

STATE OPENING SPEECH BY HIS EXCELLENCY DR. ERNEST BAI KOROMA 2012

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:

Today, before the esteemed representatives of the people, I once again, with faith in God, loyalty to the constitution, and firm commitment to the achievement of our national aspirations, accept the honour bestowed upon me by the people of this country to serve them as President for the second and last term. I glorify God Almighty for making this happen. I thank every citizen of this nation for the confidence reposed in me and my party, the All Peoples Congress to take the country to another level.

2. I am here to reiterate my campaign promises before God, before the representatives of the people, and before all the people of this country. I am here to reiterate my vow to honour the trust you have placed in me; to proclaim my fidelity to your hopes and aspirations, and to commit my administration to fulfilling the pledges we made during the campaign. Let all present here today be witnesses unto this proclamation: this new social contract; this new economic imperative, this Agenda for Prosperity: we will equitably distribute the fruits of prosperity to all; we will respect the rights of all; we will focus on the training and employment of youths; and we will continue the restoration of discipline, law and order in society.

3. In our Agenda for Prosperity we will act to diversify the economy, induce growth, and empower human capital with appropriate education to be part of programme implementation. The gains of the Agenda for Change have brought to our shores huge foreign investments in mining, petroleum industry, agriculture and tourism. In the Agenda for Prosperity we will act to enhance the capacity of our people to make them an integral part of this new dawn.

4. Mr. Speaker, in my last address here I told parliamentarians in the habit of walking out and boycotting parliament that they might be boycotted by the people. Well, I have looked around for some of my friends, but I have not been able to set eyes on them. Is it true that the people boycotted them? How many were boycotted? This just shows that dialogue is better than boycott. I hope my good friends will take note of this and acknowledge that the days of walkouts and boycotts are over, as they do not serve any useful purpose.

5. Mr. Speaker, we have conducted elections monitored by over ten thousand national and international observers, making our 2012 polls the most transparent in our country's history. Four elections were conducted on the same day, making the process the most complex electoral exercise in our nation since independence; we paid for most of it ourselves; we organized it ourselves; and we did it peacefully, fairly and transparently. And the process, from registration to announcement of results, has been acclaimed as meeting international standards of free and fair elections. We must claim these achievements; we must congratulate ourselves; we must applaud the state institutions, from the National Electoral Commission and other democratic institutions to the Police, RSLAF, and other security agencies for their immense contribution to this achievement. This is a national victory; another great addition to the achievements of the people of this country

6. We are at peace and our country remains stable. We are no longer a country of blood diamonds; we are an example of a consolidating democracy, and one of the safest and most peaceful societies in the world. Our economy continues to show positive signs of growth. We have moved away from being the least developed country in the world five years ago to being the second hottest economy this year, with a 21 % projected growth. We have built roads; provided electricity and free health care for our pregnant women, lactating mothers and children under five; we have built schools and relocated Njala University. Our human rights record is exemplary. We have enhanced public service delivery and brought Government, decisionmaking and participatory politics closer to our people. We must claim these achievements; we must congratulate ourselves; and applaud the international partners who have sustained their faith in the collective ability of Sierra Leoneans to move forward.

7. But let it be known to all that this nation can only move forward when its youth step forward. During the elections we saw the youths step forward; during the campaign we saw the youths step forward; and the youths have continued to step forward with great hopes for the positive transformation of this country. The youths have spoken and all must listen. I have listened to the youths; I am this day re-affirming the covenant I made with the youths during the campaign: I dedicate my life to your service; I submit my administration to your participation, I commit our economy to your employment; I pledge the resources of this country to your education, your acquisition of appropriate skills, and your advancement.

8. But government alone cannot bring prosperity; the private sector alone cannot bring prosperity. The Agenda for Prosperity needs commitment, cooperation, and discipline from youths, middle age and older persons. The Agenda for Prosperity requires the youths to render

their creativity, their energy and their zeal unto the service of their nation, their community, and for their own progress. The Agenda warrants progressive action for bringing about prosperity. The Agenda needs discipline, it needs hard work; it needs initiative and drive. Help the country to help you; help the government to help you, help your community to help you. I know many youths are involved in a lot of good activities; I know many youths want more. But to get more, you have to do more, you have to be more disciplined than your colleague; you have to respect the law, you have to respect your teacher, you have to respect your boss, you have to be ready to get new skills; you have to be honest. It will be easier for government and the private sector to create more opportunities for you when you pay greater attention to your behaviour, when you are more than ready to seize opportunities and be part of the transformation. The job of transforming this country is as much in your hands, as it is in our hands; and I believe that together, with discipline in our relations, commitment to our endeavours, and respect for laws and regulations we will definitely bring prosperity to this nation.

