

Presidential Address Delivered by His Excellency Dr. Ernest Bai Koroma

President of the Republic and Commander-in-Chief of the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces On the occasion of the State Opening of the Third Session of the Third Parliament of the Second Republic of Sierra Leone In the Chamber of Parliament Building Tower Hill, Freetown On Monday 10th October 2011 at 12:18 pm.

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 Mayor Of Freetown, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

A little over four years ago, the people of this country affirmed their belief in the manifesto of the All People's Congress and my ability to lead the implementation of our programmes by electing me President. Just after those memorable elections, I laid before this Honourable House the translation of our manifesto into government policy, and my government's strategies for moving forward the transformation of our country.

We promised to restore electricity to our capital city, and we did; we promised we would restore people's confidence in the ability of government to bring its projects to fruition, and we did; we promised to remove impediments and pave the way for our international partners to unfreeze funds for development and other projects, and we did.

In our Agenda for Change we stated our commitment to improving the lives of our people by transforming agriculture, energy, infrastructure, health and education.

We stated that we would be a government of infrastructure; a government of implementation; and a government of action.

We said we would be a government of visible achievements, a government that puts greater emphasis on programmes for the common man and woman, and a government with a sense of urgency, self confidence and fair distribution of services to every region, district and town.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, from this towering hill where our Honourable House stands, to the streets of Bo, Kenema, Makeni, and Koidu, the signs of our infrastructural transformation are very visible; from the completion of Bumbuna to the building of medical stores in all districts, our commitment to implementation is evident; from our support to the smallholder farmer to our provision of free health care for mothers, pregnant women and children under five, our dedication to action for the common man and woman is manifest.

From our independent funding of the widening of road projects at Wilkinson Road and Spur Road, to our commitment to shoulder the greater costs of our elections; from our increased budgetary allocations to local councils irrespective of which political party controls them, to our construction of roads in many towns regardless of which party stronghold they are located; our

increasing self confidence and fair distribution of services to the ordinary citizens of our country is very noticeable.

Four years on, I am here to report on the progress of the transformation, the challenges that we continue to face, and our renewed determination to continue the work at hand; to get the programmes off the shelves and onto the ground where their impact will be registered, known and appreciated by our people.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, many of the challenges we faced were internal. However, a significant number of these hurdles came from outside our borders. The international scene was rocked by financial crisis, increases in fuel and food prices, terrorism, and environmental disasters in many parts of the globe. But our resilience is making us weather the storm, and we are stronger now than before.

In the midst of the world financial squeeze we have attracted hundreds of millions of dollars in investment; in the midst of instability and religious intolerance in many parts of the globe, we have won accolades for peace, good governance and respect for human rights; from a country once pitied for the savagery of its civil war, we have become a very respected nation, befriended by the powerful; honoured by the African Union to lead reforms at the United Nations; standing up for the rights of ordinary citizens; leading delegations to restore democracy; contributing troops to maintain international peace, and leading reforms with a faith that wisdom inspires, and a zeal that never tires.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, before I turn my attention to the specifics of the programmes we have been implementing, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate every Sierra Leonean for the great celebrations we put up to mark our golden jubilee as an independent nation. Sierra Leoneans from all political parties, all regions, all ages and all religions came together to sing the praises of our native land, affirm their love for Sierra Leone, their pride and self confidence as citizens of this great nation, and their commitment to moving this country fifty years forward.

Mr. Speaker, out there, within the boundaries of this great House of Parliament lie the mortal remains of the two towering figures of independent Sierra Leone. Sir Milton Augustus Strieby Margai and Dr Siaka Probyn Stevens had their political differences, but they are eternally united within this great house of the land. This shows that our country wants a unity of the great men's respective legacies of tolerance and infrastructural development as the best way forward. This country wants us to harmonize the better values that they asserted, to pray for their souls together and to garner strength of purpose from those prayers to move the country forward. It is in the light of this, Honourable Members that I call upon all present here today to rise and observe a minute of silent prayers for the souls of Sir Milton Margai, and Dr Siaka Stevens.

May the Good Lord also accept our prayers for them and other heroes of our land. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members of Parliament, let me turn to the achievements we have made, the remaining challenges and how we intend to overcome them.

Agriculture

Mr. Speaker, agriculture contributes almost 50% of the country's GDP, employs about two-thirds of the population, generates almost a quarter of the export earnings and provides most of the raw materials for industry. My Agenda for Change identifies agriculture as the engine for socio-economic growth and development with a wholesome focus on the commercialization of the agricultural value chain and promotion of private sector participation. Towards this goal, we developed a long term Agricultural Development Programme, and drawing from it the current flagship Small-holder Commercialization Programme.

We focused on kick-starting the transformation of Agriculture with the smallholder farmers because the majority of the poor people in this country belong to that category. This is why we are providing them high-yielding planting materials, fertilizers, weed killers, power tillers, rice cutters, rice threshers, rice mills and cassava graters. This is why we are rehabilitating inland valley swamps and constructing feeder roads.

