

Sierra Leone Government
Presidential Address Delivered By His Excellency the President Ernest Bai Koroma
President of the Republic and Commander-in-Chief of the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces
On the Occasion of the State Opening of the Third Parliament of the Second Republic of Sierra Leone
In the Chamber of Parliament Building Tower Hill, Freetown
On Friday, 5th October; 2007 at 10:00 a.m.

Mr. Speaker,
Honourable Vice-President,
My Lord Chief Justice,
His Worship the Mayor of Freetown
Honourable Members of Parliament,
Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

1. It is the will of God and the consent of the people of this great nation of ours, that I address you here today as President on the occasion of the state opening of the Third Parliament of the Second Republic of Sierra Leone.
2. I must take this opportunity to thank all Sierra Leoneans who reposed their confidence in me, by electing me President of this great nation. I am grateful for your commitment to the democratic process and I will execute the duties of my office in the best possible manner, by the grace of God.
3. I call on all of you to join hands with me in a public reconciliation to affirm our nation purpose of unity, freedom and justice.
4. Never again shall we turn against each other to spill the precious blood of our brothers, our sisters or our children. We must continue to keep the peace and build upon it for our time and for posterity.
5. A new dawn has broken on the horizon of our nation, bringing forth a new Sierra Leone, a new era of peace, security, stability and socio-economic progress in our country. A new Sierra Leone, where there are no ethnic or regional boundaries. A new Sierra Leone where we work harder than we did before. A new Sierra Leone where our children learn better in school. A new Sierra Leone where market women and men prosper in their traders. A new Sierra Leone where the youth train and work to live productive lives.
6. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, I envisage a new Sierra Leone where women stand side by side with their men folk, in the workplace and in business. A new Sierra Leone where the dark days are brightened again by electricity and water flows freely once more for drinking, cooking and cleansing a new Sierra Leone where farmers make more profit from their cash crops and grow enough to feed ourselves and to spare.
7. In this new era of our renewed commitment to self-reliance, freedom, independence, and prosperity, we must develop anew those values of honesty and hard work that once made this nation, the envy of our neighbours in the sub-region. Our new values must include a devotion to law and order and respect for the rule of law, human rights, good governance, and a commitment to make a positive difference to the lives and welfare of our people. Mr. Speaker that is why I am in politics. To make a difference.
8. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, in this new age of devotion to national service, I appeal to all Sierra Leoneans at home and abroad to join me in making this difference. To those in the diaspora, come home and serve your country if you can, or find other ways to contribute from afar. Home is where your heart is. As true patriots, you must contribute to the development of your country and your people.

9. Mr. Speaker, on this historic occasion, at the commencement of my administration as President of the Republic of Sierra Leone, I am humbled and deeply moved by the transformation of my Party, and All Peoples Congress (APC), from a minority party to the Government benches in this noble House.

10. This dramatic change, through the will of the people of our great nation, clearly illustrates the advantages and pitfalls of democracy. This underpins the fact that when a government fails in its principal duties of good governance, reneges on its promises to effectively serve the people, and neglects to provide for the basic needs of its people, that government is destined to be rejected by the people. This ominous prospect, my government will avoid by working hard to fulfill our campaign promises to develop our nation.

11. Mr. Speaker, Honourable members, the centre piece of my government, will be anchored on acceptable democratic practice. I will ensure that all state institutions created by statutes and conventions, for the promotion of democracy, function independently.

12. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, democracy goes well beyond the electoral process. The separation of powers between the executive, parliament and the judiciary creates a system of checks and balances that enhances transparency and accountability. It therefore pleases me to thank the Members of Parliament, including those from the PMDC and the SLPP, for their commitment to the democratic process and to emphasize that we hope to enjoy a constructive working relationship between my administration and this parliament. Having served as the minority leader in the previous Parliament, I am well aware of the need for us all to work together, to secure a more promising future for our country.

