

**Address by His Excellency the President Alhaji Dr Ahmad Tejan Kabbah on the Occasion of the State Opening of the Second Session of the Second Parliament of the Republic of Sierra Leone 20 June 2003**

Mr Speaker  
Honourable Vice President  
My Lord Chief Justice  
Ministers of Government  
Honourable Members of Parliament  
Excellencies Distinguished Guests  
Ladies and Gentlemen:

I wish first and foremost to welcome you all to this State Opening of the Second Session of the Second Parliament of the Republic of Sierra Leone and to thank you for honouring our invitation.

2. On every occasion that I address this chamber I feel humbled that I have been given the honour and privilege to serve this nation as President. On this particular occasion, I also feel a strong sense of satisfaction, derived from the fact that we, as a nation, have maintained, enjoyed and benefited from peace, security, democracy, a reasonable level of economic recovery and social stability for over a year.

Mr Speaker,

3. This time last year, we were all celebrating the end of the rebel war. We were congratulating ourselves for having successfully conducted General Elections that were free, fair and totally devoid of violence. On that occasion, I spelt out some of the major challenges that we must overcome, in order to maintain the peace and take the first steps on the path to sustainable development to reach our cherished goal of building a united, peaceful and prosperous nation.

4. As I stood in this chamber welcoming the newly elected parliamentarians at that time, I called upon them and the entire nation to join together in building "a new coalition for national development", as I felt that the price of not uniting for national development would be to remain forever at the bottom of the Human Development Index. I also emphasized on that occasion that by electing us to our high offices, the people of this country had placed a sacred responsibility upon us. That responsibility, I noted, included a mandate to repair and rebuild the physical damage that was inflicted upon this country; to heal so many shattered lives and to restore the pride and image of a once peaceful and confident nation.

5. No doubt, our people and all those who wish us well will want to know how much progress we have made over the past year in carrying out this mandate. Therefore, in this address, it will be my pleasure to present key highlights of what we have all achieved together as a nation, with the invaluable contribution of every citizen of this country in diverse ways, and with the considerable material, political and diplomatic support of the International Community.

Mr Speaker,

6. Last year, one of the greatest concerns of the nation was how to sustain our newly won peace and safeguard the security of our country. We were equally concerned about our ability to promote and consolidate the reconciliation of our fractured society. We felt deeply the urgent need to strengthen our resolve to reduce poverty by maintaining

prudent economic management, including the creation of macro-economic stability and a healthy environment for investment and wealth creation; we also pledged to motivate and empower the entire nation, particularly the youth and women, to undertake productive activities on a sustained basis, as a catalyst for the creation of wealth to ensure the long term prosperity of our country. We indicated that we would try to accomplish these tasks by building, restructuring and strengthening public and other relevant institutions; by mobilizing resources both internally and from our multilateral and bilateral development partners and, significantly, by ensuring that these resources are utilized equitably and with the utmost efficiency and transparency.

7. While it is my pleasure to present to you the significant achievements that have been made in these and many other areas relating to the governance of the country, I must also apprise you of setbacks that impeded progress in certain areas, and of new measures that my Government will be putting in place not only to address those setbacks but also to consolidate and improve on the achievements we have made so far.

## National Security

Mr Speaker,

8. In the area of our national security, it is with deep satisfaction that I report that the mass violence and war of the past ten years is now virtually behind us. The pervasive fear that occupied every waking moment of our thoughts is now considerably diminished. The crime rate has fallen significantly.

9. We have continued to make steady progress with the development of our military in terms of training, logistics and the improvement of its facilities.

10. The International Military Advisory and Training Team (IMATT) has continued to train our forces and continues to help with the restructuring process to improve the operational competence of our armed Forces. As a result, effective deployment of our forces in areas of the greatest threat to our territorial integrity has been achieved. This has ensured that there has been minimum disruption of the lives of our people by the political instability in neighbouring countries. Considerable improvement to the living conditions of our military personnel and their dependants have been made.

11. Over the past year, we have carried out extensive refurbishment of the Military hospital in Freetown. The hospital can now boast of having some of the most modern diagnostic equipment in the country and operating under very sanitary conditions. We similarly refurbished the Army Workshop and rehabilitated the water supply system at the Juba barracks. The Benguema Training Centre has also been upgraded and can now support sophisticated training of our servicemen and women.

Mr Speaker,

12. A programme for the rehabilitation of old military barracks and the construction of new ones has been launched. The programme, code named Operation PEBU, jointly funded by my Government and the British Government, is now being implemented. The programme will provide barracks, living accommodation, offices and ancillary facilities in Bo, Kambia, Kabala, Kono, Kailahun, Pujehun, Yele, Juba, Wilberforce and Benguema. This is only the first of two phases of the programme.