I am pleased to inform the nation that the programme has attracted over US\$200million from our international partners, including US\$50million from the Global Agriculture and Food Security Programme (GAFSP). Under the Programme, 193 agriculture business centres (ABCs) have been constructed in virtually every chiefdom, district and region in the country. From Kabala to Pujehun, Port Loko to Kono, you will see the ABC buildings with milling, storage, marketing and office facilities, drying floors, water supply units, generators, and improved input supplies including seed rice and fertilizers.

Alongside the Small-holder Commercialization Programme, the tractor hire purchase scheme is being implemented. For the first time in the history of Sierra Leone, farmers have been made the proud owners of 265 tractors.

In addition, the Government's policy to provide investment incentives to the private sector has also triggered a good number of huge investments in the agricultural sector. Today, we have Addax Bio-energy promoting ethanol and electricity production through the development of a sugar plantation; Gold Tree rehabilitating the oil palm plantation in the Daru area; Socfinco promoting oil palm in Pujehun District; Genesis promoting the intensive mechanization of rice production on the uplands in Masimera Chiefdom in Port Loko District; Arul producing, processing and packaging rice in Moyamba District; and Africa Felix producing fruit juice concentrates in Koya in the Western Area.

In the livestock sector, two large investors have made significant investments in the production of poultry products: Pajah and IJ Ltd have installed an incubator with a capacity of 38,400 setters and 19,200 day-old chick hatchers at the Lumley Agricultural Station. Sierra Akker Ltd has also installed a modern 10,000-capacity layer facility and a 10 tonne feed mill at Sumbuya Village, Koya Chiefdom in Port Loko District.

It is good to note that Arul, Paja and IJ Ltd and Sierra Akker are indigenous investments. These private sector enterprises have not only made substantial investments in the agricultural sector but have created thousands of jobs for our people.

Also, in order to enhance the agricultural value chain especially processing and marketing, 30 giant rice mills have been constructed in all districts. The well-known Newton Livestock Station is currently under reconstruction and is housing the Sierra Leone Agri-Business Initiative (SABI) Training Centre that is training youths to be commercially self-employed along the agricultural value chain.

To assist the farmers in better water management, multiple cropping and other intensification activities, over 1,794 hectares of inland valley swamps (IVS) have been developed and cultivated to enhance all year round cultivation of rice and vegetables.

As part of my Government's effort to improve farmers' access to financial services, 6 additional Financial Services Associations (FSAs or Village Banks) have been constructed and equipped in the Eastern Districts of Kenema, Kailahun and Kono. They will be spread to other districts from this year onwards.

In the fisheries sector, we are modernizing the legal framework for fisheries in the country, establishing stakeholders/government co-managed marine protected areas, registering successes in joint patrols with the United States Coast Guard to combat illegal fishing and smuggling of contraband goods, and arresting several vessels.

We have also built fish landing sites at Bonthe, Shenge, Tombo and Goderich, and we shall be constructing a fish harbour and opening a Marine Training School to provide training opportunities for fishermen and seafarers in Sierra Leone. We are also increasing our revenues from our marine resources. From Le 3.8 billion in 2007, we more than tripled our revenue generation to Le13 billion in 2010.

Mr. Speaker, we have made enormous strides but we shall not rest on our oars. We shall act with the urgency demanded of a nation that must rise up to the full potential of its great endowments.

Infrastructure

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, my Government's policy on infrastructural development is to build infrastructure for state affairs, create access for affordable housing for the population and provide reliable road networks nationwide. Everywhere you go, there are visible signs of our construction work as evidenced in the new National Electoral Commission building, the new offices for parliamentarians, rehabilitation of district offices and road construction.

We have already rehabilitated the Makeni – Matotoka Highway, the Bo – Kenema Highway, the Masiaka – Bo Highway and 600km of feeder roads in Port Loko, Kambia, Pujehun and Kenema Districts. Construction is also well on course on the Hillside Bypass Road, Lumley-Tokeh Road, Kenema-Pendembu Road and Lungi-Port Loko Road. We are rehabilitating 25km of selected streets in Freetown including: King Street, Mends Street, Duke Street, Victoria Street, Dundas Street, and Caulker Street; the widening of Wilkinson Road is 80 % completed.

We are also widening the Lumley- Hill Cut Road, and rehabilitating 250km of Provincial and District Headquarter Town Roads in Makeni, Bo , Kenema, Magburaka, Port Loko, Kambia, Lunsar, Moyamba, Pujehun, Bonthe, Kabala, Koidu, and Kailahun.

We have constructed the Freetown–Conakry Highway, building a first class road from Rogbere to Pamlap on the Sierra Leone side of the Guinea border.

We have secured funding for the Pendembu-Kailahun Road. Work on the Regent-Jui Road will start in December this year.

We have also put the following programmes in the pipeline for immediate implementation: Sefadu-Matotoka Highway; Bo – Bandajuma Highway; Makeni – Kabala Road; widening of Jomo Kenyatta – Hill Cut Road and 550km feeder roads in Bombali, Tonkolili and Kailahun District.

We have established a Road Maintenance Fund and an administration for financing the maintenance of the core road networks in the country. We have designed a road policy to provide a coordinated approach in the mobilization and utilization of resources for the construction of feeder roads.

