

**Presidential Address Delivered by His Excellency Dr. Ahmad Tejan Kabbah President of the Republic of Sierra Leone On the occasion of the State Opening of the Fourth session of the First Parliament of the Second Republic of Sierra Leone In the Chamber of Parliament Building Tower Hill, Freetown on Friday 16<sup>th</sup> June 2000**

INTRODUCTION

Mr. Speaker, Honorable Members of Parliament

Once again, I appear before this great institution of our democracy, with a sense of pride. Thanks to the indomitable will of the people whom you represent, the forces of anarchy and brutality have failed in their grand design to completely destroy this nation, its infrastructure and institutions. Together, we have resisted attempts by an inhuman alliance of local, regional and international vested interests to exploit our natural resources in exchange for weapons to wage war against the people of Sierra Leone.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, the price of this resistance, in human lives, has been costly. I would therefore invite all assembled here to observe a minute of silence in remembrance of our nationals and allies who have paid the supreme price with their lives so that we can continue to live in peace and freedom.

May their souls rest in perfect peace.

NATIONAL SECURITY AND THE MILITARY SITUATION

The complex security situation in the country continues to frustrate the efforts of my government to stabilise the economy and create prosperity for our people. It is a situation that my government will not tolerate and with your support, I am sure, WE SHALL OVERCOME our current malaise.

The safety and security of life and property therefore, continue to be a high priority on the national agenda of my Government, as the armed forces and their allies strive to consolidate government's authority over every inch of Sierra Leone territory.

My Government is in the final stages of establishing a superior nation-wide security network that will provide prompt and accurate intelligence, analyse its implications and take steps to avert impending danger. A broad-based consultative group has already discussed and approved a national security policy, which provides the framework for raising our level of competence in dealing with the complex issues involved.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, let me now turn to the military situation. In reckless disregard of its obligations under the Lome Agreement, and in violation of the right of our people to live in peace and security, the RUF launched a military offensive on our forces and UN peacekeepers several weeks ago. My Government had no alternative but to counter the renewed threat to the lives and limbs of our people. Ours was a decisive action, in self-defence. Our action was also necessitated by the need to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance by the World Food Programme and others, to innocent civilians who had been virtually held hostage by the RUF.

I would like to say this loud and clear to the honourable members of this august legislature, to the nation as a whole, and to the entire international community, that my Government is still committed to the principal provisions of the Lome Peace Agreement, namely disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of ex-combatants. At the same time, we shall NEVER, and I repeat, NEVER, ever relinquish our right to mobilise all the forces at our disposal to defend this nation against any threat to the peace and security of its people. We are not seeking any military victory, nor do we have any territorial claim against anyone. All we are doing is exercising our inalienable right to self-defence, and ensuring that Government consolidate and maintain effective control of all our territory, especially the diamond areas.

For far too long the RUF and its external surrogates have taken our commitment to peace for granted. For far too long our determination not to do, or even not to say anything that would be perceived as disturbing the peace process, has also been taken for granted. We shall no longer tolerate further RUF violations of the Lome Peace Agreement. Indeed, my Government reserves the right to resume the two-track policy it pursued before Lome. On the one hand, we shall leave the door for a peaceful solution of the conflict wide open. We shall, in good faith, continue to work for the consolidation of peace. On the other hand, we are prepared, if necessary, to meet force with force, because the security of the State of Sierra Leone is too precious, too vital to be violated or threatened with impunity. In the words of our Constitution, we are reminded that:

"the security, peace and welfare of the people of Sierra Leone shall be the primary purpose and responsibility of Government, and to this end it shall be the duty of the Armed Forces, the Police, Public Officers and all security agents to protect and safeguard the people of Sierra Leone."

In the past five weeks, a range of pro-government forces, including the SLA, ex-SLA, CDF and civil society, has mobilised in defence of the nation. The decision to establish three new SLA battalions to counter the immediate threat demonstrates the determination of my Government to meet the new challenge. After a period of intensive training, these battalions will be ready to play a key role in our defence capability. The restructuring of the Armed Forces is key, not only to the objectives of the current campaign, but also to achieving long-term political stability in Sierra Leone. No one should question nor attempt to deny us the right to self-defence. Equally, no one should question our sovereign right to seek the assistance of friendly governments in training our armed forces.

