

HANDING OVER STATEMENT OF FORMER PRESIDENT KABBAH OF SIERRA LEONE ON INAUGURATION DAY

Mr. President,

This is a unique and momentous occasion in the history of our country, as it is the first time that a constitutionally elected government is handing over authority to a constitutionally elected successor. I would like at the outset to congratulate you on behalf of my outgoing government and on my own personal behalf on your election to the highest office of the land and wish you every success in your tenure of office as President of the Republic of Sierra Leone.

My statement today should be regarded as a form of handing-over report. I have taken note with full agreement of your desire that out-going ministers of my Government present to yours proper handing-over reports. I am pleased to learn that the process went through satisfactorily. Consequently, my suggestions and recommendations should be properly interpreted as arising out of my experience as President of our country.

Today, you are inheriting a state that is on the threshold of taking off for the progress and prosperity that lie ahead for our people. Since the war came to an end, the security of the state has been maintained through the restructuring of the security sector with the assistance of the United Kingdom government and improvements in the conditions of service for the security forces. Local government authority has been restored, a more effective justice system is being gradually built; a more proactive stance and increased vigilance from responsible civil society groups and the satisfactorily informed general public is increasingly contributing to the building of a more transparent and accountable society. Many projects have been put in place to create jobs particularly for unemployed youths.

I understand that you have visited the Bumbuna hydro electric project and have seen the state of progress for yourself. In the meantime, measures to further improve the electricity situation in the capital city are currently in progress with the help of the Moroccan technical team. Schools have been rebuilt, hospitals refurbished and new ones under construction. New diagnostic equipment is being installed that will now significantly reduce the need for people to travel abroad for medical attention.

With regard to roads, 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 Kuwaiti Fund, BADEA, World Bank, African Development Bank, Islamic Development Bank and the European Union.

The following roads have either been constructed or are under construction: the Koribondo-Blama-Gendema Ferry Road in the South; Makeni-Kamakwie road in the North; Kurobola-Kabala axis and the Masiaka-Makeni road also in the North. Work is in progress on several other roads such as the Masiaka-Bo road mainly in the South and the Tokeh-Lumley road in the Western Area, thereby completing the Waterloo-Freetown/Peninsular road.

Funding has been secured for several planned road projects such as the Bo-Kenema road; Kenema-Koindu road; Makeni-Matotoka road; Matotoka-Koidu road; the Rogbere Junction-Pamelap road; the Songo-Moyamba road and the Moyamba-Moyamba Junction road. With regards to the Hillside Bye-Pass Road that will run behind Pademba Road Prison and exit behind Kissy Road Cemetery, delay in starting this project has been too long with protracted negotiations with property owners.

We also have funding for the construction of 1,150 kilometer of feeder roads throughout the provinces, as an integral part of our food security programme.

Further, I strongly recommend to you Mr. President, to pay particular attention to the Kenema-Koindu road, for which funding is secured from four Arab countries and OPEC, and tender documents are under preparation. The Kenema-Koindu road deserves special mention. Apart from its strategic and security importance, the Koindu market came into existence in 1932, the year in which I was born, that is over 75 years ago. It was an initiative of the people who lived in the area bordering Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone. It developed into a full scale international market attracting traders from as far as the Ivory Coast. It would not be an exaggeration to state that it was the precursor of our Mano River Union today which only came into existence in 1975.

Two years ago Parliamentarians, elders and prominent citizens on either side of the Moa/Makona River, formed the Makona River Union. Its second general assembly in Koindu was graced by the heads of State of the three countries. At that summit a resolution was presented by the Assembly to further consolidate the Union. In addition to the international market in Koindu, a Technical/Vocational Institute and a General Referral hospital in Foya Kama in Liberia and in Nongowa in Guinea respectively were recommended.

The National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA) has already allocated seed money for the construction of a modern international market in Koindu. Your Excellency may wish to pursue this matter further with your colleagues especially after your recent interaction with them.

Let me also add that feasibility studies for the Freetown-Lungi link road, the Lungi-Port Loko road and the Bandajuma-Mano River Bridge road have been completed and it is now urgent to secure funding for their construction. Perhaps, you may want to consider the involvement of the private sector for the early construction of the Freetown-Lungi link road in the context of a toll-system arrangement.