9. The process has started. We have established the National Youth Commission (NAYCOM); we are attracting investments that create jobs; we are building, equipping and supporting technical and vocational centres everywhere, we are appointing younger people to positions of authority in government. We will do more. With youths we will move this country forward, and the transformation will be unstoppable.

10. We recognize the imperative of promoting the rights of women and have taken positive steps in this regard. We are increasing efforts in scaling up social protection interventions to ensure that we take along the weak and vulnerable members of our society in the country's march to prosperity. We will act to intensify these efforts in the next five years.

11. Our ambition, in this Agenda for Prosperity, is to ensure that all people, every Sierra Leonean, in every region, district, city, town and village, benefit from the endowments that God gave us. Our goal for the next five years is to develop a healthier nation; build better schools, better hospitals, and better roads; provide greater prosperity; and give power to the people. We remain committed to our pledge.

12. In our second term, we will act to revamp the constitutional review process, open up the constitutional debate to many more people and a wider range of issues. Of great importance will be putting in place constitutional guarantees for overcoming the challenges of ethnic divide in the political life of the country. We will put the resulting draft constitution to a national referendum. We will conclude the on-going civil service reforms, ensuring that we have a dedicated well-resourced public service with the appropriate capacities for delivering on our Agenda for Prosperity.

13. We will emphasize law-enforcement; ensure that the law and its agents uphold the dignity of all, and deal stringently with the undisciplined, the irresponsible, and the corrupt. We will combat recklessness and disorderly behaviour with great resolve.

14. Today I call on every Sierra Leonean, every political party, and every ethnic group to be part of this journey for national prosperity. Everybody has a role; we must play out our roles constructively. I dedicate my administration to meeting the goals we have set ourselves. We shall not waiver, we shall not relent and, by the Grace of God Almighty, we will succeed.

15. Permit me now, Mr. Speaker to move on to some of the specifics of the Agenda for Prosperity

The Economy

16. Our economy continues to show positive signs of growth. Our GDP looks set to grow significantly in 2012, projected at 21%. Our growth has been driven by investments and expansion in agriculture, mining, construction and services as well as by the enhanced unprecedented government investment in infrastructure and electricity.

17. In the next five years my government will continue to act to attract investments, improve the business climate, and promote a multi-pronged diversification of economic activities. From over-reliance on mining diamonds, we are promoting diversification in the mineral sector to include iron ore, bauxite, and gold. From mere mining and export of these minerals without value addition, we will encourage their processing in order to create jobs and increase revenues. We will also focus on the non-mining sector and diversification of these sectors. In agriculture we are moving away from mainly subsistence production of rice, to commercialized production of diverse produce. Value addition will also be key in our transformation of the agricultural sector. We will also act to put tourism at the centre of economic activities. Whilst mass tourism will still be given attention, we will also encourage heritage and eco-tourism and facilitate training and job placements for youths in the sector. Whilst we will support artisanal fishing; we will also promote semi-industrial and industrial fishing, and build fisheries infrastructure to facilitate export.

18. We will ensure the continuation of progress made in Public Financial Management. We will provide greater and more effective control over expenditure and revenue collection. We will institute more measures to control inflation and ensure that public borrowing from the Bank of Sierra Leone allows money to flow and bolster the private sector.

19. We will continue to act on diminishing reliance on food imports. We will act to create,

adopt and implement progressive development of an agro-based production economy. My Government will invest more in agriculture and boost investment in productive sectors. We will continue to act to attract more investment that create thousands of jobs for youths; improve basic facilities and services for host communities of private investments; and put more money into the hands of rural communities through rural and community banks and land lease payments to landowners.

