

**Presidential Address Delivered by His Excellency The President Dr. Ernest Bai Koroma
G.C.R.S.L. President of the Republic and Commander-in-Chief of the Republic of Sierra
Leone Armed Forces On the Occasion of the End of the Fifth Session of the Third Parliament
of the Second Republic of Sierra Leone In the Chamber of Parliament Building Tower Hill,
Freetown On Tuesday, 25th September, 2012 at 10:00 a.m.**

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

I am honoured to be here today before the representatives of the people of this great country; and I am here to thank you, on behalf of all the people, for the invaluable services you have rendered to this nation during the Third Parliament of the Second Republic of Sierra Leone. I applaud members of parliament for making Sierra Leone proud at the ECOWAS and AU Parliaments; I congratulate you all, my honourable colleague parliamentarians for passing close to sixty bills since 2007; and for ratifying eighty-one agreements that have enabled this country to move forward. We very much appreciate your promotion of transparency through the organization of public hearings, especially by the Public Accounts Committee.

2. As a parliamentarian myself, I understand the reasons for the ferocity of some of the debates in this Honourable House. I enjoyed the walk out and boycott tactics of my colleagues on the opposition bench. However, as a true democrat, I pray that the people do not exercise their own option to boycott you during the forthcoming elections.

3. By God's grace, I hope to see many of you again in the next parliament that shall be ushered in by the November elections. But should the people decide to send in different sets of representatives, the choice is theirs, they are the landlords and landladies of this Honourable House, and a democracy ensures that they decide who stays on as their tenants. And it behoves everybody to respect that choice.

4. Mr. Speaker, when the people of this country elected me President in 2007, and gave my party, the All Peoples Congress the majority of seats in this Honourable House, they were asserting their faith in our actions, our progressive ideas and our commitment.

5. Today, I am here to report on how we have utilized our tenancy of this House, and of State House, to usher in some of the greatest economic, infrastructural, social, and statutory transformations in the history of our country. I am here to state that though we still face challenges, though there are remaining difficulties, though we still face some unfair criticism, our unwavering commitment has made our economy one of the fastest growing in the world, our nation one of the most peaceful, and our society one of the most tolerant on earth. With the Sexual Offences Act, the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation Act and several others, we are a country with some of the most progressive legislations including one of the strongest anti-corruption laws in Africa. We are a country that with great bravery, tact and determination launched the free health care programme; contributed troops to maintain world peace; stood for reforms at the United Nations; settled border disputes peacefully; attracted hundreds of millions of dollars in investment at a time of tight global financial constraints; increased levels of support from international partners; won the admiration of the powerful; embraced the weak; and felt at one with the common man and woman.

6. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, we are creating a most inclusive and developmental nation. We are a government with a passion for the common man and woman, a government with vigour for development everywhere, a government with a faith that wisdom inspires, and a zeal that never tires.

7. I challenge representatives gathered here today to look me in the eye and accuse us of marginalizing their district when it comes to free health care; let any Member of Parliament here challenge the proclamation that we have included their region in the transformation of roads and other infrastructure; let any councillor or mayor here present, deny that we are allocating billions to every District Council irrespective of which Political Party controls them. If you cannot, and we believe you cannot, then forever speak the truth. Go tell your people that you may be opposing this government because in a democracy there must be an opposition to keep the government on their toes; that in a democracy it is ethical to want to take power from another party; that the constitution gives you the right to contest elections against an incumbent. We are under oath to respect that right; it is our duty to respect whatever constitutional action you take to promote that right. But then, don't turn a blind eye to the good highways you are travelling on; or the increased electricity in Freetown and other cities; or the thousands of jobs that are being created; or the economy that is growing at a rate faster than at any time since the founding of our nation. Speak the truth; that is the honourable thing to do, and that is why you are called honourable.

When I look at this parliament today; I see the esteemed representatives of all the people of this country; I see a Congress of all the People. That is why we honour you; that is why we facilitated the great increment in salaries of the people's representatives; for we envisioned the dignity of the people of every constituency in this country. That was why across the board, we gave the same tens of millions of Leones to the constituency development fund of every Member of Parliament; that is why we gave financial support to every Member of Parliament to own a vehicle, and that is why every Member of Parliament is getting additional financial support for services rendered as representatives of all the people in the supreme legislative body of the land.

8. My Government takes every part of this country as our stronghold; for our strongholds are the places where we build strong structures, the districts where we build highways and feeder roads, the chiefdoms where we are building agricultural business centres, health centres, and where more children and pregnant women are accessing healthcare than at any time before. Our strongholds are the places where the students of Njala University come from, the University on whose relocation and rehabilitation we spent billions of Leones; our strongholds are the villages and

towns where those for whom we are paying public examination fees come from.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members of Parliament, fellow Sierra Leoneans, I now turn to the specifics of our transformative actions:

AGRICULTURE

9. Mr. Speaker, on taking over governance, we put Agriculture amongst our first five priority sectors in the Agenda for Change. Our vision for the sector is making it the engine for socio-economic growth and development through commercial agriculture and the promotion of the private sector and farmer-based organizations. We established a Presidential Task Force on Agriculture under my chairmanship, developed the National Sustainable Agricultural Development Programme; increased budgetary allocation to the sector from a paltry 1.6% in 2007 to 7.7% in 2009 and close to 10% in 2010; formulated and started the implementation of the Smallholder Commercialization Programme.

10. The Government has supported nearly 500 farmer-based organizations and established nearly 200 Agricultural Business Centres (ABCs), with nearly a hundred more to be established before the end of this year. We have rehabilitated nearly three thousand hectares of inland valley swamps and nearly a thousand more are under rehabilitation for 2012. We have constructed thousands of kilometers of feeder roads that are linking ABCs to production centres and markets. We established Financial Services Associations and 7 Community Banks; 13 more of these banks are being established throughout the country.

11. We distributed nearly three hundred tractors to farmers, over four hundred, rice reapers, and hundreds of mini, medium and giant rice mills. We established a Network of Protected Areas covering hundreds of thousands of hectares and declared the Gola Forest as a National Park.

We established twelve (12) plant health clinics at district level and 72 satellite clinics are now operating. We rehabilitated the Teko Central Veterinary Laboratory, which was completely destroyed during the war, and launched the Sierra Leone Agricultural Research Institute (SLARI) in fulfillment of the SLARI Act.

12. The impact of our policies has been phenomenal. The export value of our agricultural products has increased tremendously. Food import has dropped by over 50%; and local food is now available in the market all year round. Farmers' incomes have increased, especially for cocoa farmers due to organic cocoa exports that now fetch a very high premium price in the European market. We have ensured increased agro-processed or value added products in the market: rice, garri, honey, lemon grass tea and oil, moringa tea, chocolate, and fruit juices. And very importantly, the hunger period in rural Sierra Leone has been reduced from an inherited three months to a current less than one month.

13. We have increased rice self-sufficiency from an inherited 61% to almost full self-sufficiency. Market supply will also be increased by the on-going attention being paid to processing. There is however significant slippage of food to Guinea, Liberia, Senegal and Mali. Market studies in 2009/2010 indicated that 1,800 MT or 36,000 bags of rice entered Guinea from the Barmoi Luma during the five months harvest period. Methods are being devised to address this situation within the framework of our brotherly ties with Guinea.

14. My Government has attracted many large-scale private sector investments in agriculture, including ADDAX Bio-Energy, Socfinco, Arul, Africa Felix, SIVA Group, Sierra AKKAR Poultry, Pajah & IJ Ltd., and Genesis Farms. My Government's policies and actions in the agriculture sector have created thousands of jobs for youths; improved basic facilities and services for host communities of private investments; and increased rural monetization with billions of Leones in land lease payments to landowners.