13. A major security review is currently underway. This process is intended to evaluate the post-war security threats to the State and propose further adjustments to our security structure.

Mr Speaker,

14. As you are no doubt aware, a Sierra Leone national has recently taken over the post of Inspector General of Police in a carefully prepared transition plan that includes the development of a core of highly competent police officers to guarantee effective leadership of the police for years to come. At this juncture, I should pay tribute to Mr Keith Biddle, OBE under whose leadership of the Sierra Leone Police this transformation was made possible.

15. The improvement in the professional competence of the police has been matched by an extensive infrastructural development and heightened motivation at all levels of the Police Force. Most Police stations and related facilities throughout the Western Area have now been rebuilt and others are at an advanced stage of construction. Here, I need mention only the Police Training School, the Central Police Station, the Criminal Investigation Department building and the Police Station at Waterloo.

16. In other parts of the country, the reconstruction or rehabilitation of Police Stations and barracks promised last year have either been accomplished or are nearing completion.

17. We have also made significant improvement on the transportation and communications assets of the Police Force, so that the Police will be in a position to respond rapidly to threats to the peace anywhere in the country.

#### Civil Service Reform

Mr. Speaker,

18. In the year ahead, My Government will energetically continue its programme of institutional reform. Already we have made significant progress in the modernization of the armed forces and the Sierra Leone Police.

19. We have now started the reform of another vital public institution - the civil service. Let me take this opportunity to acknowledge the contribution of the civil service to the restoration of state authority throughout this country and indeed during the difficult years of conflict. Many civil servants rendered great service, remaining at their posts often at personal risk to themselves and their families. On behalf of the Government and people of Sierra Leone I thank all of those civil servants who have rendered selfless service to the country in its hour of need.

20. Unfortunately, after many years of neglect caused by political intrusion, lack of resources and a decade of conflict, the public service in Sierra Leone has suffered from a decline in its effectiveness and self-esteem. Now is the time to re-build and modernize the civil service.

21. My Government has taken an important step in that direction with the adoption of a new civil service code, the first comprehensive updating in several decades. The new code, which includes several innovative measures designed to improve performance and reward merit, is being progressively introduced through all levels of the service. The Civil Service College is being re-activated.

22. We must now build on this work in order to rapidly develop a cadre of top public servants who are exceptionally competent, highly motivated and appropriately remunerated. They should be well trained in the management skills

that are commonly used by the public service in other parts of the world. At the apex of the public service we must groom a leadership group capable of helping this country take on the challenges of the 21st century, encouraged and empowered to exercise their professional competence, confident that their careers will not be jeopardized by unwarranted political interference.

23. This goal cannot be achieved within the confines of the present civil service structure. The top echelon of civil service posts must be re-profiled to take account of the post war need for managerial competence and professional performance. We shall do so in a transparent manner. My Government therefore intends to embark on extensive consultations on how we can move quickly to introduce such reforms that will enable us to promote the ethos and practice of effective public service that is the foundation of a modern state.

## Foreign Affairs

Mr Speaker,

24. As we recover from the war we are determined to resume our rightful role in international affairs. Having benefited so much from the goodwill of international organizations and friendly countries during our period of stress, we believe that the best way to express our gratitude is by contributing in whatever way we can towards the maintenance of international peace and security. We will also want to contribute to the enhancement of international prosperity using our limited resources, and considerable experience.

25. Our capacity to make these contributions is gradually being acknowledged as demonstrated by the recent invitation extended to our country to provide serving military and police officers for assignments at the United Nations Secretariat. Our relations with our traditional bilateral partners have continued to grow, particularly with Nigeria, Guinea, Ghana, the United Kingdom, the Peoples' Republic of China, the United States of America, Germany, Italy, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar and Libya. These Governments have demonstrated their continued commitment to enhancing the welfare of the people of this country and their support for the policies of my Government in ways that go beyond humanitarian and development assistance. In this regard, I am pleased to announce that the Government of the Peoples' Republic of China has offered to support the enhancement of the capacity of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs through the construction of a new and modern building.

26. For example, the German Embassy which was closed in Freetown about a decade ago, is about to be reopened. France also now wishes to reopen its diplomatic mission in the country, and other States are expressing interests in opening diplomatic missions in Sierra Leone.

27. We are currently trying to enhance the capacity of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs through the construction of a new and modern office building which the Chinese Government has offered to assist with.

## The Economy

Mr Speaker,

28. Our resolve to manage the economy responsibly even as we struggled with the problems of the war endeared us to the rest of the international community. This, no doubt, won their confidence and inspired their generous support that made it possible for us to rapidly resolve our conflict.