20. We will improve on procurement activities and contract management and continue pursuing policies that enhance peace and stability as well as those that promote the confidence of our international partners. As a demonstration of our government's commitment to transparency, a Performance Audit Unit has been established in the Office of the Auditor General to go beyond traditional financial audit and appraise and measure the impact of public service delivery on citizens. We will ensure that the unit robustly carries out its responsibilities.

Infrastructure for Inclusive Growth

21. My Government is transforming the national transportation landscape by undertaking the most extensive road rehabilitation and reconstruction yet in the history of Sierra Leone. We will do more in the next five years. We will continue to expand the paved road network to connect chiefdoms to districts and districts to provincial headquarter towns. We will encourage public-private partnership in funding road network development.

22. We continue to act on enhancing the quality of streets in district headquarter towns and urban centres across the country. To enable us to quickly address road maintenance, we will continue to build and sustain the Road Maintenance Fund. We will look into the propriety of introducing a toll system along some of the roads as an additional revenue source for meeting costs of maintenance.

23. As I have often stated, our visionary approach to infrastructural development caters for other facilities. I am pleased to inform the nation that we have as recently as yesterday 13th December 2012 signed an agreement with China Railway International Limited for the construction of a new mainland airport at Mamamah with supervision from the International Civil Aviation Organisation. This new airport will be part of the new city planned in that part of the country.

Energy Generation and Distribution

24. We are determined to increase power generation. We will also continue with the identification and exploration of additional hydro electricity power potentials across the country.

Additionally, we will increase investment in clean energy sources by harnessing solar power. My administration will work to sustain the functioning of the Bumbuna and Dodo Hydro Dams and all others.

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

26. As we progress over the next five years, we will act to improve on the distribution network, reduce dependence on thermal plants as they can be cost-prohibitive, and give greater access to power supply in cities, towns and communities with greater predictability.

27. My Government will encourage public-private-partnerships in the provision of energy. We will work hard to increase coverage and regularity of power supply within the cities and install prepaid meters for all consumers to ensure payment of bills.

Creating Jobs for Growth and Prosperity

28. My main job in the next five years is the creation of jobs for youths all over the country. As we continue to attract investment in the economy from the private sector, we will take specific actions to offer opportunities to our people, especially the youth, to access both self and waged employment.

29. We will also work to reduce over dependence on the State for employment. We will establish a reliable unemployment tracking mechanism. We will identify and set up well targeted special schemes for employment creation at Regional and District levels.

30. We will set up effective career and employment advisory units to provide valuable career advice to the youth of Sierra Leone. We will put greater emphasis on training in employable skills, raise awareness and increase focus on service industry skills acquisition. We will encourage acquisition of skills in technology including modern auto mechanics, assembling and maintenance of mobile phones, computers, solar panels and cooling systems.

31. To enable the youth of Sierra Leone quickly develop requisite skills that the job market requires, we will have to increase the spread of well resourced Vocational and Technical Training centres across the country. This will help alleviate the problem of unskilled and

untrained youth and encourage re-training of job seekers to make them relevant to the job market and relative demands.

32. We will negotiate a progressive scale-up of “local content” in existing and new companies; review and strengthen existing interventions that offer internship opportunities to University and Technical/Vocational graduates; work with partners to support training in employable skills for the hard core unemployed; and work with the Private Sector and appropriate Government Agencies to design and set up well targeted micro-enterprise schemes for women and young people. Micro-enterprise schemes will include scaling up of opportunities for entrepreneurship and self-employment.

33. We will also create an environment for smoother transition from University and Training Institutions to the job market, while providing progressive skills development for hardcore unemployed and new entrants into the job market. Through the National Youth Commission, NaCSA and other Partners, we will establish and resource a National Youth Service Scheme to facilitate the acquisition of work experience and address the difficulty of transitioning from training to the job market.

Youth

34. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members of Parliament, I hereby pledge the greatest amount of attention of my second term to the youths of the country. Youths want jobs, they want training, and they want to continue to be creative, energetic and patriotic. Youth stood by me, campaigned with me and voted for me because they think I am the best person to deliver on their aspirations. I dedicate the Agenda for Prosperity to honouring the faith that youths have placed in me. My main job now is to provide jobs for the youths. We will emphasize the relevance and quality of training for youths and formulate a curriculum that will meet local market demands. In collaboration with the private sector, a standardized and relevant curriculum will be designed to reflect the market needs of the economy. We will inaugurate entrepreneurship training to enhance youth capacity to participate in the economy. We will collaborate with national players to design training programmes that are specifically tailored for local consumption, including mining companies facilitating the training of mining engineers and oil companies doing the same for petroleum engineers. This is why we will diversify the educational system to accommodate the new change. In addition, we will scale up on internship programmes introduced by NAYCOM to give youth desired experience in the private sector.