INFRASTRUCTURE

15. Mr. Speaker, when we took over governance, our country's infrastructure was in a deplorable state. Work on construction sites moved at a very slow pace or had completely stalled as a result of the contracts having been badly awarded and executed.

16. To meet this challenge, my Government listed infrastructural development as a priority area in the Agenda for Change and established a high level Infrastructure Committee chaired by myself. In March 2008, barely 6 months in office, my Government commenced work on two major trunk roads: the Makeni - Matotoka Highway (35 Km) and the Bo-Kenema Highway (65Km) with joint funding from the World Bank and my Government. Both were completed in October 2009 and February 2010 respectively. In February 2010, we launched reconstruction work on the Kenema – Pendembu Highway (86Km) with replacement and construction of eight bridges. Preliminary works have been completed, with earthworks in progress.

17. My Government's constant monitoring and evaluation accelerated reconstruction work on the Masiaka - Bo Highway (164 Km). Work had commenced before September 2007 but moved at an unacceptably slow pace. The dedicated service of and close supervision by the Infrastructure Committee ensured completion in March 2010.

18. We recommenced work in March 2009 on the Freetown-Conakry Highway (86Km), including a new common border post between Sierra Leone and Guinea, at Pamlap. We completed the task in December 2011.

In December 2010, we commenced reconstruction work on the Lungi – Port Loko Road (62Km) and 30 Km of feeder roads in the Lungi township, and work is now at a very advanced stage.

19. Between 2008 and 2011, we ensured that a total of 1205 Km of feeder roads throughout the country was upgraded. We rehabilitated a total of 650Km in Kambia, Kenema, Port Loko and Pujehun districts, and hundreds of kilometres of improvements of feeder roads in Bombali, Tonkolili, Kailahun and Kono districts.

20. Also, from March 2010 rehabilitation works commenced on a total of 89Km of some selected major roads in district headquarter towns. In Bo, Kenema, Makeni, Magburaka, construction is at the 98% completion stage. In Port Loko, Kambia, Lunsar, Moyamba, Pujehun, Mattru Jong, and Bonthe, construction is in progress and completion is set against December 2012. Construction is on-going in Kono, Kailahun and Kabala.

21. In the Western Area, we have undertaken rehabilitation work involving the reconstruction of an aggregate length of 26Km pavement and drainage structure of streets in the West, Central and East of Freetown.

22. We also put on track reconstruction work on the Lumley-Tokeh Road (21Km), which by the time we assumed

office, signified bad contracting out to a company that clearly lacked the capacity to construct what was then planned as a two-lane road. My Government initiated the construction of a four lane road by a reputable firm. We have also commenced the widening of the Lumley-Hill Cot Junction route (3.4Km) and preliminary work is being done on transforming the Hill Cot Road into a four lane dual carriageway. With support from the Chinese Government, work on the Jui-Regent road has already started.

23. Wilkinson Road (5.2Km), has been widened into a four lane dual carriageway and my Government is undertaking the construction of the Hillside Bye-pass Road, connecting the eastern, central and western parts of Freetown.

24. We have secured funding and are preparing to commence work on the Matotoka–Koidu Highway; and also for the rehabilitation of the Makeni-Kabala Highway; expansion of seven bridges on the Masiaka Highway; the reconstruction of the road connecting Leicester Peak with IMATT and Berry Street; and the Lumley Beach Road.

25. We have not restricted ourselves to the construction of roads. Our visionary approach to infrastructural development caters for government offices, and other facilities. Indeed, the Tower Hill landscape has been remarkably improved through the construction of modern buildings housing the Office of National Security, the National Electoral Commission and the Commission for Human Rights, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, and of course the new offices for Parliamentarians. A new building to house the Audit Service is under construction. In the provinces, we are building stadiums in Bo and Port Loko; constructed a market plaza in Kenema; presently constructing the biggest market plaza in the country in Bo; building a market plaza in Makeni; and markets in many major towns all over the country.

These works are not only addressing the many infrastructural deficits we met on assuming governance of this country; they are also creating thousands of jobs for our youths; they are giving thousands of youths the skills and disciplines of the workplace; and when by God's Grace and the people's will, we are re-elected this year, these actions for development and jobs will continue; we will ensure more construction work to bring in more jobs, and we will focus on skills training for youths to get more jobs.

Airport and Seaport

26. Mr. Speaker, when the APC took over governance, the Airport was on the brink of being blacklisted by international aviation authorities on account of its dismal state. We prioritized the rehabilitation of the airport and today our actions have ensured fully functional lighting systems, increased electricity, rehabilitated runways, new scanning equipment for security screening of persons, baggage and cargo resulting in a significant increase in the airport security's profile and capability. We are also engaged in the rehabilitation, modernization and expansion of the Presidential Lounge and the Terminal Building which has doubled its capacity.

27. Our seaports are also being transformed. The infrastructure concession agreement between Government and the Bollere Africa Logistics is transforming Sierra Leone into a trans-shipment hub on the West African coast and making it an investment haven. We have dredged the Queen Elizabeth and Litherrage Quays; the rehabilitation of

the Kissy oil jetty is progressing, and construction work focusing on a new oil jetty and port has started. We are improving safety along our coasts through networks of radio stations, and constructing jetties at Gbondapi in the Pujehun District, Gbangbatoke in the Moyamba District, Yargoi in the Bonthe District, Port Loko in the Port Loko District, Rokupr, Kassirie, Kychom and Mambolo in the Kambia District.

ENERGY

28. Mr. Speaker, in September 2007, total electricity generation in the country was way under 15 megawatts. My Government made energy provision one of the five key sectors in our Agenda for Change. Today, we have increased the national electricity generation capacity to over 90Mw, with a target for 218Mw by 2013.

29. Freetown was a dark capital city when we took over. Electricity supply to the city was at 5Mw. Within the first three months in office, we switched on the lights, much to the joy and relief of the 1.5 million inhabitants of the city. Also with the commissioning of the 50Mw Bumbuna Hydro Power Project, Government increased the supply of electricity in Freetown from 5Mw at the start of 2007 to 50 Mw in 2009.

30. In 2010, we installed a 10Mw thermal plant at King Tom boosting supply to 60Mw. In 2011, we raised the wattage to 76.5Mw with the installation of the 16.5Mw plant at Blackhall Road. With the Interserve project, Government constructed Transmission Lines from Kingtom to Wilberforce, Fourah Bay College and Blackhall Road, improving the quality of supply to over 45,000 customers.

31. My Government has commenced construction works for Mini-hydro projects at Bankasoka (2Mw), Charlotte (3Mw) and Makali (170Kw) – with preparations on-going for the others at Yele (500Kw) and Moyamba (11Mw). Preparations are also going on for the expansion of the Bumbuna Hydro system (Bumbuna II) to 400Mw. My Government has secured an agreement with ADDAX to build a biomass plant producing up to 30 Mw of electricity.

32. We rehabilitated the Bo/Kenema Power Station thermal plants expanding power generation from 2 to 5 Mw. Preparations are on-going to upgrade the Dodo Dam to ensure a 12 Mw all year round supply of electricity.

33. We have commenced a programme of electrification of provincial towns and cities with the installation of new thermal plants. The project covers Kabala, Bo, Makeni, Bonthe, Pujehun, Port Loko, Moyamba, Kambia, Lungi, Kailahun, Magburaka, Koidu and Kenema.

34. My Government has embarked on the development of solar electricity to electrify rural communities. Several homes in rural communities, including Mamusa, Blama Massaquoi, Kissy Koya, Makandeh and Mambioma already benefit from solar home systems through a government project. Government commissioned a Bare Foot Solar Engineers Training Centre at Konta Line Village, the first ever in the continent of Africa.