29. At a time when so much attention is being paid to ranking in national development, we must take note of latest reports that our economic performance in the past year was well above average, and better than many other African countries. According to the United Nations, the economic performance of African economies fell short of expectations in 2002, with economic growth slowing from an average pace of 4.3 per cent in 2001, to 3.1 per cent in 2002. By comparison we have not done badly at all. We recorded a GDP growth of over 6 per cent. Inflation has been low, and our exchange rate stable.

30. Although this level of growth starts from a very low base and is spurred by significant injections of donor funds provided for resettlement and reconstruction, the fact remains that such level of performance could not have been achieved without prudent leadership and the willingness of the population to be patient in the face of austerity.

31. Enormous sacrifice by all Sierra Leoneans has been rewarded with even more generous funding by the donor community in the form of HIPC resources or debt relief of about Le90 billion in the current financial year, with more such resources to be made available in subsequent years if we maintain our good record of discipline in economic and fiscal management.

32. The World Bank has recently approved Le70 billion for a third Economic Rehabilitation and Recovery credit.

33. At the bilateral level, we have signed a poverty reduction framework agreement with Her Majesty's Government that guarantees British Government support amounting to more than Â£100 million over the next ten years. The agreement will ensure the provision of funds for the implementation of priority projects targeted at poverty reduction.

34. It should be noted that this pattern of support by the donor community is the first of its kind, where substantial funds are provided for economic recovery and development immediately following the end of a conflict. This, it must be said, is a measure of the strong faith that our development partners have in our commitment and seriousness of purpose. Usually, recovery and development assistance is offered, at least, three years after the post-conflict period to avoid, as the saying goes, 'throwing good money after bad.'

Mr Speaker

35. Such widespread recognition of our achievements has not lulled us into complacency. We have proceeded steadily with the implementation of critical reforms and the introduction of new policies to consolidate our economic recovery. A National Revenue Authority has now been fully established to improve on tax administration and boost domestic revenue collection. We have also fully established a National Commission for Privatization to oversee the operations of all public enterprises as they are prepared for privatisation.

Mr Speaker,

36. We will definitely continue to need donor assistance, especially for our fragile post-conflict recovery effort. However, the current extent of our reliance on donor inputs should not be taken for granted. I therefore entreat you, honourable members of Parliament to take the issue of mobilizing internal resources seriously.

The Development Assistance Coordination Office

Mr Speaker,

37. The recent Consultative Group Meeting held in Paris agreed on a Framework for Peace, Recovery and Development. This Framework includes the establishment of a bi-monthly aid coordination mechanism chaired by the Vice President and the establishment of an effective and coordination office for tracking foreign aid received by this country.

38. This Partnership Committee will serve as the policy body dealing with all matters relating to the coordination and management of external assistance. It will serve as a forum for dialogue on strategic, policy and funding issues. In particular, the Committee is assigned with the following objectives:

- Ensure a systematic, coordinated dialogue between Government and its development partners on strategic, policy and funding issues;
- Ensure effective monitoring of external assistance;
- Ensure the effective integration of humanitarian and development assistance with national priorities and policies; and to reduce the transactions costs of managing external assistance and ensure the efficient utilization of external assistance.

39. A Development Assistance Coordination Office to support the Partnership Committee has been set up in the Vice President's Office to compile, track and disseminate comprehensive data on external assistance flows to Government and its development partners.

40. In order to enhance collaboration by Government Partners, and to fulfil functions of the Coordination Office, it has become essential that all core line Ministries, agencies and the Bank of Sierra Leone as well as Sierra Leone's partners, routinely provide comprehensive data on external assistance to the Development Assistance Coordination Office. This new arrangement will greatly assist in the beneficial utilization of development assistance.

41. In addition to the Aid Coordination Office, Government has formulated the National Recovery Strategy to act as the principal instrument for donor coordination and policy direction for national recovery for the period immediately following the end of the war. This strategy is used as a means of guiding the post-war recovery process in Sierra Leone over the period 2002-2003, and is drafted on the basis of integrated assessments done in each of the country's districts. The National Recovery Strategy focuses on four key themes -

- Consolidation of State authority;
- Rebuilding communities;
- Peace building and human rights; and
- The restoration of the economy.

42. It sets a number of benchmarks for recovery in each of the focussed areas. The National Recovery Strategy is based on a district-by-district approach and places a heavy emphasis on physical rehabilitation of the social and administrative infrastructure of each district.