Mr. President, all of this is a far cry from what we inherited when we came into office in 1996. We took over from a military regime at a time when a brutal war was still raging, to be followed by a coup by the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), which eventually brought the economy to shambles, the country bankrupt and basic infrastructure completely destroyed.

My Government inherited a public debt of \$ US1.6 billion. With stringent financial practice, today, we enjoy total debt relief and over Le.500 billion at the Central Bank for use by your Government.

Therefore, the role and responsibilities of a president in a country that is just emerging from conflict are enormous and particularly challenging. Throughout my presidency, I was guided by four main principles:

- 1) seek the interest of the state;
- 2) secure the welfare of the people;
- 3) create opportunities to enable the people to realize their potential; and
- 4) build national cohesion.

You may wish to consider these principles in formulating your programme for moving our country forward.

In a diverse society such as ours, with many ethnic and other groups, rich and poor, educated and illiterate, the greatest challenge is how to bring about national cohesion so that everyone in his or her own little way can contribute to the development of the state.

During my tenure of office, I endeavoured to make my government as inclusive as possible so that every section could have a stake in the security of the state. At one time, for the sake of peace, I even included former rebels who had been waging war on the state and killing our people.

We are emerging from a bitterly contested election that threatened the very essence of our state with confrontations, intimidations and harassment among party supporters. One of your biggest challenges will be how to reconcile all of these opposing groups and heal whatever frictions and misunderstandings that may have been created by the electoral process. On that score, I hereby openly declare my willingness to offer you any assistance you might need because the peace and cohesion of this country have always been among my principal objectives.

The security forces were highly acclaimed for their impartiality and professionalism during the elections, but there have been recent allegations, particularly with reference to the police about not being evenhanded. All efforts must be made to remove such doubts. These notwithstanding, I am still proud of our police as they have many good and committed officers. We enjoin the military to continue as a well-organized, disciplined and professional entity. I have no doubt that they have the capacity to safeguard the integrity of the state and to protect the life and property of its citizens.

Mr. President,

I was amazed to read in our press that my Government was soft on corruption and that our development partners may have withheld funding because of this. Let me state that my government maintained a very robust stand against corruption. Before I assumed office, corruption was a taboo subject in this country. It was so endemic that the word corruption was never used. I personally led this fight against corruption and in this process, I requested and obtained assistance from the British. A British consultant designed the Anti Corruption Commission strategy based on a model he had put in place with excellent results, in Hong Kong and Botswana.

At the inception of our own Anti Corruption Commission, we were able to prosecute and convict high profile officials among whom were an appeal court judge, ministers and other senior officials. The Anti Corruption Commission sensitised and continues to sensitise the Sierra Leone public about the evils of corruption through very effective radio and TV messages. I personally have referred to corruption in my address in Parliament as a national security threat. What I have refused to do is to play the counter-productive game of the politics of anti-corruption by which the fight against corruption is misused as a political weapon against one's political opponents.

I may add here that certain strong positions taken by our international partners may have been counter productive in the fight against corruption. For example, DFID insisted that we change the prosecution process of corruption cases by removing the Attorney-General's fiat to determine who should be prosecuted and relegating this function to a team of three prosecutors, two of whom are their appointees and the third, a nominee of the Attorney-General. This was contrary to the provisions of our constitution. They threatened to withdraw their financial assistance unless we agreed to their prescription even though they were informed that the Attorney-General's fiat was an entrenched clause in our constitution. Yielding to pressure, a high profile case was taken to the court presided over by two DFID recruited judges. The case was thrown out of court for the very reason that my government had given. Even then DFID has maintained its stand.

Making the Auditor-General's Report available to an international agency before it had gone through Parliamentary scrutiny as required by our laws was another area of difficulty. Even the President is not entitled to this document until after parliamentary scrutiny.

Our government could not tolerate, even from a friendly country, the use of financial leverage to undermine our sovereignty.

A further concern was the high-handed manner in which the Deputy Anti Corruption Commissioner, a DFID appointee, treated Sierra Leoneans suspected of corruption. One case was the dawn raid on the residence of a Minister, without a search warrant or an arrest warrant. The Minister was detained for a whole day in his pyjamas in the ACC office although no corruption evidence was produced.