35. We will process and package public work schemes into a manageable proportion so as to enhance the participation of small businesses run by youth. Agriculture employs over 70% of the population. It therefore presents a formidable opportunity for youth empowerment. We will scale up and design youth specific programmes to increase youth participation in agriculture and we will emphasize diversity in value addition in agricultural products. We will initiate land reform that will increase access to land for young people. This will be complemented with modern

farming techniques. We will encourage chiefdom youth councils and district youth councils to engage in cooperative farms. We will initiate cottage industries in each district to be owned and operated by youth. This scheme will be made gender - sensitive and pivot on youth social networking. Most of Sierra Leone youth on their own volition have charted the way to progress. Making them an integral part of the decision making process will therefore be the key to empowering them for sustainable growth.

36. We will establish youth centres all over the country to serve as meeting places for youths, providing space for a variety of youth-friendly activities. The youth centres will also serve as forums for information sharing on training and employment opportunities.

Agriculture

37. Mr. Speaker, since 2007 our Government identified agriculture as a top development priority and increased investment in the sector from 1.6% in 2007 to almost 10% of GDP in 2011. The National Sustainable Agricultural Development Programme is Government's platform to make agriculture the 'engine' for socio-economic growth and development by promoting "farming as a business."

38. My government will act to phase out subsistence agriculture, provide cash reserves in order to help cope with food emergencies and natural disasters, stabilize grain prices during price hikes, and promote cash/export crop plantations in appropriate areas.

39. We will continue to attract private sector investment in large scale commercial agriculture. My government will act to introduce enhanced year-round cultivation of rice and vegetables through inland valley swamp development and irrigation. We will also provide expanded support for mechanization, expand the tractor purchase scheme and complement that with an effective hire scheme for poor farmers who cannot afford hire purchase.

40. My Government will promote the agricultural value chain. We will also motivate higher indigenous private sector investment in value addition, large scale agriculture and agromarketing. We will work hard to expand research institutions to cater for all the sub-sectors and specialized thematic issues of the agricultural sector of Sierra Leone.

41. We will put in place measures to ensure increased transfer of innovative skills and knowledge to farmers and help change farmers' attitudes and perceptions towards farming as a business by adopting new skills and strategies to increase economic returns. We will strive to expand farmer services especially research and extension delivery systems, continue promoting efficient and effective resource management both human and material in the sector and promote

capacity building in the Ministry of Agriculture, Districts, Chiefdoms/Wards, the ABC, farmers as well as civil society.

42. We will focus on building a comprehensive agricultural database and an early warning system for forecasting climatic conditions, pests and diseases, and food security situation in the country. We will establish more Village and Community Banks country-wide and rehabilitate and construct more feeder roads to link production areas to markets.

Strengthening Industry and Diversifying Trade

43. Following the adoption of the Local Content Policy earlier this year, we have demonstrated that we want to see a greater participation of indigenes in industrial activities. My government will also continue to act to transform the largely informal sector into formal operations. Government will strengthen the business climate for indigenous participation and encourage public-private partnerships with indigenes as a means of addressing the issues.

44. We will act to increase access to business financing by entrepreneurs. We will encourage banks to provide more favourable financing for businesses and entrepreneurs.

45. Countries are built by the strength of their Small and Medium Size Enterprises. SMEs are effective creators of employment, innovation and growth. This potential exists in our country. That is why we will establish a Commission for Small and Medium Size Enterprises to coordinate our policies and actions for the growth of Small and Medium-Size Enterprises. We will ensure better accommodation for small business operators. We will look into the option of creating business centres to accommodate small business operators. Establishing better market and business centres, especially in urban centres, will become a major focus.