In line with our commitment to infrastructural development, NaCSA has also been focusing on the rehabilitation and reconstruction of community access roads and small bridges. In 2010, NaCSA undertook the rehabilitation and reconstruction of a total of 702.91 km of feeder roads; and spot improvement on 120.3 km feeder roads.

Government is presently undertaking a major facelift to the Freetown International Airport Terminal Building as part of the efforts in the rebranding of Sierra Leone. Through bilateral economic cooperation especially in the area of infrastructure development, an agreement has been reached with the People’s Republic of China for the construction of a new international airport on the mainland between Mamamah and Magbontoso in the Port Loko District.

My Government is also through NASSIT implementing an Affordable Housing Project. The Trust has constructed pilot houses in all of the provincial headquarters. The construction of the Transport Terminal and shopping Plaza in Kenema is nearing completion; construction works of similar facilities are far advanced in Bo and have commenced in Makeni.

We continue to forge ahead as we believe that no challenge is bigger than our aspirations for a country with well-developed infrastructure.

Energy and Water

Mr. Speaker, my Government has continued to sustain the radical transformation of the energy sector. The Bumbuna Hydro Power Plant, which we commissioned in 2009, continues to generate power supply to Freetown. Plans are being put in place to expand the Bumbuna Hydro System to 400 megawatts.

We completed the construction of a 16.5 megawatt thermal plant at Blackhall Road in March 2011. This has increased the installed generation capacity from the 5 megawatts inherited in 2007 to 76 megawatts.

The World Bank-funded Interserve Project has increased the transport capacity of the distribution network from 25 to 40 megawatts thereby improving the quality of power supply to over 45,000 customers.

We have constructed a 6 megawatt thermal plant in Makeni, which will also supply Magburaka and Matotoka. We are also constructing a 6 megawatt thermal plant in Lungi for the Airport and Township. This will include the complete reconstruction of the transmission and distribution network. Work is far advanced with this project and the expected completion date is March 2012.

We are constructing a 6 megawatt thermal plant in Koidu, including the complete reconstruction of the transmission and distribution network for the city. Furthermore, at the Bo Power Station, we are rehabilitating three thermal plants with a total capacity of 5 megawatts to supplement the 6 megawatts mini-hydro in Dodo – Kenema District. These plants have been out of service for over 5 years.

In July this year, my Government signed an agreement for the construction of thermal plants with installed capacity of 1000 megawatts on a Build, Operate and Transfer Basis. The agreement also includes construction of the associated Transmission and Distribution network to ensure that the power that is generated can be transmitted and distributed to customers. Phase 1 of the project is the construction of a 125 megawatt thermal plant and associated network for the Western Area. The construction period for Phase 1 is 18 months while the construction period for the entire project is 5 years.

With a soft loan from the Chinese, we are commencing the construction of mini hydro power stations in Charlotte and Makali. An advance team from the Chinese construction company is already at the sites to prepare for the mobilization of the larger construction team. Construction is expected to start by the end of 2011. A technical design and draft contract for the Bankasoka Hydro Power Station in Port Loko District are currently being finalized with another Chinese company.

Mr. Speaker, with a determination to expand services everywhere, my Government is implementing Water Projects in Kailahun, Lungi and four locations in the Western Area - Allen Town, Wellington-Blue Water, Thunder Hill and Fourah Bay College-White Water. Work is far advanced in the execution of these projects. My Government has also commenced The Three Cities Water Supply and Sanitation Project for Bo, Makeni and Kenema.

My Government is also funding the construction of water supply systems in Mile 91, Pujehun and Moyamba. With the support of Japan, the Rokupr Water System has been completed and work will soon commence on the Kambia Water System.

With the support of members of this House, we introduced last month The Electricity and Water Regulatory Commission Bill to establish an independent agency to regulate the electricity and water sectors. We will also be introducing the Electricity Generation and Use Bill that will restructure the electricity sector into a generation and transmission company and a distribution company. NPA as we know it today will be transformed into the distribution company. The bill will also make provision for the private sector to participate in the electricity sector in the form of Independent Power Producers (IPPs).

We call on your continued support to ensure the passage of these legislations to transform the energy and water sector in our country.

Health

Mr. Speaker, our vision for the health sector is the provision of accessible, affordable and quality health care for all Sierra Leoneans. But we must start somewhere, and where we start must reflect our commitment to the weak and the vulnerable - pregnant women, lactating mothers and children under five.

We cannot sit by and let our mothers die because of lack of money, we cannot stand by and let pregnant women suffer for lack of a few thousand Leones, and we cannot allow tears of death to replace the tears of joy at the birth of a child. That was why, Mr. Speaker, we removed user fees to reduce the occurrence of preventable deaths in our communities.

Mr Speaker, our Free Health Care Initiative is paying huge dividends for our people. Between April 2010 and March 2011, the initiative led to almost two million additional under five consultations, 39,100 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.

As a result we have reduced the infant mortality rate from 170 per 1,000 live births to 89 per 1,000 live births; the under-five mortality rate has been reduced from 286 per 1,000 live births to 140 per 1,000 live births.