35. The transformation of the energy landscape is improving the quality of life of our people. We are not yet fully there, we still have more to do, but many more Sierra Leoneans, from the ginger beer seller to the welder and the electrician are all registering improved business activities. These actions for enhancing business growth and job creation will continue; for that is how we will transform the Agenda for Change to the Agenda for Prosperity.

HEALTH

36. Mr. Speaker, on assuming governance in 2007, my Government was faced with high infant, child, and maternal mortality rates. Health facilities were poorly distributed, and there was a critical shortage of all categories of health workers and professionals. Key health training institutions provided low turnout of graduates to meet demands. Much of the existing health workforce required professional development.

37. My Government listed Health amongst its first priorities in the Agenda for Change, developed a 5-year National Health Sector Strategic Plan (NHSSP-2010-2015), The Free Health Care Policy; and several other policies.

38. My Government's implementation of The Free Health Care has resulted in a 250% increase in the number of under-fives outpatient consultations compared to the period before the launch of the Free Healthcare, and this trend is continuing. Immunization coverage for children increased from 67% in 2006 to 82% in 2011 and we have a threefold increase in the percentage of children sleeping under insecticide treated bed nets.

39. Ante-natal care attendance increased three-fold as a result of the Free Health Care Initiative. There is more than 50% reduction in the number of women dying from pregnancy related conditions at public hospitals. Between April 2010 and March 2011, the Free Health Care Initiative led to nearly 2 million additional under five consultations, over 39,000 more women delivered their babies in a health facility and 12,000 maternity complications were managed in health facilities with a 60% drop in the fatality rate in these cases.

40. Government has commenced free treatment of malaria for all age groups in all public health facilities (PHUs and Hospitals) when confirmed by the use of Rapid Diagnostic Test. Malaria control noted significant progress especially in the areas of prevention using Long Lasting Insecticide Treated Nets. In 2010, about 3.2 million Long Lasting Insecticide Treated Nets were distributed to all households nationwide.

41. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, in line with our commitment to creating jobs that positively impact the lives of Sierra Leoneans, we have increased the total workforce in the public health sector from 7,164 in 2009 to 8,125 in 2010. This has also increased further to 8,446 in 2011. To address the inequitable distribution of health workers in the country, we are providing incentive allowances to health workers in remote communities. We have also ensured the mobile recruitment of health staff to ensure staff retention especially in the rural areas.

42. Since September 2007 to date, the Pharmaceutical Directorate (Drugs and Medical Supplies) has undergone tremendous positive changes ranging from procurement and distribution of supplies from \$9m in 2008 to \$12m in 2009, \$16m in 2010 and \$19m in 2011. This is increasing the availability, accessibility and affordability of safe and effective drugs by over 100% within five years. With our introduction of Free Health Care, over 80% of the most essential drugs are now available at all times in public health facilities, resulting in the increase of over 60% hospital and PHU attendance by pregnant and lactating women and children under five years of age.

43. As a government of infrastructure we ensured that a total of 1190 health facilities are now functional compared to 843 in 2006. We built maternity wards in Kabala, Kono, Bo and Kenema government hospitals respectively to facilitate supervised facility delivery by skilled personnel. We established Five Basic Emergency Obstetric Care

(BEMOC) centres each in all the 13 districts. We constructed a regional referral hospital in Bombali and district hospitals in Moyamba, Kabala and Kono were rehabilitated. Eleven district hospitals are at various stages of rehabilitation.

44. We constructed the central medical store and 13 district medical stores were constructed to enhance optimal storage of medicines and medical products both at national and district levels. Assorted medical equipment including x-rays, oxygen concentrators, laboratory and other diagnostic equipment were procured and distributed to hospitals and Primary Health Units to support quality health services delivery. All district hospitals were provided with ambulances and utility vehicles. Blood Banks were established in all district hospitals to provide safe blood for transfusion. A school for training mid-wives was established in Makeni and we established a telemedicine centre at Connaught Hospital.

45. Through the Strengthening of District Health Service Project, five new maternity wards, 21 PHUs, and staff accommodation were built or rehabilitated in Tonkolili, Bo, Bonthe, Port Loko and Kenema districts. In addition, the primary health care complex in Bo and the old maternity wards in Bo and Tonkolili were rehabilitated. All these health facilities are well furnished and fully equipped to help improve maternal and child health services. The construction of a lassa fever prevention, control and treatment complex in Kenema started in July, 2012 and will be well furnished and fully equipped.

EDUCATION

46. Mr. Speaker, education is one of my government's top five priorities in the Agenda for Change, and we have backed up our aspirations for this sector by the huge resources we put into it, and the innovative policies we designed and implemented.

47. We increased the salaries of teachers, ranging from 200 to 400%, depending on the grade of the teachers; and this is more than any increase by any previous government. We increased salaries of lecturers by over 50%, and also increased subventions to universities. When we took over governance in 2007, government subvention to the University of Sierra Leone was Le9 billion; today it is Le38 billion; we have increased the subvention to Njala University from Le8 billion in 2007 to Le26 billion today. When lecturers and teacher training colleges demanded 20% increase in their salaries, we gave them a 50% increment. We have increased allowances to Sierra Leoneans studying abroad from 60 dollars a month in 2007 to 150 dollars today; we are paying tuition fees for girls in JSS, and women studying sciences in the universities and extended the grants-in-aid award to all disabled students who have gained admission to tertiary institutions.

48. When we got poor quality BECE and WASSCE results in 2008, we launched the Professor Gbamanja Commission of Enquiry. We have commenced the implementation of the above - mentioned commission's recommendations. We established a Teaching Service Commission to ensure the effective management of the teaching profession; and recruited over 4,000 additional teachers based on a new National Policy on Teacher Training and Development. We have developed, produced and distributed a code of conduct for teachers and other educational personnel which aims at legal protection of school-going children.

49. We conducted verification exercises, to obliterate ‘ghost teachers’ from payrolls, and we are streamlining records to ensure better governance and resource transfers to the sector. A total of 35,305 Personnel Files were created in Phase One of the exercise. In Phase 2, substantial progress has been recorded. Work has progressed nationwide and approximately 3,000 schools have been visited and 30,000 teachers interviewed. Over 90,000 documents and approximately 8,000 files for teachers’ records have been sorted, recorded on checklists, scanned and indexed in the scanning software.

50. My Government is paying for public exams for more primary, junior and secondary schools than ever before. Additionally, we are paying for public examinations in polytechnic and teacher training colleges.

51. To improve on and expand the skill - sets of our citizens, we formulated a National Policy on Technical/Vocational Education and Training. We also revised the curriculum of technical and vocational institutes to include new trades that are attractive to women. We constructed seven new vocational and technical institutes in Kono, Kenema, Kailahun, Koinadugu, Bombali, Bo and Moyamba; and rehabilitated the Government Technical Institute at Magburaka. We are also supporting non-government run technical and vocational institutes with hundreds of millions of Leones every quarter.

52. Mr. Speaker, after our re-election in November, we will build upon these achievements and get more youths into vocational and technical institutions to give them appropriate skills for jobs in our growing economy. We will facilitate partnerships between these vocational centres and businesses in the mining, agricultural and tourism sectors to enhance job placements, appropriate skills acquisition, and the work ethic necessary for gainful employment.

ECONOMY

53. Mr. Speaker, under our governance, our economy is today one of the fastest growing in the world. The IMF reports that our economy is growing by 32% this year; and the World Bank Global Prospects Report calls our economy the second hottest in the whole world.