13. Mr. Speaker, with this guiding sense of purpose to provide effective leadership for our country, I shall now give a broad outline of the priorities in the plan of action of my government to move this country forward. In this plan, my Government, intends to:

- a. keep the hard won peace and maintain national security;
- b. maintain respect for human rights, the rule of law and an independent judiciary;
- c. instill discipline in the conduct of Ministries of Government, public servants and the general citizenry;
- d. introduce performance target for all government functionaries and parastatal managers and employees;
- e. institute emergency measures to restore the supply of electricity while accelerating the completion of the Bumbuna Dam Power Generation Project. To this end, a Presidential Energy Emergency Task Force will be set up shortly;
- f. improve the delivery of healthcare services especially the reduction of infant and maternal mortality and reduce the incidence of HIV/AIDS, and malaria, by providing pro-poor medical programmes while holding health administrators accountable to the public at all times;
- g. provide affordable medical care for children, nursing mothers, pregnant women and the aged;
- h. ensure compulsory and free basic education for all children of school going age while improving access to affordable tertiary education;
- i. deliver clean potable water, enhance public health and introduce compulsory sanitary practices;
- j. modernize petty trading practices by providing purpose-built markets for our hardworking traders;
- k. initiate development programmes to improve our economy through accessible banking, agricultural extension services, judicious marine resources exploitation and development of the tourism industry;
- l. regulate the mineral resources industry and minimize the incidence of smuggling while increasing annual exports;
- m. maintain our traditional relations with our international development partners;
- n. Maintain and strengthen our existing membership of the Mano River Union, ECOWAS and the African Union.
- o. strengthen Local Government performance through enhanced decentralization and rural development;

- p. gradually work towards bridging the gender gap in all spheres of our society, especially in education, the workplace, government and the marketplace, thereby ensuring equal opportunities for women;
- q. heal the wounds of war victims, secure national and international attention and aid to the war affected.

14. Mr. Speaker, having laid out the basic priorities of my government, let me address in some detail those areas that require my government's immediate attention.

Good Governance

15. Mr. Speaker, the assumption that Sierra Leone has remained backward as a result of bad governance may be true, but it is also fact that spates of indiscipline, both in the private and public sectors have equally undermined the possibilities for national development.

16. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, I have on several occasions emphasized the need to promote a new culture that is consistent with the norms and values espoused by a modern democracy. In my government, effective management and discipline will be the standard ways of doing business, underpinned by an appetite for enforcing laws, rules and regulations. This combination of operational practices will help us restore order to the Sierra Leone society.

17. Mr. Speaker, our constitution provides for the separation of powers. We shall ensure the independence of the Judiciary and Parliament by strengthening them so that they can each function effectively and independently.

18. In this vein, my government will discontinue the Ministry of Parliamentary and Political Affairs. Civil Servants currently employed in that Ministry will be redeployed.

19. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, in my government, every Cabinet Minister will be productive, every civil servant will accomplish his or her duty with performance targets. In good governance, allegations of corruption practices by public servants to enrich themselves will be a subject for investigation and prosecution by the Anti-Corruption Commission. Good governance will also require public accountability in every sector. In the classroom, the hospital, government offices and everywhere public service is rendered. The culture of impunity that has taken root in Sierra Leone will be eliminated.

20. The new culture of discipline will require all of us to be committed to change. Change is never easy but is it always necessary. Let's make the change together for a better Sierra Leone.

Civil Service Reform

21. Since independence in 1961, Sierra Leone has continued to run a civil service structure which was inherited from Britain. While this Civil Service structure has persisted, there has been a significant deterioration in standards and it has not really evolved to meet the needs of the modern governance, particularly with respect to our 1991 constitution and the global challenges facing modern state administration.

22. The decay in civil service training as well as real reductions in compensation has allowed some civil servants to adopt behaviour patterns that are unacceptable. In particular, I am concerned about the tendency of some civil servants to use their offices to undertake private enterprise. The participation of some civil servants in political activities is also unacceptable. Indeed in the last election, we actually witnessed a situation where civil servants abandoned their offices to engage in partisan political campaigning. This conduct is prohibited; it is no longer acceptable and will be stamped out by my administration.