43. The implementation of the National Recovery Strategy is monitored through the National Recovery Committee comprising key Government Ministers and donor representatives. It meets systematically with each of the District Recovery Committees in the Districts under the Chairmanship of the Vice President to assess progress made and the problems encountered by each of the districts in their recovery effort.

Public Expenditure Management

Mr Speaker,

44. We attach a high degree of importance to probity, transparency, accountability and efficiency in the management of public resources. In this regard, we have been reviewing our expenditure profile with the aim of minimizing any leakage of public funds. In addition to our three-year budgetary planning formula through the Medium Term Expenditure Framework we have established Community Budget Oversight Committees, in all the Districts as part of our decentralization programme. These Committees will participate in the annual budget discussions and will monitor budget implementation in their respective areas.

45. You will recall that in my last address to Parliament I spoke of the need to reform and ultimately decentralise our procurement system which traditionally was riddled with corrupt practices, causing leakages of public funds. We have advanced significantly in that direction. We are grateful for the technical assistance from the UNDP which has conducted a review of that system. This review showed that we lose billions of leones each year through improper and inefficient procurement practices with an estimated loss of about Le70 billion this year. A Procurement Reform Steering Committee, which includes our donor partners and is chaired by the Honourable Vice President, now has the responsibility to ensure that a new and decentralized system is instituted.

Mr Speaker,

46. In our efforts to ensure accountability in the use of public funds, the second Public Expenditure Tracking Survey (PETS) was conducted in August 2002 for public expenditure for the second half of the 2001 Financial Year. This survey, as with the first, has revealed that government policies need to be fully implemented at the grassroots levels in order to reach target beneficiaries. For example, our cost recovery for drugs programme is non-existent in certain areas and it was reported that eighty percent (80%) of pregnant women, nursing mothers, school and under-five children still pay consultation fees and for basic medical services. The survey also indicated that not all funds are being transferred to local district levels by the central line ministries and at the same time there are inadequate records of resources received at the local level.

Mr Speaker,

47. All of this indicates that there is an urgent need to strengthen accountability systems in order to ensure that public officials are held accountable for any misappropriation of funds. Therefore, we are collaborating with the World Bank and DFID under a limited Country Financial Accountability Assessment (CFAA). The first of the recommendations of this study has seen the setting up of the Financial Management and Accounting Systems Unit in the Accountant General's Department to reduce opportunities for corruption and non-transparent budgetary transactions. Plans are already underway to conduct a full scale CFAA. A strengthened Auditor General's Department will also ensure that expenditure is accounted for in a more regular manner than at present.

Mr Speaker,

48. This week the Chief Justice and one other Supreme Court Judge received an invitation by DFID and the Commonwealth Secretariat to visit London to interview two judges and one prosecutor for assignment to Sierra Leone to handle specifically corruption cases.

Trade and Investment

Mr Speaker,

49. As a small nation, we are keenly aware of the value of trade as a vehicle for economic growth and social advancement. We also appreciate the fierce competition that exists in the global trading environment. Therefore, in order to be able to reap the benefits of trade we must produce high quality goods and services at competitive prices. This calls for a highly developed local entrepreneurial group, an educated workforce, a conducive investment climate and access to foreign markets.

50. The draft bill for a new Investment Code has been completed. Government is, however, now discussing with our development partners on the issue of incentives. The final Investment Code will, therefore, be ready soon. This is an initial step in encouraging Sierra Leonean entrepreneurs and attracting reputable foreign partners to forge long-term relationships with us, not only for the economic benefit of the country as a whole, but also for the transfer of needed managerial and technical skills, as well as technological know-how to Sierra Leone.

51. My Government's policies on education, tax and legal reforms, infrastructural development, the fight against corruption and the intensification of bilateral cooperation, are also intended to have a direct positive impact on trade and investment and to favour steady long-term economic benefits for Sierra Leoneans. The goal is to ensure that Sierra Leoneans benefit consistently and broadly from foreign investment as well as from their own investments in the country. This goal must be pursued in a way that encourages Sierra Leoneans abroad to reinvest assets in and return to Sierra Leone.

52. No doubt, it is because of these measures that both local and foreign investment interests have begun to grow, as can be seen in the numerous private construction projects that are now being implemented throughout the country, such as the Bintumani and Lungi Airport hotels. Investment interests in other sectors including mining, manufacturing, tourism, agriculture and fishing are also growing including the reactivation of rutile mining by Sierra Rutile, and the rebuilding of the sugar factory at Magbass. Egyptian business groups have also shown interest in commercial agriculture and fishing, and Chinese investment groups have indicated strong interest in building manufacturing and assembly plants in the country.