The maternal mortality ratio is also down from 1,300 per 100,000 live births to 857 per 100,000 live births. With the huge 250% increase in access to health services by children under five years of age, and the recorded high increase of nearly 70% in institutional delivery, it is convincing to believe that the free health care initiative has provided strong impetus for reaching the Millennium Development Goals 4 and 5 against 2015.

Ante Natal Care attendance increased three-fold providing opportunities for health workers to identify and address any health challenge that is likely to lead to complications during or after delivery.

To those who say we cannot sustain the Free Healthcare, our answer is that what we cannot sustain is the death of our mothers, the pain of our children and the tears of our families. To those who steal the drugs we provide for our mothers, pregnant women and children, we today

declare you public enemies. We will go after you with the full force of the law. We cannot allow you to continue to sabotage the health of our people.

Mr. Speaker, we have made significant progress in our malaria prevention measures. In 2010, we distributed about 3.2 million Long Lasting Insecticide Treated Nets to households nationwide.

In relation to HIV/AIDS, we have stabilized the epidemic; ensured a decline in prevalence among pregnant women from 3.5% in 2009 to 3.2% in 2010; and also a decline in HIV infection among children born to HIV positive mothers.

The prevalence declined from 9% in 2009 to 5% in 2011.

We have also reduced the levels of deaths and sickness amongst people living with HIV/Aids, initiated early treatment of infants and expanding our provision free anti-retroviral drugs. As a caring Government, we are also providing livelihood support to people living with the virus.

We have enacted the National AIDS Commission Act 2011 to transform the dynamic National AIDS Secretariat into a Commission. With the support of this Honourable House my Government intends to achieve zero new HIV infections, zero AIDS related deaths and zero stigma and discrimination by 2015.

In line with our vision for an accelerated growth of essential infrastructure, a total of 1200 health facilities are now functional compared to 843 in 2006. We have established Five Basic Emergency Obstetric Care (BEMOC) centres each in every district.

We have built a new referral hospital at Jui. When fully functional, this 100-bed facility equipped with 4 theatres, CT scan, dialysis machines and a first class laboratory will enhance our diagnosis and treatment of non-communicable diseases. This will drastically reduce the number of Sierra Leoneans going overseas for treatment. In addition, 11 district hospitals are undergoing rehabilitation work.

The availability of appropriately trained human resources is an important requirement for the delivery of our health services. We have therefore increased the total workforce in the public health sector from 6274 in 2007 to 8243 in 2010.

In a bid to address shortage of other health specialists we have contracted a 32-man strong team of Cuban Health Professionals. These professionals are going to be deployed at regional facilities and will be encouraged to conduct outreach to district hospitals to augment provision of specialized services.

Mr. Speaker, though we have greatly reduced maternal and child mortality, we are grappling with percentages that we must continue to bring down, we still face the problem of drugs being carted away and we still need to build more hospitals and health units. We are determined to overcome these challenges. We shall not rest until we achieve the goal of a Sierra Leone with accessible, affordable, effective and well-managed health systems.

Education

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, the cornerstone of our intervention in the education sector has been improving access to educational services for our people, the construction of Tech-Voc centres and institutes and improving the effectiveness of teachers through the establishment of the Teaching Service Commission and pay reforms.

More people are going to schools and universities now than at any time in the country's history. Our incentives for improving access for women to education have resulted in more enrolment and retention rates for the girl child and greater opportunities for women to study science courses at our tertiary institutions.

We have set up the implementation committee of the Gbamanja Commission of Inquiry and they have started work. Already a number of the report's recommendations are being implemented, including the ban on access course at our universities. We have fully equipped Tech-Voc centres in Koinadugu, Bombali, Kono, Kailahun, Moyamba, Kenema and Bo. We intend building new Tech-Voc institutes in Kono, Kambia, Pujehun, and Masingbi before the end of 2012.

Mr. Speaker, the Management of Teachers' records has posed considerable challenges in the past. Of the 74,000 strong public sector workforce, just over 35,000 are teachers. Government has taken the lead to sanitize the Teaching Service, particularly with respect to staff numbers and school registrations. The creation and management of a personnel file for every teacher marked the first step towards establishing a reliable human resource data management system that will support a clean payroll and a credible database for teachers and our schools.

We have enacted the law establishing the Teaching Service Commission, and the commission shall be made functional this year. We have also reformed the pay package for teachers, creating a fairer grade system by expanding it to grade 17, as with the rest of the public service, and effectively ensuring substantial increases in the salaries of teachers.

The Economy

Mr Speaker, my Government continues to implement sound economic policies to improve the socio-economic well being of the people of Sierra Leone. The economy recovered strongly in 2010 with real GDP growth of 5.0 percent, at par with the average growth rate for Sub-Saharan Africa. The prospects of the economy in the medium term are bright.

Efforts made by Government in attracting international investors to various sectors of the economy in recent years are beginning to bear fruit. With the investments in the mining sector, especially in iron ore mining, Sierra Leone will be among the fastest growing economies in the world in the next few years. With iron ore production, real GDP is projected to grow by 51 percent in 2012.