23. With a view to returning the civil service to the highest standards of professionalism and service delivery, my government will conduct an urgent review of the existing recommendations for civil service reform and modernization.

Corruption

24. Mr. Speaker, during my elections campaign and on my being sworn in as President, I emphasized Zero Tolerance on corruption.

25. I intend now to implement that commitment by reviewing the Anti-Corruption Act of 2002 to strengthen the powers of the Anti-Corruption Commission in order to ensure its independence in the full discharge of its duties.

26. In accordance with this policy and in our effort to promote transparency and accountability, public officials including myself, will be required to declare their assets. The modalities of this process are currently being worked out.

National Security and Defence

27. Our country is enjoying peace and tranquility following the 11 year civil war. This is due to the collective efforts of the Police and the Armed Forces, supported by the International Community. Our Military and Police forces have demonstrated professionalism in defence and security in spite of challenges.

28. Let me take this opportunity to thank the military in general but particularly the Military Police for its support to the Sierra Leone Police, under their MACP protocol, in the last electoral process.

29. I am also appealing to the Armed Forces to continue to respect the principles and practice of civil-military relations. In doing so, they must uphold the principles and spirit of the constitution which clearly defines their role in the governance of the country.

30. Mr. Speaker, while our borders are secure against any external aggression, we must not forget that the maintenance of law and order in our nation is a necessary ingredient for peace and tranquility.

31. I therefore entreat the Police to continue to maintain law and order without prejudice to anyone in our society. I am pleased to say that the performance of the police in maintaining law and order in the just concluded Presidential and Parliamentary elections was both professional and exemplary. On behalf of all Sierra Leoneans, let me thank the management and personnel of the Sierra Leone Police Force. I continue to believe that disciplined conduct by the police will attract the confidence of the populace. My government continuously expects high standards of discipline from our law enforcement agencies.

Trafficking and Money Laundering

32. My government will enforce and review existing drug, human trafficking, money laundering and small arms trafficking legislations. We will co-operate with international organizations engaged in curbing these activities. This is consistent with my desire to promote the rule of law and the protection of the citizens.

Justice and the Rule of Law

33. Modern Democracy is underpinned by adherence to and enforcement of the rule of law. This is why judicial reform is critical to my government's efforts to ensure the independence and integrity of the Judiciary. In line with my desire to ensure an independent, fair and expeditious justice system my government will separate the Office of the Attorney General from that of the Ministry of Justice.

34. We will also seek to improve, as a policy, the quality of magisterial adjudication by recruiting and retraining those law graduates who may not have wished to sit at the Bar, to serve as special magistrates to dispense justice expeditiously. This policy is consistent with my government's determination that the rule of law shall prevail.

35. Additionally, and also consistent with my government's devotion to promote transparency and fairness in our judicial system, and in accordance with the TRC recommendations, politically motivated cases will be reviewed speedily. Never again will the judicial system be manipulated to unfairly silence political opponents.

36. My government adheres to the principle of freedom of expression in a modern democratic setting. The media will be encouraged to responsibly perform its oversight functions and to fulfill its constitutional role of holding government accountable. In performing these duties, however the media will also be held to the highest standards of ethics and professionalism. It will also be expected to portray a positive image of Sierra Leone in its role as a partner in development.

37. My government is aware of the challenges facing media houses and practitioners. It will work in collaboration with its development partners and the Independent Media Commission to support and facilitate the work of the media houses.

Peace Building and National Reconciliation

38. Mr. Speaker, I am aware that there is a need to put some more impetus behind the process of reconciliation and to provide the appropriate mechanism for the spirit of reconciliation to continue to flourish. It is my government's belief that we cannot truly reconcile if we do not attempt to adopt the lessons learnt from the 11 year civil war.