53. In this regard, Government has reached agreement with a Chinese company for the National Workshop at Cline Town to be rehabilitated and upgraded as an initial step in the establishment of light manufacturing industries. The workshop would also serve as a production centre for the fabrication of essential spare parts and appropriate machinery for agriculture and industry. Among other things, this will save us valuable foreign exchange and lead the way towards the development of our manufacturing capacity.

Mr Speaker,

54. We will sustain these developments while ensuring that indigenous investors develop and maintain a strong stake in the economy through various support facilities such as the promotion of access to finance by small and medium scale entrepreneurs, particularly in the agricultural sector. Through the Ministry of Trade and Industry, we will encourage the maximum utilization of the trade concessions offered by the United States of America in its African Growth and Opportunities Acts or AGOA as well as those offered by the European Union.

Agriculture

Mr Speaker,



55. We have pursued relentlessly our declared goal of making the Agricultural Sector a key pillar of our economic development, and have taken measures to develop and modernize the various components of the sector.

56. Over the past year, we have rehabilitated about 1,200 hectares of inland valley swamps for rice production in seven Districts and the Western Area. We are providing large quantities of seed rice to farmers nationwide and over 20,000 oil palm seedlings in our ongoing efforts to reactivate commercial palm oil production in the country.

57. More than 1,300 farmers' groups in the Western Area have been provided with assorted vegetable seeds. A livestock replenishment programme is currently being implemented, with significant quantities of sheep and goats having been distributed in Kono, Kailahun, Kambia, Koinadugu and Bombali. We shall establish livestock clinics in every District to ensure not only the health of the animals but the safety of the meat we eat.

58. In our bid to boost the productivity and export potential of the Agricultural Sector, we are promoting mechanized farming and crop diversification. Government has this year supplied tractors to agricultural stations throughout the country for use by local farmers. Larger quantities of tractors and related inputs as well as support facilities such as drying floors, stores and relevant farming instructions will be provided as a catalyst for the sustained development of the sector.

59. In the area of crop diversification, a programme of commercial production of ginger for export is being developed in collaboration with the Peoples' Republic of China. As I am speaking, an initial consignment of ginger seeds is arriving in Freetown this week from the People's Republic of China and will be distributed to farmers for planting in the current season. The cultivation of a wide range of other crops will also be encouraged and supported. With these and other activities currently being pursued or planned by the Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security and Forestry, including in the area of capacity building in the Ministry, we are confident that, well before the year 2007 every Sierra Leonean will have access to adequate food.

## The Mining Sector

Mr Speaker,

60. The state of the Mining Sector, particularly the diamond industry, continues to pose serious challenges to Government. While our efforts at reorganizing the industry have yielded some results, by and large the age-old problem of smuggling, exploitation, cheating and chaos in the diamond mining areas have not been brought under full control.

61. The Government is committed to bringing about a well-regulated and transparent diamond mining and trading regime for the benefit of the State and people of Sierra Leone. This one-time mainstay of the economic has suffered from deliberate de-regulation in former times, leading to its fuelling the rebel war.

62. Having taken the advice of the World Bank and other experts in the field, your Government intends without delay to:

- Rigorously enforce existing diamond mining and trading legislation, empowering the Sierra Leone Police as the primary body for the enforcement of that legislation.
- Invite an internationally acclaimed diamond mining company to determine and recommend the conditions which must be implemented in order to bring maximum revenue to Sierra Leone.

- Regularly publish the value of diamonds exported, the taxation raised and the disposal of that revenue.

63. Other areas in the sector continue to show great promise, and are attracting interest from investors. In April this year I commissioned a High Resolution Magnetic Survey carried out by the Africa Diamond Holdings Ltd. This survey covered the Koinadugu and Kono Districts. Similar surveys over the rest of the country are planned. One of the objectives of these surveys is to ascertain the extent of existing Kimberlite diamond deposits and to investigate the existence of new ones.

64. Alluvial diamond mining has recently commenced in the Kambia and Bombali Districts and government is taking the appropriate steps to regulate and manage mining activities in these areas

65. We have recently carried out the bidding process for blocks for oil exploration in the Sierra Leone offshore, and the evaluating of the bids is now in progress. When this process is completed, successful bidders will be issued with licences to commence exploration.

66. Better incentives for investment in the mining sector are being provided by Government. The income tax rate in the oil and other sectors, for example, will be lowered from almost 38% to 30%.

#### Infrastructure

Mr Speaker,

67. The poor state of our infrastructure over the years has posed one of the greatest barriers to our socio-economic advancement. The limited extent and poor condition of our road network, poor energy supply and telecommunications have severely inhibited the growth and development of virtually all sectors of the economy and even hampered the Government's ability to govern, as access to many parts of the country remained hazardous. Because of these conditions we have lost valuable revenue and employment in such potentially lucrative industries as the service industry, including Tourism. This is why we have embarked upon an extensive infrastructural development programme covering roads, energy, water supply and telecommunications, among others.