54. Our reforms have substantially increased domestic revenue collection from the low level of Le 536.9 billion (8.9 percent of GDP) in 2007 to Le 1.5 trillion (11.6 percent of GDP) in 2011. The expansion in mining activities and the discovery of hydrocarbons is expected to substantially increase revenue in the coming years.

55. We have also ensured a paradigm shift in Government expenditures by allocating significant proportion of domestic revenues to the strategic priorities of the Agenda for Change. Total expenditures on the Agenda for Change priorities increased from Le 257.1 billion in 2008 to Le540.6 billion in 2011.

56. We have also increased transfers to local councils for basic service delivery by more than eightfold from Le13.4 billion in 2007 to Le116.8 billion in 2011. Transfers for Health Service delivery grew from Le2.1 billion in 2007 to Le46.8 billion in 2011 and are budgeted at Le46.3 billion for 2012. Transfers for education services improved markedly from Le1.2 billion in 2007 to Le34.6 billion in 2011 and are projected at Le33.1 billion in 2012. Similarly, transfers for agricultural services increased from less than a billion in 2007 to Le12.3 billion in 2011 and Le12.8

billion budgeted for 2012. Transfers for rural water services increased dramatically from less than half a billion to Le13.1 billion in 2011 and transfers to local councils for the implementation of development projects more than tripled from zero in 2007 to Le7.1 billion in 2011.

57. We have shown astute leadership and undertaken robust actions to ameliorate the impact of the food, fuel and financial crises. Our actions include the elimination of import duties on imported rice, the reduction in import and excise duties on petroleum products, and subsidizing petroleum products in order to keep pump prices of these products at affordable levels. Total subsidies on petroleum products amounted to Le84 billion in 2011.

58. To further ameliorate the impact of the crises on our people, my Government also purchased 40 buses to ease the transportation problem in the country. Subsidy to local bus transportation amounts to Le328 million per month.

59. My Government's effective management of the economy has increased our gross international reserves to US\$382 million as at end June 2012. The nominal exchange rate of the Leone to the US dollar remained relatively stable in 2010 and 2011 after the sharp depreciation in 2009.

60. Export of goods also recovered strongly in 2010 growing by 33.8 percent, mainly reflecting the 45 percent recovery in mineral exports from the 18.5 percent decline in 2009. Exports continued to grow in 2011 and are expected to increase substantially in 2012.

61. Although we inherited a difficult situation from the previous administration, we successfully put our economic programme on track and ensured approval of a successor programme, the Extended Credit Facility (ECF) in 2010. Our performance under this programme has been rated good; the first, second, third and fourth reviews have been successfully concluded by the Executive Board of the IMF. Indeed, on 17th September 2012, the very day I celebrated my fifth anniversary as President, the IMF applauded our management of the economy under the fourth review, and increased its support to Sierra Leone. Total external budget support increased from US\$39.1 million in 2008 to US\$ 50.3 million in 2011. Our budget support partners have committed to disburse US\$53.0 million in 2012. Despite the global economic and financial crisis and the Euro Zone debt crisis, our astute policies and robust implementation of the Agenda for Change encouraged our development partners to disburse an annual average of \$360 million exceeding their original commitment of \$300 million.

62. Taking ownership of our own development, we ensured that the UN Joint Vision is directly aligned to my Agenda for Change. Sierra Leone is the first country to have one Strategy for the UN Family and this is now being emulated in other countries.

63. Our improved relationship with our Development Partners also prompted the UK Department for International Development to increase their commitment to Sierra Leone from £40 million to £68 million annually.

We also ensured progress in Public Financial Management. We reviewed and amended the Government Budgeting and Accountability Act (2005) to support an appropriate framework for public investments; we cleared backlogs in review of the Auditor General's report by the Public Accounts Committee (PAC). Furthermore, the Public Accounts Committee now conducts public hearings on the Auditor General's report thereby increasing transparency. We have

established functional internal audit units in key MDAs and deepened the implementation of the Integrated Financial Management Information System (IFMIS) through its roll-out to additional Ministries Departments and Agencies (MDAs).

64. We also implemented structural reforms by establishing cadres for procurement and internal audit through the recruitment, training and assigning of qualified graduates to MDAs. We increased the number of functional internal audit units across MDAs from seven in 2007 to thirty-seven currently.

65. Mr. Speaker, the work continues. We are developing the payments system project to ensure settlement of interbank transfers continuously and in real time for their own account as well as the accounts of their customers; automated cheque processing and the automated clearing house operations; purchase and sale of government securities in real time; and upgrade of the backbone IT systems of the Central Bank. We enacted The Bank of Sierra Leone Act 2012 that is strengthening the central bank's independence in managing monetary policy as well as the security of its executives. We are also protecting the banking system from money laundering and other financial crimes through the Anti-Money Laundering and the Combating of Financing of Terrorism Act.

66. We established The Credit Reference Bureau in May 2011 to monitor credit ratings of potential borrowers from the Commercial Banks. As at end June 2012, the bureau issued 4,847 credit reports on individuals and businesses.

PUBLIC SERVICE REFORM

67. Mr. Speaker, we are also reforming the Public Service, and have started performance contracts with Ministers that are also being cascaded to senior cadres of the public service, local councils, and the universities. We undertook Management and Functional Reviews (MFRs) of all Ministries, and some key agencies including NRA, Immigration Department and National Commission for Democracy. Arising from the MFRs, the following new Management Structures have been included in the Establishment of the Civil Service and created in some Ministries: Change Management Teams; Policy, Planning and Research Units; Internal Audit Units; Procurement Officer Cadre; Records Management Cadre; Human Resource Officers Cadre; ICT Cadre

68. In 2007, less than 35% of the 17,560 Civil Servants had records at the then Establishment Secretary's Office (now Human Resources Management Office). Now, every Civil servant has a file that meets the new standards required for personnel file management.

69. We re-established The Civil Service Training College (CSTC) with appropriate training modules targeting the special needs of the Public Service. My Government has commenced the construction of a Public Service Academy that will operate as a full-time Management Development Institute and serve as a centre of excellence, providing training and consultancy services in a wide range of disciplines relating to Public Sector Management. We have also designed a multi-year pay reform plan (2011-2015) aimed at improving conditions of service of public servants to realistic and competitive levels. The conditions of service of teachers and civil servants were also improved in 2011. The outdated General Orders have been replaced by a new Civil Service Code of Conduct, Rules and Regulations.

PRIVATE SECTOR DEVELOPMENT

70. Mr. Speaker, by September 2007, Sierra Leone was among countries listed as one of the “wrong places for doing business with excessive bureaucracy and an investment stifling environment”. Today, under our leadership, we are now the best place in the sub region to start a business, attracting hundreds of millions of investments in several sectors.

71. We have been able to do this because we eliminated the advance tax, the exchange control permission and the mandatory involvement of legal practitioners in the preparation of Memorandum and Articles of Association (M&A) needed to register limited liability companies. This has reduced the cost of doing business in Sierra Leone from approximately US\$1700 to US\$79. We merged the work and residence permits from four to a single permit and extended the validity of this single permit up to 5 years.

72. We enacted three acts - The Companies, Bankruptcy and Payment System acts – which combined effect has been the reduction in the cost and time of doing business in Sierra Leone.

As Sierra Leone is opening up for investments, my Government has put in place mechanisms for the simplification of the entire investment procedures, including a One Stop Shop for Business Registration at the Office of the Administrator and Registrar General. Another such facility for clearing of imported goods in the ports is also going to be set up at the National

Revenue Authority. We also established The Sierra Leone Investment and Export Promotion Agency (SLIEPA) to, amongst other functions, assist investors in obtaining permits, and licenses, and facilitate the registration of business enterprises.