39. To this end, and in accordance with the provisions of the Lome Peace Agreement and the Truth and Reconciliation Act of 2000, we will establish a TRC Follow-Up Committee to superintend the implementation of the TRC recommendations.

40. My government recognizes that the TRC recommendations, when implemented, will address some of those issues in our society that gave rise to the onset of the most difficult period in our history.

Energy and Power

41. Mr. Speaker, the utmost priority of my government is the speedy restoration of electricity supply, not only to Freetown and its environs, but to all districts headquarters towns. It is clear that the demand for electricity in Freetown has not been satisfied throughout the past decade.

42. In the provinces, electricity supply is available only in Bo and Kenema. Bo and Kenema have a combined hydro and thermal system which complement each other in meeting alternate seasonal demands. Electric power supply in other districts is sadly non-existent.

43. To bring electric power supply to each of the district headquarter towns will require an average of 2 MW each in other to meet basic power demands. On the whole, the country needs about 200 to 250 MW to satisfy household and industrial needs. Currently the available generated capacity is about 10MW nationwide. As an emergency measure government will source out temporary power supply units to augment reliable electricity generation.

44. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, let me draw your attention to the intermediate and long term solution for electric power supply nationwide. While providing temporary electric power supply, government will endeavour to increase the capacity of the Dodo Hydroelectric Project.

45. In the intermediate term, government will encourage public and private investment in other hydroelectric power supply systems and alternative energy resources throughout the country.

46. As I observed at a recent conference on energy organized by the Sierra Leone Institute of Engineers on 29th September 2007, our hydroelectric power potential estimated at 1,200 MW. All these alternative resources should be investigated and harnessed for our energy self-sufficiency. My government's goal is to attain energy independence and to optimize our full potential in power generation.

47. Our long term electric power supply solutions lie in part, in the completion of the Bumbuna and the Binkongor Hydroelectric Projects. Contrary to expectations, the Bumbuna Project, will not be completed until 2009. However, Government will ensure the completion of the Bumbuna Project in a timely manner.

Water Supply

48. Mr. Speaker, my government's other concern is the improvement and development of water supply systems. The Guma Dam was constructed to supply a population of 300,000 people. The current population of Freetown and its environs exceeds 1.5 million. This is five times more than originally planned.

49. My government will source out funding to increase the capacity of the dam as well as improving the distribution system in order to ensure adequate water supply to all areas of the city.

50. The entire district headquarters towns in the provinces, except Koidu New Sembehun Township, used to have their own water works and pumping stations. The Sierra Leone Water Company (SALWACO) will be instructed to rehabilitate these water supply systems countrywide in the shortest possible time.

51. At the rural level, the existing water well drilling and hand pump installation projects will be extended and intensified so that all rural communities can have access to clean drinking water.

Health Care Delivery

52. Mr. Speaker, our country has one of the poorest health care delivery systems in the sub-region. This clearly deserves the attention of my government. We have one of the highest incidences of infant and maternal mortality.

53. With these facts in mind, my government will endeavour to improve the delivery of health care services. We will institute better medical and public health standards in all hospitals, clinics and community health care units nationwide.

54. In improving the delivery of medical services, government will collaborate with our development partners to provide: "free Insecticide Treated Bed nets (ITBs); "stem the tide of tropical diseases by increasing the number of health professionals and improving delivery of medical supplies to all health care facilities; "rehabilitate and construct new health facilities.

Poverty Reduction

55. The Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) asserts that 75% of Sierra Leone's populations of nearly 5 million people are poor and living on less than three thousand Leones a day. Furthermore, 25% of those live in abject poverty.

56. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, this is happening in Sierra Leone, a country which in the words of our immediate past President Alhaji Dr. Ahmad Tejan Kabbah when he said, and I quote, "has no business being poor," unquote.

57. The PRSP further states that: 75% of our population are illiterate, 75% of the poor people live in the rural areas and engage in subsistence farming, 67% of our population comprises the youth (aged 18-35yrs), 75% of the youth population is jobless and poor.