Mr Speaker,

68. It is with great pleasure that I wish to inform you that at this point in time we have been able to secure over 80% of the funding, largely from our development partners, for the implementation of our current infrastructural programme. This, I believe, is mainly as a result of the high quality of our programme design and our ability to our development partners about the relevance of our programmes to the needs of the people of Sierra Leone.

Mr Speaker,

69. By the end of this year we will have completed the rehabilitation of major streets in Bo, Makeni, Sembehun, Kenema, Tongo and Pujehun. Similar road works in Freetown are also expected to be completed over the same period.

70. Maintenance work on trunk roads and about 300 km of feeder roads throughout the country is in progress. Funds that have already been mobilized will support the construction and rehabilitation of up to over 1000 km of trunk roads and about 900 km of feeder roads. Already the reconstruction of the Waterloo-Kent road in the Freetown Peninsular

is nearing completion. Resources have also been secured for the remaining sector of the road from Kent all the way to Juba. Work on this sector will soon commence and be completed in 2004. Other trunk and secondary roads on which rehabilitation work will soon start are the Freetown-Conakry road, the Masiaka-Makeni, Masiaka-Taiama Roads, and the Taiama-Bo road among others.

71. Feasibility studies have been carried out for the proposed hillside road. When constructed, this road will ease the congestion faced by motorists driving through Kissy Road and Fourah Bay Road. Terms of reference are also being prepared for feasibility studies for the Lungi/Freetown road link via Lokomasama and Waterloo.

72. On-going road works already employ several thousands of people countrywide, and many more people will find jobs when other road projects begin. This will not only help to absorb the many young men and women currently looking for work, it will also provide business opportunities for those in commerce, manufacturing and agriculture, among others.

Mr Speaker,

73. Over the past year, we have worked hard to find durable solutions to our energy problem. I am happy to inform you that the funding and modalities for the completion of the Bumbuna project are now in place and that the contractors have assured us of its completion next year. For this achievement we should express our thanks to the ADB, the Government of Italy and the World Bank which together have undertaken to provide the bulk of the funding.

Mr Speaker,

74. Since Bumbuna will not be providing power to all parts of the country, we have decided to explore the development of a similar facility in the Kono District to supplement the existing capacity at Dodo for the entire Eastern and Southern regions. In this regard, I am pleased to report that discussions are in progress with one of the most renowned engineering companies in the world in the construction of these facilities. This company from the Peoples' Republic of China has already made field visits and demonstrated considerable interest.

Mr Speaker,

75. With regard to the supply of safe drinking water, extensive developments of the water supply systems in Bo, Makeni, Kenema and Lungi, among other areas, including Freetown, are in progress. With support from the World Bank under the Urban Water Supply Rehabilitation project we will also be able to upgrade or develop water facilities in Matotoka, Magburaka, Bo, Potoru and Pujehun. For villages and small towns, the Government will directly construct over three hundred wells while encouraging NGOs and other agencies to construct even more.

Mr Speaker,

76. The provision of these and other social amenities such as schools and health clinics, as well as road will encourage the return of people to the rural areas which will now offer them better lives than the difficult existence they now endure in the cities. This will in turn restore the vibrance of the rural communities and regenerate their potential to contribute to economic growth and the building of wealth for the nation. It will also help to decongest the cities and discourage the growth of squatter settlements and their associated environmental, health and other social problems.

77. In effect, the regeneration of rural communities represents a vital strategy for addressing pressing economic and social problems and it will therefore be pursued with vigour as part of the general decentralization programme.

Mr Speaker,

78. Significant efforts have been made in repairing the damage caused to the telecommunications infrastructure during the war. Much has been achieved, not only in the rehabilitation process, but even in the upgrading of the equipment and improvement of services. Services have already been restored to most parts of the Western Area. Work on the restoration of services to the rest of the country is progressing rapidly, and this year a digitalized network will be in operation in Bo, Lungi, Kenema, Makeni and Koidu.

79. In the meantime, the Government is taking measures through the encouragement of private sector participation in the industry to improve the quality of the service and eventually lower the cost to the consumer. In this regard, we are conducting a desk review to fine tune our policy to ensure that high standards are maintained in the telecommunications industry.

