

**Address by the Chancellor
His Excellency the President, Ernest Bai Koroma
at the Congregation of the University of Sierra Leone
Fourah Bay College – Saturday 22nd December 2007**

Honorable Vice President
Mr. Speaker of Parliament
Honorable Chief Justice
Pro-Chancellor and Chairman of the University Court
Vice Chancellor
Excellencies
Your Worship the Mayor
Members of Court and Senate Faculty and Staff
Graduands and Students
Distinguished Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am extremely delighted to be here once more on the campus of Fourah Bay College, the University of Sierra Leone where I was myself a starry-eyed freshman some years ago. It is a wonderful feeling coming back here today as the Chancellor of the University of Sierra Leone. Sir Milton Margai, our first Prime Minister is the only other alumnus of Fourah Bay College to have occupied a similar exalted position although he did not get to be Chancellor. He too would have been proud to have been given the opportunity to occupy the highest position in the University to demonstrate his commitment to the motto of the University "Non sibi sed alliis" Not for the self but for others.

During my recent inauguration, I had acknowledged that my election as President of our country was both an honor as well as a challenge. The honor is for any Sierra Leonean to have been selected by the populace to lead them at the highest level.

The challenge is for the elected leader to lead them to the promised land of unity, peace, progress and prosperity as enshrined in our constitution and our National Vision 2025. I had indicated however, that our vision cannot be achieved unless we change our attitude. We must all be prepared to change our attitudes now if we are to lift our nation from the bottom of the Human Development Index and save our people from a life of poverty, disease, ignorance and disunity.

Nowhere is this challenge of attitudinal change more crucial than at the University. For it is here that some of the most influential ideas are conceived and developed for the consumption of the wider society. The challenge to every Sierra Leonean is how he or she can help contribute to the development and prosperity of the country by changing his or her attitude.

Whether it is the taxi and poda poda drivers, the market women or members of the law enforcement agencies or the judiciary, each of us must be involved in this process.

Today is our turn at the University. How should we as students, lecturers, deans of faculties and graduands change our attitude so that we can prepare more adequately to respond effectively to the needs of our people, the demands of the marketplace and the aspirations of a developing country in the 21st Century with its complex challenges and decreasing opportunities?

How can we change our attitude so that the University can become more self-reliant and less dependent on the state for its survival?

What kinds of research should be conducted at the University?

What kinds of courses of study should we be exposing our students to in order to make them responsive to the many demands that we have just outlined?

What values should we be inculcating in our students so that they can withstand the challenges of the outside world and resist the temptations of corruption?

We need to propagate and extol values that prevent our young people in particular from lapsing into a sense of hopelessness and loss of self confidence simply because they feel that they have been let down by others. We should teach our people to believe in themselves, appreciating that there are no easy paths to self realization and that looking for easy ways to survive or make a fortune harms not only the nation but the self. The University could respond to changes in the contemporary and globalized world by introducing courses in areas such as biotechnology, genetic engineering, information and communications technology, renewable energy resources which could all contribute significantly to the development of our country and the marketability of the students.

The University could engage in the development of new institutions that would draw on the significant experience we have had as a nation in such areas as conflict management and resolution and peaceful democratic transition.

We can definitely be pacesetters in the latter given our experience in bringing one of the most brutal conflicts on our continent to an end within the relatively short time of 11 years and the follow-up with successful democratic transformation which saw the holding of presidential, parliamentary and local government elections that were free, fair and largely devoid of violence.

In a world dominated by interconnectivity through networks of scholars, research institutions and the internet, the University should be asking itself about the nature of linkages it should be establishing with world renowned research centers for collaborative work. What partnership should the University be establishing with the private sector that could yield sponsorship for cutting-edge research?

What types of enterprises, research and other productive activities should the University be engaged with in order to provide additional sources of funding and income for lecturers, researchers and the University Administration?

These are pertinent questions that need answers at a time like this when it is becoming clear that the funding of the University can no longer be borne by the state alone. On the part of students, the challenge is how to meaningfully engage them with the larger community.

Here I can think about the establishment of a programme of national services program, which will engage undergraduates in some community service before they graduate.

These could be in the form of agricultural extension services for our farmers, adult literacy classes for our illiterate brothers and sisters and teaching in remote areas of the country which do not attract some of the best teachers. Our medical students too, can provide services in our health clinics.

All of these could be done within a limited period of six months to a year before graduation. Each one teach one. This will enable Sierra Leonean students to relate better with the wider community and instill in them a sense of belonging, service, self-pride and patriotism.