73. We developed and launched the National Private Sector Development Strategy which implementation focuses on increasing access to affordable finance for SMEs. Actions undertaken towards this include: funding a business plan competition known as Business Bomba Plan Competition; rehabilitation of the three Growth Centres in Binkolo, Pujehun and Pendembu and providing them with agro-processing machines and other equipment. We have also set up a Public Private Partnership Unit to support MDAs in structuring and negotiating agreements. We have also enacted the Intellectual Property Rights Law of 2011 to provide safeguards against piracy and to reward creativity. Furthermore, to harmonize the country’s standards policy with that of other countries in the sub-region, we enacted the Weights and Measures Act in 2010.

74. To ensure just and fair adjudication of commercial disputes, we established commercial courts. We have also designed the Local Content Policy, which stipulates the development of linkages between foreign firms and domestic small and medium enterprises.

75. My Government’s promotion of investment and private sector activities has ensured hundreds of millions of investment in the country. Hilton Hotels are involved in a 41 million dollars partnership with Sierra Leoneans to operate the 5 star Hilton Freetown Cape Sierra. ADDAX is investing 350 million dollars on bio-fuels; Dangote Industries is on track to build a US\$45 million cement packing plant. West Africa Venture Fund is launching operations in Sierra Leone with 20 Million dollars. Socfinco is investing 80 million dollars on oil palm plantation

and processing plant in Pujehun. It is also planning on establishing a rubber estate. The Siva Group is investing tens of millions of dollars in the Southern Province, and also establishing plantations in Port Loko. Goldtree is continuing to expand its activities, creating employment in Kailahun and other districts. Sahara Biofuels has also had their feasibility study completed by Booker Tate of South Africa for another sugar cane plantation in Tonkolili.

76. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members of Parliament, fellow Sierra Leoneans, the transformation of the Agenda for Change into the Agenda for Prosperity is on course; we will continue to attract investors and create more jobs; we will continue to develop the skills of young men and women and create more jobs; and when re-elected in November, we will continue to create more and more and more jobs.

MINERAL RESOURCES

77. Mr. Speaker, our country is truly blessed, with rich mineral resources in every region, iron ore and gold in the North, Rutile and Bauxite in the South, diamonds in the East, and now oil along our coasts. And more is being discovered. But for too long, we have not been able to claim these blessings for ourselves; for too long we have talked about these resources, but we have not worked upon them in ways that will bring wealth to the country, meaningful employment to our people, and economic and social growth for the whole nation. My Government committed itself to changing this state of affairs and ensuring that the blessings of this country are claimed by its citizens.

78. Already, the signs of the transformation are very visible. Our mineral wealth is making us one of the fastest growing economies in the world, our citizens are getting thousands of jobs in the mineral and other sectors, and the whole country is increasingly being transformed into a vibrant nation, more confident, more assertive of its rights, honoring its obligations but not afraid to demand compliance of its partners to its aspirations for greater revenues, sustainable exploitation, involvement of citizens through our local content policy, ensuring corporate social responsibility by companies, and the distribution of resources to communities through introduction of the Gold Area Community Development Fund alongside the Diamond Area Community Development Fund, and royalty payments to local communities.

79. We have been able to do this because we transformed the Mining Regulatory Environment. My Government enacted a New Mines and Minerals Act in 2009 to guide its interventions in the sector. A new institutional framework with a stable, predictable, competitive, investor-friendly legal framework and fiscal environment has been established.

80. We are reviewing all mining agreements inherited from the past government with a view to increasing the contribution of the sector to the socio-economic transformation of the country. This review has brought about the renegotiation of both the Koidu Holdings and the Sierra Rutile agreements.

81. We granted large-scale mining licenses to African Minerals Limited for the mining of Iron Ore in Tonkolili district; made a port and rail agreement for the purpose of the shipment of iron ore; and already the reconstruction of

the Pepel Port has been done, and the first iron ore shipments in almost 30 years made by the African Minerals and London Mining. Also, the construction of the railway from Ferengbeya to Pepel has been accomplished.

82. We have introduced and started the implementation of a Mining Cadastre for the transparent and effective administration of Mineral Rights. This system feeds in relevant information to the EITI process.

We designed operational regulations for the mineral sector in 2011 which stipulates guidelines relating to occupational health and safety, operating machinery, explosives and blasting, surface and open pit mining, and underground mining.

83. My Government has also established a National Minerals Agency (NMA) which is responsible for the day-to-day implementation of the minerals sector regulation and policy. The Ministry of Mines and Mineral Resources would be responsible for policy development and regulation of the minerals sector.

84. We have developed the Precious Minerals Trading Bill; and facilitated a geochemical survey in the Loko Hills, Sula Mountains, Kangari Hills, Nimini Hills, Freetown Peninsular and the younger granites of the Northern Province of Sierra Leone, including mapping of part of the Kasila Series. The exercise will provide the ministry and the Government of Sierra Leone for the first time a Geological Data Bank.

85. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, the work continues. The prospects for Sierra Leone becoming an oil exporting nation are very great. Three successive discoveries have so far been accomplished from the first three wells drilled between 2009 and 2012 offshore Sierra Leone. This represents 100% geological success. These discoveries are currently being appraised to determine their commerciality.

86. We have just organized the Third Petroleum Bid Round and my Government succeeded in attracting major oil companies including Chevron, Noble, PETRONAS, African Petroleum and several others through an open and competitive bidding process. A total of 59 International Oil Companies competed for nine open blocks, eight of which have been provisionally awarded. Negotiations are on-going.

87. To ensure that Sierra Leoneans fully benefit from our great prospects for oil, my Government has put in place measures for improving local content requirements. Each company is now expected to implement an approved plan of action for the progressive employment, training and retention of citizens in all job categories, and at acceptable proportions. They are further expected to procure goods and services produced and/or provided in Sierra Leone. Furthermore, we are emphasizing corporate social responsibility as a key criterion for award of exploration blocks or petroleum rights generally.

MARINE RESOURCES

88. Mr. Speaker, in relation to our marine resources, we have commenced a review process of the governance system, introduced a participatory governance (co-management) model involving all stakeholders in the sector; established marine protected areas, and started integrated maritime patrols comprising the different maritime and key state agencies and the United States aimed at combating IUU fishing and enforcing other maritime security issues.

Surveillance vehicles have also been provided to the Fisheries Protection Unit for effective integrated maritime patrols. This has resulted in the successful arresting of vessels and prosecution of owners in 2010 and 2011. Punishments have ranged from fines and impounding of vessels, to confiscation of fish.

89. In order to increase fish stocks and conserve the marine environment, my Government has banned pair trawling and the use of monofilament netting materials for fishing purposes. We introduced an incentive for change programme to enhance co-management and eliminate illegal nets. Under this scheme, illegal fishing nets used by artisanal fishermen are replaced with legal nets at subsidized rates. We have also delinked the registration of vessels from the International Ship Registry in New Orleans.

90. The infrastructure work continues, my Government constructed four landing site facilities at Tombo, Shenge, Bonthe, and Goderich; and commenced the construction process for the Freetown Marine Training School. The school will deal with capacity building for the fisheries sector.

To improve safety at sea and save lives, we secured and staffed a Search and Rescue boat, and installed navigation aids in Sierra Leone's territorial waters and inland waterways. My Government has also purchased and installed ultra modern communication equipment in ten jetties in the country. Radio rooms have already been installed and attached to jetties in Shenge, Mattru Jong, Rokupr and Tombo.