Domestic Revenue Effort:

Mr. Speaker, my Government has been very successful in mobilizing internally generated funds to gradually reduce our reliance on donor funds. In recent years, domestic revenue collection

has improved considerably increasing from 10.8 percent of GDP in 2007 to 13.3 percent of GDP in 2010 and is projected at 14.5 percent of GDP in 2011.

While intensifying domestic revenue collection, Government also considered it necessary to provide wide-ranging investment incentives to promote agricultural and industrial development. The Finance Act 2011 contains attractive incentives for businesses involved in the production of pharmaceuticals, manufacturing of goods, and the construction of hotels, schools and hospitals. Incentives have also been provided for staff training, research and development.

Re-Direction of Government Expenditure to Infrastructural and Human Development

With increasing domestic revenues and consistent with the Agenda for Change, Government expenditures have been re-oriented in favour of the main drivers of growth including roads, energy, agriculture, education, health and water supply. Accordingly, since 2010 Government has undertaken major infrastructure projects from internally generated revenues. These include Le 257.7 billion to fund various road projects; Le108 billion for energy projects and Le12.8 billion for the rehabilitation of water supply facilities in various townships.

About Le15 Billion was transferred to Local Councils for various health projects at the local level, including the construction of a maternal health post in Kenema city and the rehabilitation of the Nixon Memorial Hospital in Segbwema Town, Kailahun District. We have in totality increased Government's annual direct transfers to Local Councils from Le7.6 billion in 2007 to Le67.2 billion in 2010.

Mitigating the Impact of Higher Food and Fuel Prices

To cushion the impact of the higher imported food prices, Government suspended the payment of import duty on rice and reduced excise taxes on petroleum products to stabilize transport fares and the price of rice. Government has also ordered 40 buses to further cushion the impact of higher fuel prices.

Accountant General

My Government has made sure that the Accountant General's Department has improved the turn-around time in processing payment requests. We have also improved records management in the Department resulting in a score of over 90% in the last donor assessment, and reduced cash handling and its related risks by channelling government payments through bank accounts.

Audit Service

In line with our determination to ensure accountability in the management of public finances, the Auditor General's Annual Report on the Accounts for the year 2009 was submitted to Parliament on time on the 30th of December 2010 as per the Government Budgetary and Accountability Act 2005, and tabled in Parliament on the 11th of January 2011.

As we are in the process of widening our scope of audit by introducing other audit areas, the Performance Audit Unit has been established. We will be expanding our audit work to include banks, insurance companies and other donor funded projects.

Bank of Sierra Leone

As a key element of its monetary policy reform measures during the review period, the Bank of Sierra Leone introduced the Monetary Policy Rate (MPR) in February 2011 to benchmark the term structure of interest rates in the financial markets.

The Bank also established the Credit Reference Bureau this year as part of its financial sector reform drive. To promote access to capital in rural areas, a number of deposit and non-deposit taking Micro Finance Institutions (MFIs) have been licensed.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, as a result of the prudent macroeconomic management, the World Bank's Country Policy and Institutional Assessment (CPIA) rating for Sierra Leone has consistently improved from 3.1 in 2007 to 3.3 in 2010.

Mineral Resources

We shall make the mineral resources of this nation benefit the people of this country, and the result of our endeavours visible in hundreds of millions of dollars of investment and the creation of thousands of jobs. As promised in our manifesto, we are renegotiating all agreements to further optimize the benefits of minerals for the citizens of our country. We have already successfully renegotiated the agreement with Koidu Holdings and London Mining. Renegotiations with Sierra Rutile and Sierra Mining Holdings are ongoing.

We have granted a concession to African Minerals Limited for the mining of Iron Ore in Tonkolili district. Reconstruction of the Pepel Port has been completed by African Minerals and also the railway from Ferengbeya to Pepel is nearing completion. The Production of Iron Ore is expected to commence in December 2011.

To further ensure transparent and effective administration of mineral rights, we have introduced and started implementation of a Mining Cadastre. This system feeds in relevant information to the EITI process. A Data Repository has been established in the Ministry's website for the purpose of transparency and accountability.

With support from partners, we are building our capacity for the sustainable management of Sierra Leone's Extractive Industry through the Extractive Industry Technical Assistance Project (EITAP). This project is facilitating a geochemical survey that will for the first time provide us with a Geological Data Bank.

A new Petroleum (Exploration and Production) Act was enacted in July 2011. Under the Act, a Petroleum Directorate is being established to monitor petroleum operations in Sierra Leone. The Sierra Leone National Petroleum Company is also being incorporated to manage the commercial aspects of petroleum operations and the participating interests of the State in petroleum licenses.

Private Sector and Investments

Mr. Speaker, because of our resilience and actions in creating a business friendly environment, Sierra Leone today is in the midst of a great transformation. We are attracting huge investments in our mineral sector; prospects for commercially valuable oil are great; and hundreds of millions of dollars are being invested in our agriculture, marine and other sectors. Our patient courting and nurturing of investors is paying off.

Through a partnership involving the Government, IDEA (UK) who are Sierra Leonean business people, and Hilton a premier name in the hotel industry, the Cape Sierra Hotel will be refurbished into a 5-star hotel.