Education

Mr Speaker,

80. We have made, and are making good progress in rehabilitating school buildings and providing equipment, learning and teaching materials, in particular, science and technology equipment for secondary schools and technical vocational institutions. In the past year, a total of 196 educational facilities nationwide, including technical/vocational institutions were rehabilitated or are under rehabilitation. Among these are, Port Loko Teachers College, Makeni Teachers College, St. Francis Secondary School, St. Joseph's Secondary School, Makeni, Mathora Girls Secondary School, and the Boys' Secondary School, Magburaka. We have almost completed the rehabilitation and construction of another 112 educational institutions in all four regions. Work has already started on the rehabilitation of Njala University College and all the necessary funding has been obtained for the completion of the rehabilitation.

81. We have also mobilized about USD40 million as a combined grant and loan budget for the Rehabilitation of Basic Education Programme.

82. We are surely on our way to increasing and retaining school enrolment, in order to raise our literacy rate, and ultimately to regain the position of leadership in educational excellence that Sierra Leone once enjoyed.

Mr Speaker,

83. We are aware that we need to motivate and empower our teachers by paying them well, regularly and on time. From now onwards, government will seek to match the level of funding for school reconstruction and rehabilitation with funding for recruitment, training and improving the conditions of service for teachers. In all these, Government shall work in close collaboration with school proprietors who, after all, are ultimately responsible for the management of their schools.

84. We firmly maintain our commitment to reducing the burden of children's education on parents with limited means. We have, therefore, extended the payment of public examination fees from National Primary School Examination (NPSE) to the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) and the West African School

Certificate Examination (WASCE). Commencing next academic year, Government will meet the cost of fees for every girl child in the northern and eastern regions at JSS1 level after successful completion of the primary level (NPSE) examinations. These regions currently experience the lowest education access rate for girls at this level.

Mr Speaker,

85. We have established that the reading habit of the average Sierra Leonean is very poor. To address this situation, Government will be building and stocking libraries across the country. The benefits of a society that reads are invaluable and so as a government we shall seek to make books and other tools for education accessible to all the people, not just the children.

Health and Sanitation

Mr Speaker,

86. We have achieved a measure of success, in a short span of time, in ensuring that the targeted vulnerable groups have free access to basic health services. Notably, in the past year we have set up the Sierra Leone HIV/AIDS Response Project (SHARP). Government attaches high priority to this project, since its long-term benefit to our society will be profound if successfully implemented. It is for this reason that the project is placed directly under the supervision of my office. Let me take this opportunity to express our sincere appreciation to the Government of the United States of America for their invaluable support so far towards this project.

87. We have also extended the school health programme to cover previously inaccessible areas, extensively reconstructed and equipped health facilities countrywide and rehabilitated community health centers. The construction of twenty peripheral health units, including water wells and sanitation facilities is near completion.

88. The rehabilitation of Connaught Hospital, the Princess Christian Maternity Hospital (PCMH), and the Kissy Mental Hospital will start shortly. The assessment of the district hospitals in Bombali, Koinadugu, Kono and Moyamba are in the final stages for the bidding process to start and the phased reconstruction of Kailahun District Hospital has already commenced. To attract qualified and experienced medical practitioners back to the regions and rural areas, we are renovating staff quarters, and providing other incentives.

89. However, there is still more to be done. Surveys indicate that many targeted beneficiaries do not have ready access to appropriate services due to bureaucratic inefficiency and related problems. In a bid to address these and associated problems, we have decentralised the financial management systems of the health service, established hospital management committees. A Bill is now on its way to Parliament, the enactment of which will enable us to set up and operationalize Area/District Medical Boards.

90. As part of our preventive health programme, and in order to improve sanitation, we are currently considering proposals for the long-term treatment of public waste. These proposals include the transformation of waste into energy. However, in the interim phase, youth groups have been mobilized to assist with waste collection and its disposal. We have also ordered specially designed vehicles and equipment from the United Kingdom to facilitate the cleaning exercise.

The Judiciary

Mr Speaker,

91. Last year, we committed ourselves to pursuing, as a matter of urgency, reform of the laws and the judiciary of the state with a view to developing a more effective and efficient legal and judicial system.

92. In the past year, magistrate courts have started sitting in all districts, except Bonthe. A new Chief Justice has been appointed who with the support of the UNDP has overseen the training and installation of 86 Justices of the Peace (JPs) and support staff in 18 locations to perform critical judicial functions. The assignment of the JPs will ease the pressure of work on the magistrates who currently make only periodic tours to the districts. It will also reduce the backlog of cases; shorten the length of pre-trial detentions and limits the delays of trials.