58. The above statistics, Mr. Speaker, Hon. Members, have helped my government to deduce the following correlations, "that illiteracy induces poverty, "people living in the rural areas are exposed to extreme poverty and therefore the urgent need to put in place the modalities to enhance the standard of living in the rural areas, "that the youth are more likely to be unemployed and are amongst the poorest segments in our society, "the work of my government in fighting against poverty has been well defined by the above correlations. Our war, my government's, war in fighting poverty is multifaceted and aims, "to reduce the illiteracy level in accordance with the Millennium Development Goal by year 2015, "to revitalize the agricultural and industrial sectors in order to kick start the economy, "to stimulate growth in the economy, "to wage a relentless and vigorous war against corruption.

59. My government, Mr. Speaker, Hon. Members, will ensure that battle lines are drawn on all the fronts to overcome poverty.

60. I will facilitate the revitalization and expansion of the industrial sector by providing, in the shortest possible time, satisfactory energy and water supply, in order to boost productivity to reduce dependence on imports and create jobs.

Education

61. Human Capital development is a prerequisite for social and economic progress. This is why my government will be working assiduously to increase access to primary and secondary education. I will increase spending in education in order to achieve the Millennium Development Goal for education by 2015.

62. Government will enforce the free and compulsory basic education for all children.

63. In order to increase the overall literacy level, government will put in place an extensive adult literacy programme that will impact both the rural and urban communities.

64. Access to affordable tertiary education will be enhanced with a determination to restructure the delivery system.

65. To this end, my government will encourage the Tertiary Education Commission to recruit and retain qualified staff, from within and outside of the country, so that the various faculties across the entire university system will be adequately serviced.

66. In my determination to see that these initiatives are successful, I will be inviting the executives from the Association of Primary School Head Teachers, the Conference of Principals of Secondary Schools, the Tertiary Education Commission and School Proprietors to have discussions with Government, on the way forward.,

67. In these discussions the current 6-3-3-4 system will be reviewed to determine its appropriateness to our national development aspirations. We will also seek to address the quality of education delivery and the training and retraining of teaching staff.

Agriculture

68. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, agriculture in Sierra Leone is not only a business for our people, but it is also a way of life, impacting heavily on our cultural and traditional practices., my government is of the view, that by boosting agriculture in rural areas, rural poverty can be significantly reduced while enhancing the agro-cultural values of our communities.

69. My government will create the enabling environment to encourage effective participation by the private sector in the agricultural sector.

70. My Government, with the participation of the private sector, will improve agricultural productivity by the providing necessary farm inputs, machinery rentals and agricultural extension services to farmers.

71. We will also encourage a shift from subsistence farming to commercial agriculture with the full involvement of the private sector. In this regard modernized farming practices including increased mechanization can lead to an increase in crop production, especially our staple food rice. This will greatly reduce the US\$44 Million annual rice import bill with a positive impact on the balance of trade. Other commercial crop production activities will be expanded for increased revenue and sustainable job opportunities.

72. Cash crop production is an important component in the overall commitment of my government to beef up the national economy.

73. The animal husbandry component of our agricultural sector was adversely affected by the rebel war. To this end, our universities and research facilities are challenged to embark upon training programmes tailored to produce more agriculturists, Veterinary scientists and other allied professionals.

Marine Resources

74. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, our country is endowed with some of the best quality Seafood stocks in the world and if the exploitation of these marine resources is properly managed, it can not only improve the protein content of our diets but will also provide much needed additional sources of export revenue.

75. My government will work with our development partners to facilitate the marketing of our fish and other seafood products in the international market. We will also seek to introduce modern methods of surveillance of our coastal waters to minimize poaching and discourage all illegal commercial fishing activities within the Exclusive Protection Zone (EPZ)

Private Sector Development

76. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, it is no secret that due to the devastating rebel war and poor management of national resources, Sierra Leone has lagged behind in the areas of social and economic development. For over ten years, Sierra Leone continuously occupied the bottom rung of the United Nations Human Development Index.

