practices especially against the girl-child. It is for this reason that my government has pioneered the passage of a bill in parliament that not only provides comprehensive protection to women and the girl-child, but also the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW). We must also bear in mind that children and women bore the brunt of atrocities during the war, especially children who were the most vulnerable groups. My Government, in order to remedy this situation and reintegrate fully these war-affected children, has created the National Commission for War-Affected Children (NACWAC), which is now engaged in the full reintegration of these children into our society.

165. My Government will continue to pursue proactive measures to empower women in all areas of endeavor so that soon, all of us in Sierra Leone can proudly say that this is a land of equal rights and equal opportunities regardless of gender.

#### Youth

166. Honorable members will recall that a new phenomenon in our society is the emergence of a large proportion of disaffected youth due mainly to the consequences of the war where some of them were cruelly exploited and forced to serve as brutal soldiers. Rapid urbanization has also produced its own unsettled youths among whom unemployment and substance abuse are common. My Government is concerned over this youth challenge and has developed programmes to provide increased educational opportunities for youths and employment avenues especially in the recently established Youth Employment Scheme (YES) which is to be found all over Sierra Leone. In addition, my Government is encouraging the private sector to build synergies with youth self-employment schemes such as the Sweissy Boys to create entrepreneurial capacity among our young people. My Government's focused attention on the youth is a reflection of the fact that they constitute a significant proportion of our population and are most immediate successors to continue our stewardship in the development of our country.

#### Conclusion:

167. On the whole, it is clear that considerable progress has been made since we came to office in 1996, the eleven year war and other political disturbances notwithstanding. On the political front, our greatest achievement, undoubtedly, was the restoration of local government after 30 years of non existence. The empowerment of our grassroots populace through regenerated chieftom authority and local council representation remains the flagship of our political modernization. Today, our many civil society organisations are not only important for empowering women, they are now a compelling contributor to accountability by providing an important bridge between the rest of the citizenry and the government. The pursuit of fiscal and political decentralization is bringing hope again to the once alienated and criminally marginalized rural masses They can now boast of owning and controlling their destiny, compared to days when all was decided at the central government level. Many rural and sub-urban women now have better access to productive and income generating activities leading many more to becoming heads of their households.

168. Through specially targeted donor-supported programmes, and enabling quasi-fiscal subsidies, we have in a significant way, revived the lives of ex-combatants, restructured and modernized our army and police; strengthened the prisons and fire force, and improved security intelligence. All ex-fighters and displaced persons who wanted to, have been reintegrated into their original environments.

169. In health and education, we can now boast of a large number of functioning schools, health clinics, healthcare centres, and hospitals, with massive school enrolments. We have engaged enough teachers including support staff, nurses and doctors. We should continue to subsidize our education system because it is necessary for building a strong and skilled workforce that can play a pivotal role in sustainable economic development.

170. Infrastructure, especially roads, and public services which were badly destroyed, have been generally restored to pre-war levels, although they are still inadequate and limit rapid growth and development.

171. Sustaining the progress we have been able to achieve in food security and developing sustainable livelihoods are key to improving the lives of Sierra Leoneans and is closely interrelated with health and education. The extensive displacement of the rural population and low agricultural productivity are core to the high level of food insecurity faced by much of our population. There is enough evidence to show that the special food productivity drive launched two years ago has significantly improved food security. The programme has also built local capacity for sufficient food production both for local consumption and export of surplus products to build wealth through trade of such commodities including cash crops.

172. Since assuming office in 1996, I was fully aware that the immediate task of fostering political and social stability hinged upon quick and sustainable resumption of economic activity. For this purpose, financial, technical and moral support from our development partners was crucial to complement our efforts in delivering the peace dividend. We embarked on comprehensive economic programmes and structural reforms which have resulted in impressive growth levels and substantial aid flows including debt relief. Overall, our economic fundamentals remain strong and this has been acknowledged by our development partners, who have recently granted Sierra Leone full external debt cancellation and additional resources under the new Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative as we reached HIPC completion point.

173. Combined with economic achievements, there has also been, during the past 5 years, a tremendous effort on fiscal consolidation and fiscal discipline. Inflation has remained subdued and the exchange rate relatively stable for many years. Even though still rudimentary, the private sector is now feeling more comfortable and confident to undertake badly-needed investments to fuel growth and create jobs. The financial system is bracing itself to be able to meaningfully support growth and development. We are enforcing the rule of law to restore investment confidence in a revitalized economy. We are rebuilding capacity in our public administration. We are battling corruption and have put in place sound public financial management procedures including public procurement and public service delivery to minimize opportunities for rent seeking. Economic reforms have significantly enhanced domestic revenue mobilization and improved efficiency and effectiveness in public spending.

So, where do we go from here?

174. Critically, the foundations of a responsible, transparent and accountable government and public service machinery are in place and areas of past corruption are being reformed. Much of the hardest work ahead for all of us lies in sustaining the gains made thus far, stepping up to our shared responsibilities, and taking charge of our future. With staggering needs in education, nutrition, clean water and sanitation, electricity, healthcare, roads and jobs, the challenges that lie ahead are daunting, but we are equal to the task!

175. Indeed, we cannot just count the number of schools, clinics and businesses that are established. It is also about the quality of the curriculum and education delivered; about the access

to affordable quality healthcare and about the quantum and quality of jobs created. It is about access to reliable and affordable clean water and reliable electricity supplies, about the quality and safety of the road network across the length and breadth of the country; about sustaining the private sector momentum, and about broadening the economic base and increasing growth and distributing its gains fairly and equitably among the population.

176. It is about widening our trade links and rethinking the way we exploit our natural resources. Over the past 2-3 years, the economy has grown by an impressive 6-8 percent per annum, but the truth is that a much faster growth is needed to pull millions of Sierra Leoneans out of poverty. This obviously requires more resources that are delivered promptly and with minimal disruptive bureaucratic procedures and processes.

177. It is about changing attitudes and committing ourselves to becoming more responsible and more accountable citizens, respecting and appreciating each other, and protecting public assets which after all belong to all of us

178. At this point, I should like to take the opportunity to appeal to all Sierra Leoneans, no matter what their political affiliation, to cultivate and disseminate a positive image of our country. This will lift up our spirits, invite foreign investors to come and promote our development so that we shall be free from constantly asking and receiving handouts from others. This is of extreme importance to me since sustainable development cannot be guaranteed by the charity of others. Too much dependence on others for the solution of one's problems even, those of a basic nature, is most undesirable and can have unpleasant consequences especially for a sovereign state; where a conditionality may require either the suspension or changing of certain laws or some provisions of the Constitution thereby raising questions of sovereignty -a practice, which in our own case, may have contributed to our war.

179. The stakes could hardly be higher. We must address both the qualitative and quantitative challenges so that every individual will be able to realize his or her full potential. We will need to create, equally, opportunities for all Sierra Leoneans not only to improve their own lives, but also to increase their ability to contribute to the overall development of their nation and fellow countrymen.

180. Mr. Speaker, Honourable members, we must focus on making a difference. As I ride into the sunset I am content that I have played my part in national development and made a difference in my own humble way.

181. I throw this challenge out to others of my fellow countrymen and women to always strive to make a difference for our beloved country -Sierra Leone. "Land that we love so well!