In spite of our acute financial constraints, government has provided adequate logistics for the combined pro-government forces.

I am pleased to confirm that the Government of the United Kingdom has reiterated its commitment to assist in this process. In addition to helping to train the new battalions, it will also lead a 90-man strong international training and advisory team that will assist my Government in introducing the fundamental reforms required to establish professional, capable, and loyal Armed Forces. The team is also expected to have a considerable impact on our short-term security campaign. We are specially grateful to the British Government and people for their timely and effective response to our crisis which has greatly inspired our troops and given confidence to our people. By their actions, they have made believers out of us all Sierra Leoneans that, "a friend in need is a friend indeed."

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I would like to take this opportunity to express the gratitude and appreciation of the Government and people of Sierra Leone for the outstanding performance and achievements of the Nigerian-led ECOMOG Forces, incorporating units from Guinea, Ghana and Mali. The success of this unique experiment at sub-regional conflict management and resolution has spurred the International Community to organise and deploy in Sierra Leone the largest United Nations Peace Keeping Force.

Cooperation between Government forces and the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), continues to improve under very difficult circumstances. Government is pleased that after the recent unfortunate incidents, UNAMSIL has taken into consideration recent changes in the security climate in the country, as well as the demands of Sierra Leoneans in adapting to these changes. We welcome the fact that it is taking a more robust approach to the implementation of its mandate, in order to cope with the special situation in Sierra Leone. My colleagues in ECOWAS continue to provide encouragement and support in ensuring that the appropriate troop levels are achieved within the shortest possible time.

While recognising the need for external assistance, we must not continue to rely on such assistance indefinitely. We must increasingly take full responsibility for our own security. I would like to urge Parliament and all Sierra Leoneans to join my Government in ensuring that our Armed Forces have our unstinting support, especially at this crucial period in our history. In this regard, I consider it most appropriate to commend citizens for their personal contributions to the security agencies at this critical time of need in our country.

Let me add here that our commitment to the maintenance of law and order continues to be demonstrated through the speedy implementation of the policing charter, which has greatly improved the image of the police as 'a force for good' and increased its operational capability. While the effectiveness and efficiency of our Police Force is to be recognised for responding to citizen dilemma, government continues to be concerned about the increased incidence of armed robbery especially in the east end of Freetown. A special programme for community safety and security has also greatly enhanced the effectiveness and efficiency of the Force in discharging its duties. At the same time, urgent steps are being taken to ensure that both the Prisons and Fire Services fulfil their mandates for general safety and security.

My Government has also finalised plans for privatising the production and issue of National Identity cards and transferring the Immigration Department to civilian control.

## NATIONAL RECONCILIATION

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, the Government and people of Sierra Leone have amply demonstrated by their actions that they are capable of forgiving and reconciling with those who have wreaked so much havoc, destruction and misery on the nation. Government has worked very hard to overcome public skepticism and outright opposition to some provisions of the Lome Peace Accord and to implement them in both letter and spirit. All that the people are asking the RUF to do in return is to abide by the Accord, which they freely signed. As I speak to you, extensive consultations are going on within the country and among our partners to salvage the Lome Peace Accord while safeguarding the broad interests of the mass of our people.

The key to an overall settlement of the present conflict is a commitment by all Sierra Leoneans to the principles of democracy and constitutional order, respect for human rights, the rule of law and reconciliation. The activities of the National Commission for Democracy and Human Rights, Commission for the Consolidation of Peace and those proposed for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission are all designed to achieve these objectives.

## FOREIGN POLICY

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, we would like to assure our friends and allies that democracy, good governance, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, remain the basis of my Government's foreign policy. This approach continues to generate understanding, considerable assistance and support from the international community

in our efforts to achieve sustainable peace, security and development. The ECOWAS States especially Nigeria and Guinea, the OAU, Great Britain and other Commonwealth and European Union countries, the United States, Canada, China and other friendly countries have all continued to provide assistance to ensure stability and relief for our people. We also reaffirm our commitment to the United Nations, OAU, the Commonwealth, ECOWAS, the Organisation of Islamic States, the Non-Aligned Movement and the Group of 77.