We have also privatized the Freetown port through an agreement with Bollore. We are hopeful that this will lead to the modernisation of our port, improved turn-around times for ships, and decreases in freight and insurance costs. Our privatisation of handling services at the airport has led to major airlines doing business in the country.

The Mining Sector continues to do well.

Koidu Holdings is currently implementing a US\$150 million expansion plan to enhance its processing capacity, with a view to increasing its annual production from 100,000 to 500,000 carats.

Sierra Rutile has been transformed with a change in the major share ownership, and the value of the company has grown by over 150% in the last twenty four months.

In Iron Ore, London Mining has successfully raised hundreds of millions for their project. Since January 2010, African Minerals Ltd has successfully raised and invested US\$1.3 billion to fund the development of the Tonkolili project. The company has also signed final agreements with Shandong Iron and Steel Group which when completed will see an additional US\$1.5 billion being invested to develop Phase 2 of the Tonkolili project.

Our efforts on investment climate reforms continue to yield dividends. We have increased our rankings in the World Bank Doing Business Index. We have established Commercial Courts as we promised to do. We have also improved tax payment efficiency and made it easier for businesses to register and flourish.

Mr. Speaker, in collaboration with other stakeholders, the Ministry of Trade and Industry developed an incentives package for investors, which was approved by Cabinet and incorporated into the Finance Act of 2011. We have also developed a National Trade Policy and Action Programme as a strategy to address the challenges faced by our trade sector as well as to guide both policy makers and members of the private sector on matters relating to trade in Sierra Leone.

With the support of this Honourable House, we have enacted the Intellectual Property Rights Law of 2011 to provide safeguards against piracy and to reward creativity. This will enhance not just the development and growth of the creative arts but also the private sector in general.

To harmonize our Standards policy with other countries in the sub-region, Sierra Leone passed the Weights and Measures Act No.5 of 2010. On 1st May 2011, the petroleum sector adopted the metric system of measurement moving from gallons to litres.

Human Rights

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, for my Government, consolidation of democracy, peace and development is inextricably linked to the building of a viable national human rights culture supported by independent national institutions. It is in view of this that we have provided 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.

We have created the space for freedom of expression to thrive, allowing for independent voices everywhere, respecting the rights of journalists to freely practise their profession.

Our 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. The Commission has maintained a third comprehensive annual state of human rights report thus complying with its statutory obligations to government and to this House. It has also provided assistance to government that ensured successful reporting and participation in the United Nations Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review.

Mr. Speaker, never before in the history of our land have Sierra Leoneans had more space to express their thoughts as at now. Through our Open Government Initiative, ordinary Sierra Leoneans from all over the country have directly posed questions to me, the Speaker of Parliament and the Chief Justice at forums organized in this very House of Parliament and at State House.

Through more than 40 radio stations, the common man and woman have aired their voices, and given their opinion on any issue without hindrance. Freedom of expression is thriving in our newspapers, and our television stations and we are committed to making it thrive even more.

Youths

Mr. Speaker, we are determined to make youths play their rightful roles as the mainstay of our country’s quest for security, democracy and development. We have established the Youth Commission to lead the integration and contribution of youths to the country’s programmes.

We have attracted investors in every sector and they are creating thousands of job opportunities for our youths.

Employment opportunities are being created in our infrastructural development programmes; in the roads that are constructed in every district and region; and in our implementation of the Small-holder Commercialization Programme.

Knowing that the presence of employment must be matched by the presence of skills, we are building more vocational centres to match up the skills of our youths with jobs.

Through NaCSA we directly provide temporary employment for 15,570 young people through the implementation of 358 Cash-for-Work (CfW) sub-projects. We have also deployed Peace and Development Corps (PADC)) volunteers throughout the country, for a period of two years in

order to provide them with the opportunity of gaining job experience. These interventions have been scaled up under the Youth Employment Support Project (YESP).

Our youths are the pride of our nation. Sierra Leone has now moved up the FIFA world rankings from 172 in September 2007 to 68 presently. Tomorrow our darling Leone Stars will be playing in South Africa, in their final quest to qualify for the 2012 African Nations Cup. Let me use this opportunity to call on Members of this Honourable House and the citizens of this country to join me in wishing them well.

Mr. Speaker, from the provision of transport services in remote areas to their involvement in the mobile phone and video centre business, from their determination to succeed at universities and the moral networks they are creating within religious organizations, the positive march of youths is unstoppable. Together we will overcome the remaining challenges, and sustain a violence-free, democratic and development-oriented youth culture.

Social Protection

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, consistent with our Government's determination to ensure the expansion of our people's social security, NASSIT is currently working with the relevant stakeholders to introduce a social health insurance scheme that will guarantee the extension of social security protection to the most vulnerable in our society, especially agricultural and informal sector workers.

The proposed scheme will be piloted in two selected districts for a period of 18 months and it is during this phase that the full features of the scheme will be developed and subsequently rolled over to the rest of the country.