77. The 2008 edition of the Doing Business Index also ranks Sierra Leone amongst the 20 worst places in the world to do business. Clearly this is hardly a desirable position to be in for a country that desperately needs to attract both domestic and foreign investment.

78. Mr. Speaker in order to address these impediments to the development of the private sector, my government will embark on further reforms to continue to remove administrative barriers to investment.

79. We will redouble our efforts to define a strategy for developing Sierra Leone's Private sector placing strong emphasis on growing and adding value in the agro-business sector and developing our marine, mineral and tourism potential.

80. Given the significant role that the informal private sector plays in the economy, my government will also pay specific attention to strengthening the entrepreneurial culture with a particular emphasis on small and medium size businesses. To this end a commission will be set up to focus on Small and Medium Scale Enterprises, to provide opportunities for employment and wealth creation.

81. In addition to the removal of administrative barriers my government will also remove non-administrative barriers to investment. These will include: "introducing financial sector reform to enhance access to capital "strengthening Judiciary to enable quick access to redress "initiating power sector reform and energy policy management "Conducting a close examination with a view to improving transport and communications in and out of Sierra Leone. Increasing and enhancing skilled labour and improving labour productivity.

82. Mr. Speaker, Honourable members let me assure you that it is our intention to establish and maintain constant dialogue with the private section for the purpose of promoting private sector development.

Mining

83. Mr. Speaker, the mining sector is plagued with a poor regulatory framework and rampant smuggling.

84. My government will enforce existing mining legislation and develop a robust environmental protection policy.

85. My Government shall also ensure increase in exports as well as encourage secondary processing of minerals, especially diamond and gold to increase the tax revenue base and create more jobs.

86. Government will pursue the proposed resuscitation of the Marampa mines and the development of the Tonkolili Iron Ore prospect as well as the Port Loko Bauxite mining project. Government will also continue to support the operations of the Sierra Rutile mines as well as the Sierra Minerals Bauxite operations with a view to improving revenue to government and more benefit to the people of Sierra Leone.

Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation

87. My administration will maintain its traditional ties with the International Community. While we appreciate assistance from our development partners, my government will assiduously work towards attaining sustainable self-reliance and independence in our own affairs.

88. My government will collaborate with the World Bank, the IMF, DFID and the EU among others in all the areas of development deserving continuity from the last administration. We will also commence new programmes with these multi-lateral and bi-lateral institutions as and when necessary.

89. We will continue to work with the United Nations in peace-building and my government will take full advantage of the opportunities provided by the newly established United Nations Peace Building Commission.

Conclusion

90. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, I have spoken to you today of the imperatives of good governance, our efforts to resuscitate the economy and to improve on the delivery of social services.

91. In order to achieve these important goals which I have set out for my government, I am calling on this Parliament to co-operate with my cabinet.

92. To that end, Mr. Speaker, I ask for your co-operation and that of every Member of this Honourable House, to say with me, on this day of the opening of this session of Parliament "Come, then, let us go forward together with our united strength."

93. We are bound together by the promises we have made to our people, which explains why this government must effect an economic turn around within the next 36 months.

94. We must remain committed to that lofty and achievable purpose to improve the quality of life of our people as I put in place new administrative machinery that seeks to modernize Sierra Leone consistent with global trends.

95. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, I wish to extend special thanks to Sierra Leone's development partners, particularly ECOWAS, African Union, The African Development Bank, The European Union, The Commonwealth, The World Bank, The United Nations, The Governments of The United Kingdom, The Peoples Republic of China, The United States of America, Japan and other multilateral and bilateral partners to name but a few.

96. My fellow country men and women, thank you once more for electing me President and for giving me this great privilege to serve you. The task ahead of me is difficult, and my purpose lofty.

97. I pray to God for this our beloved Republic and ask for your prayers so that God will guide me in my daily endeavours to serve this great nation of ours, the land that we love, our Sierra Leone.

98. May God bless us all.