In pursuit of the national commitment to peace, security and stability in the Mano River Union, we shall continue to strengthen our engagement in cooperative institution building with our partners as provided for in the Mano River Conakry-2000 declaration.

## THE ECONOMY

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, the recovery in economic activity achieved by my Government under very difficult conditions is now under threat from the recent deterioration in the security situation as a result of the violation by the RUF of the Lome Agreement. This development, and its associated high defence outlays pose serious problems in sustaining improved revenue performance, reducing Central Bank Financing, money supply and inflation, as well as maintaining the strength of the national currency with a weak performance in the export sector.

Against the background of continued support by the IMF, World Bank, IFAD, African and Islamic Development Banks and other Donors, the Government remains committed to restructuring and relaunching the economy. With the anticipated improvement in the security situation, we look forward to the full resumption of essential programmes.

The Government has been carrying out reforms in public management, which have resulted in a substantial improvement in the management of the economy over the past few years. The role of the state in administering and participating in economic activity has been considerably reduced through deregulation of domestic markets and privatisation or restructuring of the state enterprises. Key institutions involved in economic management such as the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Development and Economic Planning, the Bank of Sierra Leone are being restructured. Fiscal management and budgetary procedures have also improved significantly.

The foreign exchange auctions undertaken by my Government have resulted in the improved availability of foreign exchange in the official system, and to a large extent stalled the depreciation of our currency and enhanced transparency of foreign exchange transactions. As a result, the spread between the commercial banks and parallel market exchange rates has narrowed considerably. The major structural performance benchmarks agreed with the IMF under the current Emergency Post Conflict Facility are being implemented. These include passage into law by Parliament of the Banking Act and the new Income Tax Code. I take this opportunity to congratulate Parliament on passing these two important pieces of legislation.

Plans are at an advanced stage for the establishment of an Independent Revenue Authority, which is expected to improve tax administration and boost domestic revenue generation. My government is also actively considering a review of the current indirect tax system, especially import duties and sales and excise taxes. My Government will adhere strictly to the economic and financial policy objectives of lowering the rate of inflation, reducing the primary budget deficit and rebuilding foreign exchange reserves with an enhanced supervisory role for Bank of Sierra Leone, while ensuring the prudent management of financial resources to achieve accountability, efficiency and effectiveness.

Long Term Perspective Vision The key to sustainable socio-economic development in any country, however, remains effective and efficient planning in a stable and secure environment. My Government is of the view that development

priorities for Sierra Leone ought to be formulated from a careful analysis of the country's historical experiences, its natural and human resources and its cultural, regional and international context. My Government also believes that to be effective and relevant, this analysis should emerge from a national debate on the relevant issues. Its focus must not only be directed towards immediate development needs and reacting to looming crisis, but to go beyond the passive and reactive development practices which characterised past development efforts and adopt a more active and strategic stance with regard to changes taking place in our country. There is a need now to review the short term solutions which mainly respond to immediate situations and to adopt strategies which will anticipate events, as we gradually take bold steps towards a peaceful Sierra Leone, and put plans and programmes in place which will respond to the people's long term desires and aspirations. Towards this end, my Government has made several attempts to develop a National Long-term Perspective Study (NLTPS) for a long-term vision, which will promote movement to a broader vision of development and bring hope for a long-term sectoral and regional development of the country. These attempts have always been interrupted by rebel activities. We shall not be deterred from our objectives. In order to ensure meaningful planning for smooth implementation of plans and programmes, preparatory work is already far advanced for a national population census, which will provide reliable and current data. At the same time, an integrated approach to aid coordination will effectively manage the various donor interventions for greater benefit to our population.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, a central pillar of my Government's strategy to stimulate the recovery and growth of the economy is the development of private sector initiatives. This can be achieved through well-structured and effective tripartite partnerships involving government, indigenous businessmen and foreign investors. We remain committed to providing opportunities and effective empowerment to credible indigenous businessmen and women to actively participate in all areas of the economy.