To site yet another disagreement was the treatment the Deputy Anti Corruption Commissioner meted against a Sierra Leonean, Ms. Newman-Smart, who had decided to return home from the United Kingdom where she practised law, to serve her country. Ms. Newman-Smart was employed by Government as Chief Immigration Officer. She was arrested, her premises searched, her personal papers put in the internet, thereby depriving her of her privacy. This harassment and shock may have led to the lady's premature death, as she was a hypertensive case.

My Government took the view that prosecution was not the only way to fight corruption. While successful prosecution could indeed be a strong deterrent against corruption, its impact on abolishing it can be minimal. We therefore set in motion certain legislative and administrative measures to remove opportunities for corruption which I would like to recommend to you, Mr. President, for your consideration:

1. Procurement leakages if not properly sealed, can lead to high rates of corruption. We therefore enacted legislation which removed procurement from Government Ministries to a Commission comprising people of high integrity and knowledge on procurement matters.

2. The National Policy Advisory Committee (NPAC) was set up to advise Cabinet on all Sector Policies and Cabinet papers, and make recommendations for Government action. The NPAC is composed of highly qualified and reliable Sierra Leoneans who scrutinise all Papers to ensure they are in the best interest of the state. The past Chairmen for the NPAC have been Dr. Peter L. Tucker, Prof. Eldred Jones, Dr. Dunstance Spencer and currently Prof. John Kamara.

3. Public Expenditure Tracking Surveys (PETS) system is designed to ensure that goods and services reach their intended beneficiaries and are not siphoned away along the road. Hilary Benn, the erstwhile Secretary of State for DFID, commended my Government on this particular initiative while he was addressing an international meeting in the United Kingdom.

4. Budgeting process in most countries is not known to anyone except the Ministry of Finance officials. Other people only get the details on the day the Budget is read in Parliament. Today in Sierra Leone, the Budgetary Process is transparent and participatory as civil society, Paramount Chiefs and students are invited to take part in the budget process.

Mr. President, for anyone therefore to say that my Government was soft on corruption, is to distort the fact of our robust stand against this social and economic scourge.

Before I conclude, I want to mention a number of issues which in my opinion could preoccupy your mind as you conduct the affairs of state:

1. Let our people know that unless they can provide enough food for their own consumption and surplus for export, as we used to do before the advent of diamonds, we shall never be truly independent. I did my own bit under my food security programme and even if some people still claim to go to bed hungry, nobody can claim not to have been sensitized about the need to be self-sufficient in food production including the diversification of our diet.

2. Encourage our people to work hard for what they want and not to depend on others, the state, the government or even donors, to provide for all their needs. Sierra Leone should not be seen as a "Nanny" State or "Combra" State.

3. Keep a watchful eye over our mineral resources and ensure that they are exploited for the maximum benefit of the ordinary people. In this connection, we have already taken measures to develop a database of our mineral resources – what kind, where located, quantity and their quality. If this is completed the country will be in a stronger position to negotiate the best terms for their exploitation. Sierra Leone is now a member of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) which should help us in instilling transparency in revenues derived from our minerals and the way such revenue is used.

4. Consolidate the thinking that as a nation, our output is dependent upon the skill competencies and training of our human resource. My government opened the way for many people to access quality education. Reviewing the 6334 system of education should not be misconstrued as dampening the gains we have so obviously made. You may wish to consider taking steps to expand this base, by continuing to create affordable institutions to allow Sierra Leoneans of various abilities and capabilities to feel proud of their attainment as they contribute to nation-building.

5. Guard against environmental degradation so that we do not lose all our forests and animals, especially rare and endangered species, which are indigenous to our country.

6. Indiscipline and lawlessness have been the bane of our society. Every effort should be made to curb this malaise. The criminal justice system and the police should do everything possible to bring culprits and lawbreakers to book. I am heartened by your commitment to this goal as stated in your swearing-in address and I have no doubt that you will succeed.

Mr. President, I now wish to thank all those who worked with me in my administration, for the successes we achieved while in office.

With these remarks, I hereby hand over to you, Mr. President, the baton of office and once again wish you well and every success during your tenure of office. I now take my leave to enjoy a well-earned retirement.

I thank you all for your attention.