Natural Resources

46. Mr. Speaker, God has blessed this country with immense natural resources. We have iron ore in our mountains, diamonds in our valleys, oil in our coasts, fertile soils everywhere, and our rivers and seas teem with unimaginable marine resources. This generation must claim these blessings; this generation must get the necessary training to make the resources beneficial to every citizen, this generation must move away from just talking about the resources and act productively to bring home the bounties of our natural endowment. The process has already started. There has never been as much interest in our natural resources as at this time, there has never been as much investments as at this time, there has never been as much possibilities of positive transformation as at this time. My second term will be dedicated towards enhancing the capacity of the Sierra Leonean to become the biggest drivers and beneficiaries of the transformation.

Optimizing returns from our Minerals

47. My Government will step up efforts to ensure optimum revenue inflows into the national treasury from mining operations, revenue that would be used for the benefit of all Sierra Leoneans. We will also continue to promote employment and skills training opportunities in the mining sector especially for the youth of the country. We will increase the campaign for transparency, public awareness and consultations in the design and granting of concessions and licenses. With significant increases in revenue, we will act towards creating a Transformation Fund to support economic infrastructure, agricultural productivity, human capacity development and social protection.

Marine Resources

48. In the next five years, my Government will continue to promote policies and programmes to ensure the use of increased revenue from the sector to promote pro-poor expenditure by earmarking some of the revenues for improved fishery management through enhancing monitoring, control and surveillance. We will also continue to raise productivity through investment in more productive fishing techniques, processing and promoting competition. Efforts will be directed towards combating illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing through a more stringent surveillance system. Artisanal fishermen will also be protected against the hazards of industrial fishing companies. Additionally, opportunities will be created for small-scale fishermen by encouraging them to form associations to negotiate better terms and benefits from a system of devolved rent. We will also scale up the provision of cold storage facilities at landing sites and during transport.

Tourism

49. My Government will embark on an aggressive advertising and positive imaging of the country. Efforts will also be made to promote supportive policy, regulatory framework and long-term planning for tourism. Local content in employment amongst tourist businesses will also be promoted. We will invest in both vocational training and the promotion of mentoring to build a critical mass of human capital in the industry. We will also support local spin-off businesses such as tour guiding, community campsites, craft markets and small and medium enterprises. We will invest in tourism infrastructure such as roads, communications and healthcare facilities that will make the industry more attractive and provide more benefits to the people. .

Water Resources

50. My Government will continue to tap the full potential of our surface and underground water resources with a view to contributing to increased national revenue and promoting the livelihoods of the people. We will invest in the improvement of potable water supply systems across the country. We will promote affordable water technologies to ensure that the poor benefit from improved access. We will promote greater investment in water for hydro-power and growth

to increase electricity supply. Additionally, steps would be taken to ensure responsible water management in order to sustain the range of economic services provided by water (irrigation, energy production etc.) as well as the livelihoods and well-being of the poorest populations. We will promote conservation and enhancement of “natural infrastructure” -aquifers, watersheds, lakes and wetlands - as a sound investment to complement and, in some cases, substitute for artificial storage.

Land

51. Mr. Speaker, we will develop a comprehensive national land use planning and mapping system based on agro-ecological and economic potentials and social requirements. We will also build capacity for land use and country planning for sustainable development in both urban and rural areas and discourage land grabbing and hoarding. We will set aside land for allocation to the development of social services especially in urban areas and especially for youth development and empowerment. We will also identify and map areas which are prone to natural calamities like floods, landslides and drought for national preparedness. We will ensure the sustainability of land for agricultural development programmes to contribute to national revenue and employment creation and develop specific agricultural land use plans for every district. We will work towards ensuring a more equitable, non-discriminatory and fairer land tenure system in the country.

Sustainable Environmental Management

52. My Government will continue with serious efforts to promote the realization of the Millennium Development Goal of ensuring environmental sustainability. We will work with all the municipalities to divide cities into several zones and quadrants and institute effective waste management systems. Our administration will use Garbage Disposals as a Revenue Source by encouraging the use of landfill sites to extract methane gas which will be used as another source of energy. This particular intervention will provide employment opportunities for the youth. We will provide necessary support to our forest rangers to actively patrol and protect our forests. We will collaborate with civil society groups, non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations, local television, local radio and print media to promote awareness raising programmes on the environment. We will enforce all statutes contained in the laws of Sierra Leone designed to protect the environment. We will also enhance early warning and response systems for disaster management.