The performance of Public Enterprises remains a source of concern to Government. Many of these enterprises have been plagued with serious problems and had to be subsidised by the Government, thereby creating serious budgetary problems. A State Enterprises Commission is to be established to provide the mechanism to monitor and enhance the performance of all public enterprises. My Government is committed to the continued implementation of the Public Enterprises Reform Programme embarked upon under the Structural Adjustment Programme.

In this regard, action plans are currently being prepared for privatisation of the Sierra National Airlines, the Sierra Leone National Shipping Company and the Sierra Leone Road Transport Corporation. Restructuring will continue to entail changes in both the Board of Directors and Management of public enterprises that will not be privatised in the short run. Board appointees have to be in a position to appreciate the operating environment of a public enterprise, to evaluate performance, to provide guidelines to the operating management and to exercise proper supervisory control over management. Management changes will involve the contracting out of the management of a number of public enterprises and in others, personnel changes.

The external debt burden, coupled with low performance in the export sector represent a serious threat to economic prospects for the coming year. Whilst debt service obligations will continue to pose a challenge, my Government will endeavour to meet scheduled obligations to Multilateral Creditor Institutions, from which substantial disbursements are expected. At the same time, Government will pursue dialogue with bilateral creditors, in particular, the Paris Club, with a view to securing debt forgiveness through cancellation or write-off.

The alleviation of poverty and the creation of better living conditions for the entire population is central to Government's economic policy objectives. In many ways, at the root of our problems are poverty, ignorance and disease, which inevitably threaten our security.

My Government is already implementing a micro-credit financing scheme in support of disadvantaged groups, work is also in progress towards the formulation of a comprehensive Poverty Reduction Programme for donor funding.

## TRANSPARENCY, PROBITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, my Government continues to work towards ensuring that transparency and accountability become integral parts of our public culture and ultimately of our national character. Whether it is considered as misuse of public power for private gain, or acts of operational dishonesty, corruption undermines democratic accountability and promotes chaos and instability in any society. This is why my Government has been actively developing strategies, which will be implemented by the recently established Independent Anti-Corruption Commission. My Government will continue to design and execute programmes aimed at increasing public awareness of the negative effects of corrupt practices by individuals and institutions. This is an effective way to enhance public and donor confidence in government's ability to use and manage resources efficiently.

Following the passing of the Audit Service Act, the Auditor General's Department is in the process of being restructured. Members of the Audit Service Board will shortly be named and the Board will be responsible to appoint persons, other than the Auditor General, to hold or act in offices as members of the Audit Service and to advise the Auditor General in the administration of the Audit Service.

**THE ECONOMIC SECTORS** The persistent insecurity in the rural areas resulting in massive displacement of the farming population, destruction of planting materials, plants and livestock, as well as the unprecedented rate of deforestation have all adversely affected agricultural production and productivity.

My Government's strategy to achieve food security involves, a partnership between grass-root farmers, the private sector, multilateral and bi-lateral Donors and NGOs. An important initiative in this regard involves collaboration with the NCRRR to embark on a nationwide Agricultural Rehabilitation Programme at District level. Government is also currently taking steps to protect our marine resources, improve revenue performance and promote the participation of Sierra Leoneans in the industry.

Over the past few years, our trade regime has witnessed significant liberalisation. The main thrust of our current efforts continues to be the enhancement of economic growth through the promotion of both internal and external trade. Active indigenous participation in the national economy will be encouraged and foreign direct investment will be attracted to participate in joint venture projects with our people especially in non-traditional sectors.

The Sierra Leone Export Development and Investment Corporation (SLEDIC) continues to establish the basis for a quick take-off of export and investment activities through a number of initiatives seeking to facilitate interventions in the economy by both local and foreign businessmen.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, my Government attaches a high priority to the development of transport and telecommunications infrastructure as a firm base for socio-economic development. This is why measures continue to be adopted to restructure and organise the sector to ensure that the country derives maximum benefit.

In this regard, the World Bank supported Transport Sector has undertaken invaluable work on construction of landing sites and slipways at the Port, expansion and improvement of the Lungi Airport and providing support for establishing the Sierra Leone Maritime Administration which will regulate all aspects of maritime transport,

including certification and registration. Unfortunately, the persistent insecurity has again delayed rehabilitation of the road network in Freetown and construction of both feeder and trunk roads in the provinces.