YOUTHS

91. Mr. Speaker, youths are the mainstay of our democracy, the most creative citizens, and our greatest hope for the continuing transformation of our economy and society. We are committed to greater integration of youths into the socio-economic and political life of our country.

92. We established the National Youth Commission to spearhead the active, disciplined and skilled involvement of youth in the development of the country. We are implementing the Sierra Leone Youth Employment Support Project (SLYESP) which seeks to address constraints in the demand and supply side of the labour market by improving the skills base of youth to make them more employable.

93. Knowing that training of youths and ensuring that they have the appropriate skills is vital to their integration into the expanding economy, my Government is building Technical and Vocational Centres in Koinadugu, Bombali, Kono, Kailahun, Moyamba, Kenema and Bo. Construction of Technical and Vocational Institutes in Kambia, Pujehun and Masingbi are to commence before the end of 2012. To further enhance the skills of our energetic youths, we formulated a National Policy on Technical and Vocational Education Training, and revised the curriculum for Technical and Vocational Institutes bringing in new trades which are attractive to women.

94. My government is also attracting investors in every sector and encouraging them to create thousands of jobs. These include high paying jobs for youth at African Minerals, London Mining, Sierra Rutile, Addax, newly established commercial and community banks, and thousands of jobs created through infrastructural development projects with companies including China Railway, CSE and tens of indigenous companies involved in feeder road construction all over the country. Employment opportunities and enhanced livelihoods for youth are being created in

every district through the implementation of the Smallholder Commercialization Programme.

95. Through NaCSA, my government has also created thousands of jobs for the youth. Over 1,200 cash-for-work sub projects were successfully implemented for the purpose of creating short-term employment for over 48,000 unemployed youths across the country.

96. Additionally, thousands of youths are gaining employment through the various labour-intensive projects under the Promoting Sustainable Youth Employment Programme and the Peace and Development Corps, in the expanding commercial and community bank sectors, in companies servicing the iron ore, bauxite and rutile sectors, and in the small to medium business enterprises now emerging as a result of removal of administrative barriers to investment, our promotion of local content, our provision of electricity, and our expanding telecommunications sector.

97. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members of Parliament, fellow Sierra Leoneans, the transformation is on course; let me reiterate that we have created more jobs than any other government in our country's history. Our job when re-elected in November will be to create more jobs for our youths. Our job when re-elected will be to enhance the skills of our people for jobs. Our job when re-elected will be the provision of greater opportunities for our businesses to create more jobs.

GENDER

98. Mr. Speaker, no other government has appointed women to top ranking positions as my Government. The top echelons of the Judiciary are now dominated by women, with the first female Chief Justice ever appointed in this country. Women also constitute the majority of members of the Supreme Court, the Highest Court in the land. Other senior positions held by women include the Administrator and Registrar General, the Solicitor General, the Chairperson Law Reform Commission, the Auditor-General and the acting Commissioner-General of the National Revenue Authority.

99. No government is more dedicated to protecting women and promoting women's rights as our government. Commencing with the signing of the Gender Acts into law, we have also just recently enacted the Sexual Offences Act to protect women against the most widespread abuse and violation of rights in our country.

100. No other Head of State in this country had publicly showed remorse for the wrongs made against women until I, on the 27th March 2010, apologized to women for all the sufferings they went through during the conflict period. On that same day, I re-affirmed our commitment to the 30% quota for women in governance at all levels.

101. No other government has acted to promote the health of women as my government through the introduction of the Free Health Care. And no other government has acted to enhance the enrolment of women in schools and colleges as my government, with the country now having the greatest number of girls and women enrolled in schools and colleges all over the country. We revised the curricula of technical vocational institutions to ensure that occupations friendly to women are also part and parcel of their courses. We are paying for all women studying science subjects in tertiary institutions and we are paying tuition fees for girls in schools far more than any government had previously done.

102. My Government has facilitated the construction of pilot safe homes for victims of sexual and gender-based

violence; developed and initiated the implementation of the National Gender Strategic Plan through a wide range of consultations with all relevant stakeholders across the country. This is the first time a Comprehensive National Gender Strategy has been developed to provide a framework for the implementation of all gender programmes in the country.

SOCIAL PROTECTION

103. Mr. Speaker, we are a government of the common man and woman, our party was founded on the aspirations of the ordinary man and woman, the weak and the vulnerable for a caring state. Believing in these aspirations, we kick-started the War Reparations Programme in 2008, and registered 33,793 War Victims. The National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA) has provided micro-grant and livelihood support of Le300,000 each to registered victims. Also hundreds of sexually violated women benefitted from diverse skills training of their choice, toolkits and micro-grants of \$ 500 per beneficiary to start enterprises of their own. The construction of 150 shelter units for war victims is in progress in the North and South-East of the country.

INTERNAL AFFAIRS/LOCAL GOVERNMENT

104. Mr. Speaker, my Government is dedicated to articulating chieftaincy with the best traditions of customary governance, with increased national pride, accountability, good governance, justice and human rights. That is why we enacted the New Chieftaincy Policy, and the Local Court Act. We have replaced colonial paramount chief staffs and regalia bearing the British Coat of Arms with new staffs and regalia bearing the Sierra Leone Coat of Arms. Chieftom police have been trained and sensitized about the chieftom police code of conduct.

105. My government has been implementing the modernization and structuring of National Registration Secretariat. National security is being enhanced through the capturing of biometric data in the production of national identity cards.

106. The Immigration Department has also been structured to meet the challenges of modern management trends and international standards for the issuance of readable passports that ensure maximum security of our passport and a credible database. My Government has also extended the immigration services into the provinces by the setting up of regional offices in the East, North and South for improved service delivery and access to the facility. Personnel are trained in contemporary skills to address issues of illegal immigrants, fraudulent documentations and cross border problems. Border posts have been restored and they are functioning in key areas such as Gendema in the Pujehun District and Gbalamuya in Kambia District. Government has established Border Patrol Officers and Immigration Assistants have been recruited and trained to monitor our cross border posts.

THE POLICE

107. Mr. Speaker, the Sierra Leone Police Force has been engaged in intensive reforms in the areas of change management and training, crime management operations and support services. Our Police is not only a force for good, peace and security in our country, but also internationally. Their participation in international peacekeeping missions was lauded by the Members of the United Nations Security Council during their visit to Sierra Leone.

108. In May 2012, government provided 52 vehicles to the police as part of the ongoing building of police capacity

to respond to incidents and enhance peaceful elections. Riot control vehicles and equipment for the non-lethal management of public order have also been procured.

109. As with other areas, the infrastructure work continues. We are commencing the transformation of the Police Training Centre into an Academy that will award professional qualifications and attract international students. We constructed additional blocks at the Kingtom Police Hospital, and work on a police hospital in Kenema is nearing completion.

We are also improving police welfare by providing police officers with a bag of rice every month.

DEFENCE

110. Mr. Speaker, the Armed Forces are the pride of our nation and they have been fully capacitated to participate in international peacekeeping operations. We also increased the morale of our armed forces by restoring the supply of our staple food to our military. We have also improved financial accountability within the armed forces by instituting payment of salaries through the banks for soldiers.

111. We have also developed the physical infrastructure of the armed forces, constructing and rehabilitating their Mosques, Churches, Canteens and Mess, Senior Officer's quarters and hundreds of prefabricated housing units. We rehabilitated the former recruit billets at the Armed Forces Training Centre which is now used as accommodation for Sector Reconnaissance Company 2 going on peace support operations in Darfur. We also rehabilitated the military hospital and placed it under effective management.

112. The RSLAF has established agricultural units to effectively contribute to the socio-economic transformation of the country; and for the first time, government has established an RSLAF industrial tailoring complex to ensure cost effective production of RSLAF uniforms.