53. My Government will continue to promote policies and programmes for the prudent management of our forest resources with stronger emphasis on production and protection. A ban will be placed on the export of round logs in favour of setting up processing facilities to add value before export and to also provide job opportunities for our youth.

Strengthening the Public Service

54. Reforming the Public Service was a key area of focus in the last five years. We initiated performance contracts with Ministers and these are also being cascaded to senior cadres of the public service, local councils, and the universities.

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

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

In spite of the reforms already undertaken, there are remaining challenges that will compel my Government to further address the situation through a step-wise modernization of the systems, processes and structures of service delivery to make them more effectively and efficiently responsive to the needs of our people.

57. In the next five years, we would ensure more efficient and higher quality of service delivery across MDAs and establish functioning and predictable administrative and management systems, structures and procedures across MDAs. To support inclusive growth and prosperity, we would focus on improved human resources management and discipline across MDAs; a progressive improvement in the female-male-youth ratio within the Public Service workforce; continue to improve the conditions of service and work environment for public servants; and continue to maintain the neutrality of the Civil Service. To help create jobs and achieve prosperity for all, there will be need to nurture a productivity mindset and improve professional standards within the public service. We will do this in collaboration with MDAs, HRMO and development partners.

58. We will act to ensure a wholesome transformation of the Education Sector; for without this transformation our people will benefit very little from the economic boom this country is witnessing. Our people need to be more entrepreneurial, more innovative, and with appropriate skills set to be integral players in the new economy. Our people need competencies in the new information technologies to be competitive and resilient. Our education policies will therefore be guided by this overarching vision: an appropriately educated, entrepreneurial and innovative citizenry, tolerant, productive and internationally competitive. I will establish a Special

Presidential Education Initiative for Entrepreneurship and Innovation through which I will personally leverage the wholesome transformation of the Education Sector. More than ever before, this is the time for rethinking the current system from pre-school through tertiary and taking the bold steps to refine it for more productive results.

59. The Tertiary Education Commission will be strengthened to better lead, coordinate and promote university, vocational and technical education and the relevance of higher education to the transformation of the country.

60. In the next five years, we will get more youth into vocational and technical institutions to give them appropriate skills for jobs in our growing economy. We will facilitate partnerships between these vocational centres and businesses in the mining, agricultural and tourism sectors to enhance job placements, appropriate skills acquisition, and the work ethic necessary for gainful employment.

61. We will review and re-orient the national curriculum with a view to providing skills appropriate for the diversified economy we are creating and to addressing issues relating to the environment, needs, rights and values. The training of teachers and workers will be diversified and strengthened. There will be zero-tolerance for underperformance, low standards and poor conduct in schools. We will ensure a realization of the potential for Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) in schools and colleges. My Government will encourage the formation of partnerships in educational management processes by involving teachers, parents and governors, as well as community-based organizations, local councils, civil society groups, faith-based organizations and the private sector.

Improving Health and Nutrition

62. Mr. Speaker, to achieve diversified and sustainable growth and prosperity, we will need a healthy population. We will therefore ensure increased access to health and nutrition services for everybody in terms of availability, utilization and timeliness of delivery. To that end, we will provide more and better functioning hospitals and clinics across the country and ensure better quality of medical and nutrition products and technologies in use within the sector. There will be particular emphasis on equity in health services in terms of meeting the needs of disadvantaged groups. We will continue to provide free health care for pregnant women, lactating mothers and children under five. We will look into the possibilities of expanding the free healthcare scheme

to include other social groups.

The high prevalence of teenage pregnancy is an emerging issue of national concern; one of the more pervasive problems affecting the health, social, economic and political progress, and empowerment of women and girls in Sierra Leone. We will work with our partners and engage all sectors of the population in a nationwide effort to tackle this problem.

63. We will encourage greater inclusiveness in terms of the involvement of well meaning partners in the delivery of health and nutrition services and ensure collaboration and coordination of programmes and partners for synergy. My Government will continue to implement the free healthcare programme and act robustly to increase its effectiveness and efficiency.

64. My Government will also continue with the on-going reform of the sector and strengthen the Ministry of Health and Sanitation to focus on the core functions of policy formulation and implementation. At the same time, we will continue to push ahead with the devolution of services to the 19 local councils in terms of shifting responsibilities and associated budgets to these Councils for managing the delivery of both primary and secondary health care services.