My Government's goal to reintroduce the railway system in the country is still being actively pursued and feasibility studies are now pending within the framework of the ECOWAS Master Plan for Railways. Our collaboration with the ECOWAS vehicular transport initiative is well on track with the implementation of the protocol on reflective number plates for vehicles.

In the Communications Sector, my Government has adopted measures to make communication affordable to all. These include the introduction of a generalised licence framework for the provision of Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM), invitation to investors for improving the national telecommunications network, as well as improving postal services, within Sierra Leone and the outside world.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, we now know that despite their protestations, the primary reason why the RUF launched war on the people of this country is in pursuit of their greed to illegally exploit the mineral resources in league with criminal foreigners who perpetuate the war with huge supplies of arms and ammunition. The continued instability has destroyed the mining industry especially as the RUF continues to occupy and mine in 80% of the diamond producing areas, in clear violation of the Lome Peace Accord. The continued insecurity is also impeding the resumption of rutile, bauxite and other mining activities.

Despite these serious setbacks, diamond-marketing activities from legal artisanal mining in the Southern and parts of the Eastern Region were already showing signs of slight improvement when the security situation deteriorated recently.

In order to ensure that the Government and people of this country derive maximum benefit from diamonds in the future, export licences will be granted only to internationally reputable diamond marketing companies, which will operate on a joint venture with Government or as Agents of Government.

At the same time, Government is studying various proposals to reactivate the rutile and bauxite mines, while two contract proposals for oil exploration submitted by an American and a French Oil Company are receiving the active attention of Government.

Government will continue to cooperate fully with international initiatives being worked out to put a halt to the stealing of our diamonds. Our people should be the principal beneficiaries of the proceeds from our diamonds.

Government under the new management of the National Power Authority continues to take a number of positive actions that will lead to an improvement in the power generation in Sierra Leone. It has secured from the World Bank a credit agreement that will lead to the purchase of three 1.5 Megawatts high-speed generators by the end of July and repairs to Sulzer 5 and Mitsubishi 6, which should be completed by August, this year. Arrangements have also been finalized with the Bank for the installation of a new 6.3 Megawatts generator by October.

With all of these expected developments, the power situation in the city is expected to improve significantly by the end of this year.

Various programmes are being finalised with bilateral, and multilateral agencies, as well as International NGOs to increase accessibility to safe drinking water in rural and urban areas of the country.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, one of the sectors of the economy most severely affected by the prolonged rebel war is tourism. My Government is pursuing initiatives with various partners to revive the sector, which has a huge potential to generate foreign exchange, create income and employment, as well as provide social infrastructure in both urban and rural areas. Other aspects of restructuring and reorganising this sector involve developing and promoting the country's rich cultural heritage and monuments and historical sites.

**THE SOCIAL SECTORS** Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, the destruction caused to our social, physical and natural infrastructure by nine years of rebel war is massive and will take a long time to rebuild. The damage to the social structures, institutions and facilities in both urban and rural areas has particularly affected women, children and old people with traditional coping strategies no longer adequate for their welfare and development.

The major thrust of my Government's social welfare programme is to provide community-based counselling and support services to the most vulnerable war victims, especially the highly traumatised, amputees, sexually assaulted, women and children. We are also collaborating with our partners on family tracing and re-unification, child protection, as well as promoting child rights and the active participation of women's groups in national development.

My Government has already embarked on massive multi-sectoral efforts to alleviate the desperate plight of our people. The programmes cover agriculture and food security, schools, health units and shelter rehabilitation, micro-credit and water and sanitation sectors.

The problem of youth unemployment is of particular concern to my Government and investments to better prepare them for the job market through skills training will continue. A youth training and employment project to be implemented in collaboration with ILO will target all categories of youths, including the disabled and ex-combatants. At the same time, my Government will soon introduce a comprehensive Alien Work Permit legislation to ensure that jobs, which can be efficiently performed by Sierra Leoneans are not given away to foreigners.

Meanwhile, we are continuing efforts to develop a contributory social security scheme, which will provide participants with medical and realistic retirement benefits.

In addition, Government intends to create a non-contributory safety net for the benefit of the most vulnerable groups. Seed money has already been earmarked for the scheme.