In 2010, NaCSA worked with other stakeholders, including the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, to develop the National Social Protection Policy, which was adopted by Cabinet on 30th March 2011. The appropriate bill is being drafted for presentation to Parliament. These will create space for Government to care for the most vulnerable groups within the population and make them live in dignity.

Security

Mr Speaker, my Government has just launched the 2011 National Security Exercise and the Second Security Review Consultations. The aim is to review current security threats, analyze our preparedness, and position the security forces to continue to effectively maintain peace, law and order as a prerequisite for the planning and implementation of our development programmes, the sustainability of our democracy, improving access to justice and social services, and the oversight and governance of the sector.

We have also maintained our active involvement in the promotion of regional and international stability through mediation and peacekeeping efforts. As a result our country is now categorized as a credible contributor to international and regional stabilization exercises and efforts. Our Army and Police are deployed in Somalia, Haiti, Ethiopia, East Timor and Lebanon as peacekeepers. We have also been asked to send Prison Officers in the next few weeks to Southern Sudan.

Parliament

Mr Speaker, with the great, positive and nationalistic support of this Honourable House, my Government passed eleven Bills into law, and ratified 43 International Loan and Grant Agreements all aimed at mitigating poverty, ensuring good governance, and effectively managing the flow of overseas development assistance, controlling the allocation of natural resource revenues, and reviewing budgetary allocations to support micro-economic initiatives.

Law Reform

Mr. Speaker, through the Law Reform Commission, my Government has continued to review and update our laws to reflect current realities and aspirations. These include laws dealing with commerce and investment, human rights, marriages, disability, drug control, criminal justice and the administration of justice.

Lands, Country Planning & the Environment

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, we have developed The National Land Policy for Sierra Leone and a draft copy is ready for validation. We have also designed and deployed a land documentation database for private and state lands to promote effective land management. We have initiated a Land Registration Project (LRP) for the Western Area; introduced the use of Global Positioning System (GPS) and state of the art Geographic Information Systems.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, my Government is implementing programmes to ensure the effectiveness of the newly enacted environmental legislations. The projects include: Conservation of the Western Area Peninsula Forest Reserve and its Watershed; Eco-tourism Supporting Community Development and Conservation at Tiwai Island Wildlife Sanctuary; the Trans-boundary Forest Co-management; and The Gola Forest Management.

Information and Communications

Mr. Speaker, we have put in place a National Communication Strategy to guide our interventions in the sector. We have developed a project geared towards the dissemination of information to all parts of the country. We established four Media Resources Centers in Freetown, Makeni, Bo and Kenema with VSAT to provide internet connectivity.

We have developed a Freedom of Information Bill that is currently before the House of Parliament for enactment.

In March 2010, my Government created and 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. We have already signed the necessary agreements and secured funding for the Programme. The Submarine Cable is scheduled to land next week, and will be put to commercial use in 2012. Its landing will make communication cheaper and affordable to all and will encourage private sector participation and promote competition in the management of the International Gateway.

With our own funds, and support from the Islamic Development Bank, we are implementing the ECOWAS regional Backbone Infrastructure & E-Governance Project (ECOWAN). The

strategic objective of the ECOWAN project is to provide the capability to establish a common platform where exchange of information can be executed seamlessly to enhance productivity, expand opportunities for knowledge sharing and also promote regional integration.

We are also implementing the Pan-African e-Network project. The project supports three major components including the tele-medicine, tele-education and the VVIP connectivity. With the tele-education project nearly 200 students at Fourah Bay College are receiving online lectures for various courses through a Virtual Tele-Ed-Agent from the Amity University and University of Madras (UNOM). Students in the country have sat to the first and second semester examinations for masters and bachelor degrees in business and information technology.

International Cooperation

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, whilst our goal is the creation of a strong, self confident, democratic and peaceful nation, this could be better achieved with the support and cooperation of the international community. That is why we are continuing to build on our partnerships and alliances. Our efforts are yielding positive results for our country and the promotion of peace, democracy, development cooperation and security in the Mano River Basin, West Africa, Africa and the entire Globe.

We have continued 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 continued to strengthen cooperative relations with our immediate and extended neighbourhood through political dialogue and entry into Cooperation Agreements, and representational activities involving the Foreign Ministry and its diplomatic missions.

Our ties are still strong with our traditional partners in Europe and America, including their respective development cooperation agencies such as DFID, USAID, and Irish Aid.

Let me also use this opportunity to register our appreciation of the support provided by the European Commission, the African Development Bank, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, BADEA, JICA, and the Islamic Development Bank.

We are also engaged in the expansion, diversification and consolidation of our partnerships within the context of South-South Cooperation. This has significantly enhanced the opportunity for expanding the scope of resource commitments, expertise and affordable technology particularly from the Arab Gulf States, and emerging economies of Latin America and South East Asia respectively.

We have been able to secure expanded support for our domestic agenda through technical assistance grant aid and soft loans particularly in the priority sectors of Energy and Water Resources, Agriculture, Infrastructure, and Human Resource Development.

Mr Speaker, in this 40th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relationship with the People's Republic of China we wish to congratulate the People's Republic for their peaceful rise

and applaud their immense contribution to the infrastructural and socio-economic development of our country.