The RSLAF is now training foreign cadet officers, as well as Sierra Leonean cadets at the Armed Forces Training Centre, Benguema.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

113. Mr. Speaker, the work continues and our positive transformation of the country is unstoppable. Our rebranding actions are paying huge international dividends for Sierra Leone. Our country is now a force for peace in the world, a destination for renowned international investment, a voice for reforms, human rights, and democracy, and an exemplar of recovery, development and concern for the health and rights of women, children and the general citizenry. In the Mano River Union sub-region, Sierra Leone played a central role as a member of the international contact group on Guinea in the negotiations with the junta to return the country to civilian rule, and also in negotiating peace and return to democracy in the Ivory Coast.

114. At the level of ECOWAS, Sierra Leone has ratified a number of protocols on democratic governance, preventing conflict and promoting trade. The country has also started issuing ECOWAS passports to its citizens. Sierra Leone has allocated land for the construction of an ECOWAS troop logistics depot.

115. We are now playing leadership roles in International Bodies. As Chairman of the African Union Committee of

ten on the reform of the Security Council, we are leading negotiations on the issue of fair global representation. Our collaboration with Norway and Guinea has enabled Sierra Leone to determine both the contiguous and outer limits of the continental shelf in accordance with the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Through our Permanent Mission in New York, Sierra Leone won membership to the Budget and Finance Committee. In ECOWAS, Sierra Leone obtained the position of Commissioner, Administration and Finance of the Commission. In the AU, Government ensured that a citizen of the country won the position of Commissioner for Social Affairs.

116. My Government is increasing the range of the country's international engagements. We have established full diplomatic and resident representation in the United Nations Office in Geneva (UNOG), and resident missions in Kuwait and Senegal. My Government is expanding its bilateral relationships, reaching out and strengthening ties with countries such as Brazil, India, Venezuela, South Africa, Kuwait and other Middle Eastern countries.

117. We are now a destination for major international conferences, including the African Union Caucus of Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors in Freetown; ECOWAS Heads of States, and MRU Presidents.

We are acclaimed as a force for peace in the world; a contributor of troops to peace keeping missions, including deployment of troops and police officers in Sudan and Somalia.

118. The country has had significant international support towards the government's transformative agenda. The United States Peace Corps Programme has been resuscitated and volunteers sent to teach in schools all over the country. The Cuban Government has provided thirty-two (32) Medical Doctors with South African funding. Government's international engagement is increasing training opportunities and bursaries for Sierra Leoneans in various disciplinary areas from our many bilateral and multilateral partners. These include, Australia, China, Cuba, Germany, France, India, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan, Russian Federation, Singapore, Turkey, and Venezuela among others.

119. We have expanded and strengthened developmental and investment links with Nigeria. This includes the deployment of Nigerian Government's Technical Aid Corps Volunteers in the health and education sectors and Obasanjo Skills Acquisition Centre for the preparation of our youth to enhance middle-level manpower; increase in the number of Banks headquartered in Nigeria, investment by Nigerian businesses in the cement, oil and other sectors. We are truly appreciative of the profound support provided by the Government and people of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to our beloved nation.

120. We have also strengthened our links with China. A significant outcome of this is the establishment of the China-Sierra Leone Malaria Prevention and Treatment Centre. China has also constructed a one hundred-bed hospital in Freetown and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Complex at Tower Hill. As already mentioned, the Chinese are currently supporting the construction of the Regent - Grafton Road. There are also agreements with the Chinese to support two hydro projects in Charlotte and Makali.

121. My Government has maintained the strong ties between Sierra Leone and her traditional partners in Europe and

America including their respective development cooperation agencies such as DFID, USAID, GTZ and Irish Aid. We applaud the British for the great contribution they are making to the sustenance of our democracy and transformation. My government's robust international engagements have also ensured support and cooperation worth hundreds of millions of dollars from the European Commission, the African Development Bank, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, BADEA, JICA, and the Islamic Development Bank.

122. We continue to play positive roles in the affairs of the Mano River Union, ECOWAS, the African Union, the Commonwealth, Organization of the Islamic Conference, the United Nations and its family of Agencies.

We have ensured great leaps in international ratings of the country. The Global Peace Index published as recently as June 12, 2012 rates Sierra Leone as the 7th Most Peaceful Country in Africa and the 52nd globally, in a survey conducted in 158 countries.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS

123. Mr. Speaker, freedom of expression is greater today than at any time in the country's history. The TRC Report decried the hundreds of persons put in jail and the journalists killed by governments in the 1990s and early 2000s. We have moved away from that. My Government is facilitating lively press and broadcast media and freedom of expression, through a regulatory regime that enhances speedy registration of radio stations and newspapers with the leadership of the regulatory body, the Independent Media Commission almost entirely composed of journalists.

124. My Government has transformed the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service into an independent broadcaster, Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation, with voice given to all shades of opinions within the country. Through the Open Government Initiative, my Government has continued to bring ordinary people and government officials together, and provide ordinary people the opportunity to express their concerns and directly enquire about government policies and actions, pose questions directly to the President, the heads of the two other arms of government-the Speaker and the Chief Justice, Parliamentarians, Mayors and Councillors.

We have also subjected ourselves to an evaluation of our performance through the Citizens Report Card project organized by the Open Government Initiative. Through this, we will enhance our knowledge of the positive impacts of our programmes, further assess the challenges and firm up our understanding of our people's aspirations for community and national development.

125. Through the Attitudinal and Behavioural Change Secretariat, and the National Commission for Democracy, Government is robustly engaging communities on issues relating to non-violence, patriotism, respect for government property, law and order Fully cognizant of Information and Communication Technology as a prime mover of development and facilitator of a vibrant knowledge based society, we designed a National ICT policy. The National ICT policy document provides for the improvement of network performance by service providers.

126. We have set up the National ICT Advisory Council that gives guidance to all stakeholders in ICT sector related matters. We also established standards bureau for the ICT sector, created a centre for ICT intelligence, and developed a National ICT framework.

127. My Government also landed the first submarine fibre optic cable in Freetown, constructed the cable landing station (CSL) and installed partially tested submarine terminal equipment.

128. We are currently developing the National Fibre Optic Backbone. We have also incorporated Sierra Leone Cable Limited (SALCAB) to participate in the Africa Coast to Europe Consortium and serve as a landing party for the submarine fibre optic cable.

129. The work continues; we launched four multi-purpose resource centres in Freetown and the provincial headquarter cities, equipped with internet connections, Local Area Network for resource sharing, printing and photocopying facilities. We have also established the Universal Access Development Fund to provide telecommunications services in under-served and un-served areas in the country. Additionally, we are rehabilitating, equipping and modernizing the moribund Government Printing Department through a Public Private Sector Partnership Agreement with Excellent Printing Press of Ghana. This is enabling the Printing Department to be involved in quality government, commercial and security printing

JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

130. Mr. Speaker, our country is a dedication to the freedom of people and promotion of justice for all its inhabitants. My government is an inheritor of this dedication, and we are breaking new grounds, expanding the realms of justice and human rights, and moving on with our obligations with a zeal that never tires.

131. My Government is the only government that has not carried out the death penalty in the history of the country; has had no political prisoners and no journalist has been sent to jail. My Government's support for the independence of the Human Rights Commission has allowed it to improve its effectiveness resulting in its recent elevation to "A" status by the United Nations.

132. We have enacted landmark human rights legislation promoting and enhancing the rights of women, youth and the disabled. This includes the establishment of the National Youth Commission and the Disability Commission. The passage of the Local Court Act in 2011 is for the first time in the history of the country putting local courts, which adjudicate the overwhelming number of cases in the country, under the supervision of the judiciary of the country.