My Government has made steady progress in providing basic health services to the majority of our people throughout the country, including those behind rebel lines and in displaced camps. Despite the limitations imposed by insecurity, numerous achievements have been recorded in the delivery of preventive and curative health services, including immunisation of vulnerable groups against communicable diseases, roll-back and control of malaria, HIV/AIDS and other diseases. The rehabilitation of the limb-fitting centre to cater for amputees and resuscitation of the Hill Station hospital with modern equipment have also been completed.

Government in collaboration with its bilateral, multilateral and NGO partners will continue to provide appropriate and affordable healthcare to the population within the framework of an integrated strategy towards achieving the policy objectives of the health sector.

As you all know, the cream of our society, youths and students, have borne the brunt of this prolonged conflict. The rampant abductions for abuse and conscription, destruction of educational infrastructure, disruption of school

calendars, displacement of teachers, students and other youths have severely tested the ability of government to fulfil its core objective of increasing access to basic education and improving overall standards in this sector.

My Government will continue to improve the quality and relevance of technical, vocational, sports and literacy education by developing in children and youths, relevant skills, attitudes and values that will enable them to become more effective and responsible citizens. At this moment, free education is being provided for classes I to III with support for texts for classes IV to VI despite our current security situation. The target beneficiaries of this intervention will be disadvantaged youths, particularly those from poor families, victims of war, the handicapped and ex-combatants. At the same time, we are determined to address the root causes of indiscipline in our society through programmes that will ensure the active involvement of parents, schools and college administrators and civil society groups in the fight against this cancer in our society.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, my Government has worked very hard to solve the shelter problem and several programmes are now ready for implementation in accordance with the National Housing Policy. Within the strategic framework for the planned growth of urban centres and rural communities, a Chinese grant will be utilised for constructing housing units and provide building materials to the needy on a soft loan basis, while a social security and provident fund scheme will make provision for the majority of Sierra Leoneans to have easy access to affordable housing. The programme will also build and strengthen the capacity of the displaced communities to actively participate in the reconstruction and rehabilitation of their communities through the establishment of building materials manufacturing and Builders Cooperatives in various parts of the country.

The availability, identification, distribution, affordability, as well as efficient planning, protection and use of land will be critical to a successful implementation of this programme.

The critical role of information in sustaining democracy and good governance has now found expression in the newly enacted Media Commission Act, which makes provision for the efficient and effective management of the information sector by all the stakeholders. My government's firm commitment to press freedom and the effective dissemination of information continues to be demonstrated in various ways, including diversifying ownership of the print and electronic media, setting up regional radio stations, restructuring, rehabilitating and expanding the activities of government media agencies and finalising plans for the phased country-wide coverage of television. The short-wave radio is now in operation. In the spirit of partnership for progress, media personnel from both government and private organisations will be trained together under the British Media Development project.

## DEMOCRACY AND GOOD GOVERNANCE

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, my Government is keenly aware that the very basis for our survival as a nation today is our people's firm commitment to democratic principles. We will do everything to sustain it through a close partnership with civil society in eliminating tribalism, nepotism, bad governance, human rights abuses, corruption and unpatriotic attitudes in our society. Local Government Reform and Decentralisation, involving district council elections, restoration of Paramount Chiefs, and elections to vacant chieftaincies, delimitation of constituencies and restructuring and strengthening Local Government Institutions are programmes being implemented or planned by government to enhance grass-roots participatory democracy.

One of the cardinal elements in our new system of Government is the need for popular participation in the governance of the state. It follows, therefore, that in matters of national importance, the Government would wish to carry the citizenry with it. To achieve this, there is the need wherever possible, for consultations and the taking of

views and opinions on national matters from a very wide national spectrum before a decision is taken. Such views and opinions may very well assist Government in taking decisions acceptable to the majority of the citizenry.

This process may be slow and sometimes time consuming, but it is an essential process in our new democratic system, which we are nurturing. I will therefore urge all of us to see the merit in this system and to judge the Government's decision making process in the light of our new democratic system of Government. I will also urge that those consulted by Government on national matters should treat the process with the seriousness and objectivity it deserves, as this is one way in which they participate in the democratic governance of this country.