We also congratulate the Government and people of the Federal Republic of Nigeria for their leadership role in Africa, and express our sincere gratitude for their profound support for the sustainability of security, democracy and development in our beloved nation.

We applaud the continued friendship and support of the governments and peoples of Guinea, Senegal, India, Kuwait, Malaysia, Australia, South Africa and Venezuela. We also applaud the cooperation of Japan in our developmental strides.

With support of host Governments, we have succeeded in establishing missions in Senegal and Switzerland. My Government has also embarked on a revision of our country's diplomatic representation profile, including our pattern of consular representation and accreditation. In relation to Yenga we have constituted our membership to a Sierra Leone-Guinea Joint Committee that will come up with appropriate recommendations for the final resolution of the burning question of the Yenga occupation.

The Public Service

Mr. Speaker, my Government remains committed to revamping the Public Service and to providing services to all sectors of our community. Our vision is to create a performance-oriented and citizen-focused Public Service that works for all. It is in this light that in August this year we got Senior Civil Servants to sign Performance Contracts. The Civil Service has also started using the new Civil Service Code, Regulations and Rules replacing the General Orders, which became obsolete many years ago. Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, my Government in collaboration with other stakeholders developed a comprehensive multi-year Public Sector Pay Reform Programme to improve conditions of service of public servants. Implementation of the pay reform started with teachers in September this year and will be extended to all other public sector workers this month.

Integrity in Public Life

Mr Speaker, we have made significant strides in promoting integrity since our enactment of one of the strongest anti-corruption laws in Africa in 2008. Sierra Leone moved from 1.9 in 2009 to 2.4 in 2010 in the Transparency International Index. The Global Integrity Scorecard has also published that among the lower and middle income countries in the world Sierra Leone has achieved important anti-corruption improvements in 2010. For these achievements, the World Bank gave the Anti-Corruption Commission the prestigious Integrity Award for recovering stolen government property.

Conclusion

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, our country is in the midst of the greatest transformation in its history. We are on the verge of becoming one of the largest exporters of iron ore, on the threshold of becoming an oil producing nation, we are attracting expressions of interests in our resources from investors everywhere in the world; we are close to being fully integrated into the internet world and its attendant opportunities through the landing of the fibre optic cable; we are

at the point in a country's history that is called the set point, the point where the consequences of what is decided shall stay with us for decades.

It is in the light of this that we shall be organizing a Sierra Leone Conference on Development and Transformation in December this year.

Our vision is to become a middle income and advanced country within the next few decades. I strongly believe we can attain this status.

Given the opportunities available and the strides we are making we can become a donor nation in record time; we can fulfil our aspirations for a truly free country, confident, assertive and forward-looking. This country has enough men and women of goodwill to carry us through.

I come to this Honourable Assembly to reiterate our commitment to working with these men and women of goodwill from every political party.

I come to this Honourable House to reiterate our dedication to democracy and progress through visible action. There are still challenges but we must continue along the path of progress, commitment and unity of purpose.

I believe men and women of good will and non-violence in all political parties will prevail; I believe that our ties of friendship, family, and neighbourliness will triumph over destructive ambition for power.

In this gathering, I see partners for transformation. I see them in the SLPP, the PMDC, and the APC. I believe we share much more than opposing each other in the political arena. Most of us share a disposition for tolerance, friendship and non-violence.

I call upon all of us to use the great resources of our friendships, our common dispositions and values to build bridges over the antagonisms of politics. Let us use these resources to keep the extremists and the violent at bay.

The force of our determination must be the greatest deterrent against those who seek to debar our progress.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, next year this country shall be conducting its fourth presidential and parliamentary elections since 1996. My government is determined to ensure free, fair, transparent, and violence free elections.

We will not allow the perpetrators of violence to derail our continuing transformation into a democracy respected by all, a development-oriented nation lauded by multi-lateral and other institutions, and a country of immense potential that is courted by investors from all over the world.

We the peaceful, the non-violent and the development-oriented are in the overwhelming majority in all political parties, all ethnic groups and every region in the country.

We will never allow the violent to take our country back to the era of gross violations of our rights. The era of impunity is over; we will enforce the laws to the fullest and ask for the maximum punitive measures for those engaged in electoral violence and other human rights abuses and violations.

We will also be seeking the cooperation of the International Criminal Court to ensure that no one escapes the net of fair, just and impartial trial for electoral and other gross violations of the rights of our people. There will be no hiding place for perpetrators.

I hereby call on all peaceful Sierra Leoneans to come together in an alliance of strength, unity, and commitment and prevent our country from being taken over by the agents of retrogression.

From the sacred groves of the Gola Forest to the great Mountains of Wara Wara, the time to stand up for our peaceful and developmental values is now; from the fishing grounds of Tombo to the mines of Tongo, we must assert our fidelity to the ideals of unity, freedom and justice.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members of Parliament, our national heritage should be the cord that binds us closer as one people. We should all accept that we have a common destiny as Sierra Leoneans and work together relentlessly for peace, freedom and prosperity. Let us with patriotic zeal serve this land that we love, our Sierra Leone.

God bless us all.