Similar programs are operating in Nigeria, Ethiopia and other developing countries and have helped to instill in students the same sense of service, self-pride, belonging and patriotism that we yearn for in our students.

I have mentioned elsewhere that my campaign for attitudinal change includes fighting that cancer that is destroying our nation- corruption. Not only must students and their lecturers resist temptations that may come their way but should also fight with all their might against all forms of corruption. If not sooner, corruption is bound to come to them later. People say it is difficult to fight corruption because the environment we live in is itself corrupt.

That is where the personal challenges come into play. Let us have personal standards and values to guide us. Let us live humble lifestyles. Let us live simply and let us avoid greed. Let us know that the University is a beacon of light for the rest of society and therefore, anything that happens in the University is bound to have repercussions on the rest of society.

On my part, I pledge to do everything in my power and with the support of the government, to help the University achieve its objectives. A very good place to start in this regard is to involve the University in the management of our resources both external and internal.

The University could help develop mechanisms to enable the Government and people of Sierra Leone benefit more from the exploitation of the natural resources of the country and from the aid donated by friendly countries.

Reports from studies conducted by Oxfam and Action Aid, for example, have indicated that 80 percent of the aid earmarked for developing countries such as ours goes back to donors in the form of commissions, administrative costs, handling charges, consultancy services and other miscellaneous and often ambiguous charges.

A more proactive role by the University community in the coordination of aid could vastly reduce this amount of wastage. The University itself could benefit immensely by actively engaging in the numerous consultancies that accompany these aid packages which often come at exorbitant and inflated rates. To give the university a fair chance, I intend to set up a consultancy clearing house that will ensure that qualified and competent Sierra Leoneans are recruited to conduct needed consultancy services in our country. In this way, Government will ensure that foreign consultants are engaged on national projects only in circumstances where there are no qualified and competent Sierra Leoneans to perform those functions.

Of course, this requires a complementary change of attitude on the part of lecturers to rededicate themselves towards excellence and quality so that the product of their efforts will be of the same standard as any produced by experts in any other parts of the world. Let us remember that University education is expensive.

Much as Government is willing to provide meaningful support and lecturers may be willing to change their attitude so that they too can contribute to the running of the University, parents should also now start changing their attitude towards university education and be ready to bear an increasing proportion of the cost of university education for their children and wards.

This is a very important aspect of attitudinal change that will move us from always expecting free lunches. Ladies and gentlemen, my presence here today as Chancellor of the University of Sierra Leone underlines my appeal for attitudinal change and the need for Sierra Leoneans to demonstrate a positive disposition towards each other and towards their nation. As I said at the beginning of my address, I was myself a student here at Fourah Bay College at one time just like most of you here today - curious, excited and overwhelmed by the pomp and pageantry of University congregation.

Little did I know that one day, I will be at the very helm of the affairs of our nation. It is not at this point in time that I, as Chancellor would have had to develop, so to speak, the right spirit and the right attitude to lead our nation, if I didn't already have them. The time for that was when I was like you, just an ordinary student.

Therefore, now is the time for you students to inculcate the attributes of leadership and service that will make you worthy leaders when the time comes. As a citadel of learning and knowledge, you must be curious about this discourse on attitude and attitudinal change; especially what it takes to forge the kind of attitude required for national cohesion and progress in society.

These values are often forged over a period of time, in most cases for years, and lie dormant waiting to be expressed in situations which require them. Indeed, values inculcated over time govern our conduct in life. We are informed that our values in life are generally derived from the belief systems and knowledge our families, communities, schools and other academic institutions like Fourah Bay College, houses of worship as well as the general public bequeath to us, often imperceptibly. Thus, a student in a tertiary institution is an adult with a personality that is almost formed.

But it is equally true that it is in tertiary institutions like Fourah Bay College where the process of maturing reaches its highest point. It is at the University where you must learn to imbibe the values that can mould you into responsible citizens for the rest of your life. It is there, and in your case, here where a major renewing of minds must take place. It is here that you will inculcate the right attitude that is propitious to service in the public as well as the private sector.

I will therefore enjoin you to cultivate attitudes of respect for yourself and mutual respect for one another, honesty and integrity, hard work, tolerance for opposing views and a disposition to share. Above all else however, it is here that the spirit of patriotism that will move you to sacrifice for your country and your countrymen and women will be imbibed.

I wish you all a special Merry Christmas and a Prosperous and Happy New Year.