Another cardinal element in our new democratic process is the insistence on the right to freedom of expression. My Government intends to adhere to this to its full extent. But the right to freedom of expression should not be taken as a licence to endanger national security. This is not tolerated even in the most advanced democracies. Unfortunately, we are still not yet in a real post-conflict situation. Therefore, my Government will continue to take appropriate measures to ensure that national security, the lives of our fighting forces and the citizens of this country are not endangered under the guise of the right of freedom of expression.

This, notwithstanding, I assure you all that my Government is determined to continue to govern this nation in a democratic way, and in accordance with the Constitution and laws of this country. I regard this determination as the strength of my Government, and in the interest of this nation.

The peaceful co-existence between the Executive and Parliament, and between Parliament and civil society generated by my Government, have on many occasions successfully withstood desperate efforts to derail the democratic process. The current spirit of cooperation and unity of purpose in enhancing the cooperation between the Executive, Parliament and Political parties is testimony to the correctness of my government's strategy to ensure that democracy and good governance are applied in accordance with the Constitution and the laws of the land. This process is being further enhanced through workshops for Parliamentarians and Cabinet Ministers, as well as facilitating the work of Parliament.

At the same time, the fair, honest and proper administration of justice is very critical to the survival of our hard-won democracy. My Government has therefore adopted concrete measures to simplify and improve procedures for citizens to seek redress in courts, even against the State, thereby forestalling discontent, which may lead to rebellion and the breakdown of peace and security. The appointment of an Ombudsman, in accordance with the Constitution, is also geared towards ensuring justice for all our people.

## MONITORING AND COORDINATION

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, you will agree with me that effective monitoring, analysis and coordination of the various interventions being undertaken by my Government are essential for invigorating the institutional and legal framework for efficient operations. My office has often performed this task as the fluid security situation unfolds, while endeavouring to cover a lot of ground as objectively as humanly possible. As part of this process, the critical and detached view points of the National Policy Advisory Committee (NPAC) have provided refreshing insights into complex issues in our country. Coordination of critical donor projects from my office has also provided the detailed insights required to keep abreast with complex developments in critical areas of government interventions.

A comprehensive reform of the public sector is a key input into the process aimed at restoring efficiency in the civil service and increasing its capacity for efficient delivery of services. Other aspects of the reform measures being

undertaken include verification of payroll, rationalising promotions, training and computation of retirement benefits and pensions, with a view to accomplish them in a timely manner, as well as developing efficient and effective management information, staff appraisal and records management performance systems.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members of Parliament, I have highlighted in detail efforts being made by my Government to fulfil its democratic mandate obtained from the people of this country. This is so in order to demonstrate that the state cannot be held captive to insecurity while also giving indications of the huge potentials for creating prosperity for our people and country. However, the unstable security situation continues to play havoc with programme implementation in many aspects of national life and restrict our activities only to specific areas of the country. As a responsible Government therefore, we must continue to give high priority to security and clearly understand the need to restore and sustain it, because we stand the risk of losing all our hard-won gains and jeopardizing the safety and security of our long-suffering people if we fail to do so.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I am addressing you today with a very heavy heart when I recall the hopes and aspirations generated by the Lome Peace Accord, which have now been undermined by our own brothers and sisters being manipulated by foreigners determined to criminally exploit our natural resources. But I assure you all that the forces of destruction shall themselves be destroyed by the might of our unified fighting will.

Let me take this opportunity to renew my call to those members of the RUF who will want us believe that they are also patriotic citizens of this country, to lay down their arms and save this country from further misery and destruction. My Government for its part remains committed to the Lome Peace Accord, but the RUF must now demonstrate its own commitment and sincerity, in very practical ways, to convince the people of this country that they will implement the letter and spirit of the Accord and ensure lasting peace and prosperity in Sierra Leone. Sierra Leoneans have demonstrated on many occasions that they are willing and ready to reconcile and live in peace even with those who have caused them so much suffering. There is still time to prove to the world that Sierra Leoneans are a civilized, united and peaceful people. That is the legacy our forefathers left for us. We owe it to them and to ourselves to revive the culture of civility in a world that demands that we do no less.

I thank you all for your attention and may the Almighty Allah help us all to live together in peace.