133. We have ensured new office spaces for the Office of the Ombudsman in Freetown, Bo, Makeni and Kenema, giving the office greater publicity. The office has designed and started the implementation of a five-year development plan.

134. We are expanding access to justice for the common man and woman. A legal aid scheme to provide legal assistance to the poor and the vulnerable has been piloted. The legal aid bill has been completed and has gone through cabinet. To further enhance the rights of our people, we passed the Persons with Disability (PWD) Act to address the human rights concerns of PWDs and also in compliance with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

135. As with other sectors, infrastructural development is also enhancing the Judiciary. We have built the Pademba Road Magistrate Court, the first court to be built in Freetown in one hundred years. We have also constructed the Cline Town Court; the new Magistrate Court has been constructed in York; and two new Magistrate Courts constructed at Mile 91 and Masiaka. We have rehabilitated the Judiciary's library and its Civil Registry.

136. We have established The Fast Track Commercial Court (FTCC) intended to speed the adjudication of Commercial and Admiralty cases, and the enforcement of contracts, by reducing the time it takes to complete commercial cases to 100 days or a maximum of six months. We have also constructed a Judicial and Legal Training Institute to build the capacity of the Judiciary and the Justice Sector in general.

137. We have generally improved conditions of service, increasing the salaries for Magistrates and Legal Executives. Knowing that the bulk of the country's population utilize Local Courts more than any other court in the land, we commenced training of Local Courts personnel across the country in Moyamba involving Paramount Chiefs and other local authorities. In relation to the superior courts, there is now in force new and improved High Court Rules, the aim of which is to simplify procedure and speed up cases in court. In preparation for the 2012 Presidential and Parliamentary Elections, the Judiciary is setting up six special Electoral Offences Courts to hear electoral offences and petitions throughout the country.

ANTI-CORRUPTION

138. Mr. Speaker, my Government has done more than any other government to tackle corruption in our country. No country in the world is corruption free, but we belong to the list of governments that have put up some of the bravest fights against this scourge.

139. On taking over governance in 2007, we met a very weak anti-corruption commission, a weaker anti-corruption act and a flaccid anti-corruption strategy. We promised zero tolerance for corruption; launched a new National Anti-Corruption Strategy and enacted one of the toughest anti-corruption legislations in all of Africa, The New Anti Corruption Act 2008. The prosecutorial powers granted the ACC by the new Act have seen the establishment of a prosecution unit by the Anti-Corruption Commission.

140. In stepping up the fight, the strengthened ACC has undertaken Anti- Corruption System and Process Reviews of Government Ministries, Departments and agencies (MDAs) for the purpose of improving their systems and processes. During these reviews the financial procedures and practices, recruitment policies, stores management procedures, use of office property and assets among other things were examined and recommendations made to improve on the general running of these MDAs.

141. Our anti- corruption efforts are not only limited to what the ACC is doing. A prime objective of our overall public sector financial management reforms is also geared towards promoting integrity in public life. That is why we have also embarked on a comprehensive range of measures to strengthen public financial management in both Central Government and Local Councils. With the launching of the Integrated Public Financial Management Reform Program (IPFMRP), we hope to ensure sustainable improvement in the country's fiscal governance.

142. My Government also initiated a comprehensive review of the Government Budgeting and Accountability Act,

Financial Management Regulations, Public Procurement Act and Procurement Regulations to strengthen the legal framework for budgeting, accounting, recording and procurement.

143. As a demonstration of our government's commitment to transparency, a Performance Audit Unit has been established in the Office of the Auditor General to go beyond traditional financial audit and appraise and measure the impact of public service delivery on citizens.

144. Corruption is not only a public sector issue, it is a societal problem; and that is why the ACC is enlisting the supporting of all Sierra Leoneans to fight this scourge. That is why it established as well as strengthened School Integrity Clubs throughout the country; that is why it organized a series of Conferences for Principals/Head Teachers Councils in Freetown and all the District Headquarters with a view to improving on their roles as education officials as well as to enhance them with knowledge in the fight against corruption. And that is why it also signed communiqués with two strategic institutions i.e. the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) and Civil Society Organizations to support the fight against corruption.

145. Sierra Leone moved from 1.9 in 2009 to 2.4 in 2010 in the Transparency International Index. The Global Integrity Scorecard published that among the lower and middle-income countries in the world, Sierra Leone achieved important anti-corruption improvements in 2010. In Global Integrity Report 2011, the Anti Corruption Commission's effectiveness is rated at 85%. For these achievements, the ACC bagged the World Bank's prestigious Integrity Award for recovering stolen government property; the IACCA Public Service Announcement Award of Excellence; highly commended in the Millennium Challenges Conference, and the country improved its rankings in the Global Integrity Report, Mo Ibrahim Index and the World Bank Governance Indicators.

CONCLUSION

146. Mr. Speaker, we are proud of our record; we have done more with less time and resources than any other government. We have built more roads in five years than any other government; we have saved more lives of pregnant women and children in less length of time than any other government; we have secured more international investments than at any other time; we have created more job opportunities than at any time. We face difficulties, but the youths of this country, using the language of football they are so familiar with, call the leadership of this government "world best." We still have hurdles to jump over, but the assertions of the youths of this country are in accord with World Bank naming us the second hottest economy in the world; the proclamation of the common man and woman correlate with the report of the Gallup Company that we are amongst the most tolerant of societies.

147. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members of Parliament, this country is on the move; we are being certified as secure, progressive, beautiful, democratic and developmental by visiting international statesmen; by renowned publications and indices; by missions of international financial institutions; and most importantly by the majority of the people of this country. A wind of change is blowing throughout Sierra Leone and the transformation that is taking place is simply unstoppable. The ship of progress and advancement is sailing majestically on calm waters and we are

heading for a haven of prosperity. To the people of Sierra Leone I say, take control of your own destiny and sail proudly and confidently with us to that haven of peace and development and prosperity.

148. Fellow citizens, Sierra Leone is at the crossroads, the moment of truth has come; choose now whether you want progress or retrogression; democracy or dictatorship; prosperity or poverty; equal rights and justice or a brutish breakdown of law and order. My government's transformative achievements provide tangible evidence of tenacity of purpose, perseverance, patriotic zeal and resilience. We have said goodbye to the emptiness, desolation and despair of the years preceding September 2007; we have proved ourselves worthy; and we look forward to the years ahead with optimism and new vistas of hope for a brighter future in our beloved Sierra Leone.

149. I exhort you all to put Sierra Leone first in all your endeavours. While individual progress is essential, it is our collective efforts as Sierra Leoneans that will determine the progressive strides we make as a nation. Let us with one accord think and act as Sierra Leoneans regardless of ethnic group, region, or political affiliation. The ties of friendship and kinship that bind us are stronger than the differences that threaten to divide us. Let us as proud citizens of this great country preserve our national heritage, guided by a true spirit of unity, tolerance and good neighbourliness. We know that elections are usually moments for trumpeting out our differences, but let us not allow these differences to threaten the foundations of our unity, our freedom and our sense of justice. Let all Sierra Leoneans translate these great values into productivity, jobs and concern for the welfare of all.

150. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members of Parliament, the world is watching us, let us use the coming elections to enhance the world's admiration of our stability, our peace, our democratic credentials and our tolerance. God in his wisdom has put all six million Sierra Leoneans into this diamond-shaped land in West Africa, and endowed it with the resources that should propel it to greatness. That is our inheritance, we must guard it, we must promote it, we must make it work for all of us; we must strive relentlessly to make it prosper; that is the only way we can bequeath to our children a land truly exalted by all.

151. God bless Sierra Leone.