93. The appointment of resident magistrates, next year, to cover all the districts remains a priority in order to speed up the judicial process. Additionally, our aim is to appoint resident judges in all the regions in order to ensure an effective functioning of the judiciary at all levels of our society. In line with our commitment, we now have a fully functioning Law Reform Commission whose mandate is to review all the laws of our country and to make recommendations regarding the need for the updating, amendment or repeal of these laws.

94. As you are aware, the main Law Courts Buildings in Freetown have been refurbished and the rehabilitation of High Courts, Magistrate Courts and Customary Courts throughout the country is in progress. As we are rehabilitating the courts, and increasing the number of magistrates and judges, we will also strive to improve conditions of service and provide them the necessary support facilities.

Governance

Mr Speaker,

95. The peaceful and successful election of over 60 Paramount Chiefs throughout the country this year marks a high point in our governance reform efforts. In the ceremony marking my Recognition of the newly elected Paramount Chiefs in Kenema, Bo, Makeni and Port Loko from the 26th to the 30th January, I spoke about the central role played by Paramount Chiefs in the governance of our country over the years. I lamented about the regrettable devaluation of their stature and role in recent times and called for a restitution of the dignity and authority of this vital national institution.

Mr Speaker,

96. I am pleased to report to this House that this process of restitution has begun. I have appointed a team of local consultants with experience in chieftaincy and public service matters to assist the current Council of Paramount Chiefs in carrying out its responsibilities consistent with established terms of reference that include the restructuring of the management of chiefdoms throughout the country.

Mr Speaker,

97. Another major endeavour that we have embarked upon is the decentralization of Government. Considerable work has already been done under the direction of the Minister of Local Government and Rural Development. Extensive consultations have been carried out throughout the country and studies undertaken regarding such issues as how

elections of District Councils should be done, the form and extent of devolution of powers to the Districts. We are expecting that once these issues are resolved we should be able to hold district council elections in a few months.

98. Meanwhile, during my recent visit to Ghana, I took the opportunity to discuss this matter with my colleague President Kufuor since Ghana is one of the countries with the best experiences in decentralization. The President was kind enough to assign to Government one of the leading authorities on this subject, on a short-term advisory basis. The Adviser, Prof. S. K. Nkrumah, arrived in Freetown early this week and is already at work and will be advising on the design and development of local Government structures that will be relevant to our needs and enhance the effectiveness of Distinct Councils.

Mr Speaker,

99. Consistent with our declared commitment to the enhancement of the welfare and progress of women, children and the youth we continue to provide resources for programmes designed to benefit these groups. We have also taken measures to address specific issues relating to their needs.

100. While I have made detailed comments on these efforts and related matters in several speeches over the past year, I wish to state here that Government has committed more than Le4 billion on children through the National Commission for War Affected Children (NACWAC) since the Commission was inaugurated in February this year.

#### Efforts to Enhance Popular Participation in Governance

101. In its effort to involve the population in the governance of this country with a view of rendering our democracy well and truly participatory, the rotation of Cabinet meetings between the capital city and the Provincial Headquarters, has been in progress. By this process the Government literally moves to the people. The reason for conceiving of this idea is to enable the Ministers of Government to dialogue directly with Paramount Chiefs, Chieftom Elders and other opinion formers of the Regions about the development aspirations of the Regions visited. At these meetings, Government reveals its proposals for the development of the region visited, and requires the endorsement or amendment of those proposals with appropriate priorities for implementation of the agreed development projects set by the people themselves. Unlike visits to Districts by the National Recovery Committee, in these meetings Cabinet devotes itself to regional or inter-regional issues only.

102. This innovative method of involving the population in the decision-making process of Government, especially in respect of matters directly affecting their welfare, has been highly appreciated by the people and acclaimed as a unique experiment in participatory democratic governance. It is bound to produce popular cooperation and collaboration between the Government and the governed. It also fosters mutual understanding and appreciation of the level of resources available to Government for development at any particular time to the extent that it keeps the expectations of the people within achievable limits. Government will continue with this new-found good practice of governance.

#### Conclusion

Mr Speaker,

103. Let me take this opportunity to extend my profound thanks to the International Donor Community, including the International and National Non-Governmental Organizations, for their invaluable support of our efforts in shaping the destiny of our nation.

104. I should pay special tribute to the people of Sierra Leone for their faith in our leadership and the enormous sacrifices they were willing to make in the interest of the survival and progress of our country. Without this, none of the achievements presented here could have been made.

105. It is, therefore, relevant at this point to remind those of us, I mean both the executive and the legislature, that have been entrusted with managing the affairs of the Nation, to always strive to enhance the creation of wealth for the benefit of the general population rather than agitate for personal comfort or advantage. The occupation of a public office should always be regarded as a heavy and sacred responsibility and not as a source of personal reward.

I thank you.