65. While efforts in improving interventions in health continue, comparable effort will be directed at achieving improvement in the nutritional status of the population. My Government thus commits itself to addressing the issue of malnutrition especially amongst women and children. We will strive to achieve an optimum number of well qualified and better motivated human resources serving the sector and put in place improved systems and structures for the delivery of better quality health and nutrition services in terms of safety, efficacy, value for money and integration.

Improve Water and Sanitation Services

66. My Government will ensure that there are effective and proactive management teams in place within the water and waste management agencies to oversee the effective and efficient delivery of clean drinking water to the general population. We will improve and expand the distribution system for pipe borne water in urban centres, enforce a robust water bill collection system with effective sanctions for defaulters, and put in place effective sanctions for unauthorized tampering of the water distribution system. We will also ensure proactive and effective monitoring and timely correction of wastage and faults. My Government will enhance our current efforts in the area of sensitization on proper hygiene and sanitation practices, and improve and expand the sewage network and disposal system. More resources will be dedicated to ensure that effective solid waste disposal systems are put in place within municipalities. We will encourage greater participation of the private sector in water and waste management. We will reintroduce the Sanitary Inspectors and review and modernize our sanitation laws.

Affordable Housing

67. My Government will increase access to housing especially for low income earners and the poor. We will ensure better planned settlements with basic services in both existing and emerging settlements through enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of the Ministry of Lands, Country Planning and the Environment. We will encourage banks and pension funds to invigorate the mortgage market to address the housing situation. We will continue to encourage private sector interventions in affordable housing.

Improving and Diversifying Transport, Communication and Information Services

68. As we aspire towards diversified economic growth and a more prosperous society, we commit ourselves to providing improved transport, communication and information services for our people. We will continue to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the public transport system, providing greater access to faster communication and information dissemination systems throughout the country, and putting more effective regulatory and monitoring systems in place. We will ensure greater safety and dignity of passengers as well as security of goods and services by conducting mass sensitisation on and enforcing adherence to air, sea and land transportation safety regulations.

69. We will conclude the undersea fibre cable project to provide high speed internet connectivity, expand the penetration of landline and mobile phone communication, and continue to increase the number of public buses for all major towns with appropriate bus stops along the way. We will continue to improve airport transfer by boosting investment in the sector, promote the development of a sub-regional airline. We will further enhance government's financial support to the Sierra Leone Postal Services to ensure the gradual reactivation of especially its parcel post functions.

Sports and Recreation for a Healthy Society

70. Engaging Youths in sporting activities would instill discipline and a level of tolerance that would enhance our peace and democracy. We will continue to work for the continuous improvement of the health and fitness of its citizens. We will provide support geared towards achieving higher degrees of sportsmanship, soundness of mind and tolerance among youth. Through the National Youth Commission, we will ensure more meaningful and gainful engagement of young people, which will enable them make a more meaningful contribution to the consolidation of peace and stability. We will use new and available information networks to sensitize the youth on tolerance, peace and reconciliation.

71. In the next five years, we commit ourselves to improving the levels of financing for sports and recreation. Through this, we will develop the necessary sporting facilities and opportunities in educational institutions. We will continue to strengthen the capacity of the Ministry of Youth

Employment and Sports, other sporting bodies and the National Youth Commission to provide the necessary support for effective youth participation in sporting and recreational activities. In the more inclusive society we envision, private sector participation is vital in all spheres. We will therefore encourage public/private partnership in financing sports and recreation.

Empowering the Vulnerable

72. Mr. Speaker, we will expand the social insurance coverage of NASSIT to cover informal sector operators including petty traders, artisans and bike riders. To that end, NASSIT is designing a scheme with benefits that will be particularly attractive to the informal sector.

73. We will take steps to improve and intensify public works schemes for off-farm workers and the urban / peri-urban unemployed. As such we will scale up Workfare Schemes by improving on systems of delivery, expanding coverage and increasing the duration of interventions and linking them up with the building of entrepreneurship skills and creation of productive assets. Strides will also be made to harness the potentials of the physically challenged. In this regard, we will implement the Disability Act 2011. We will also provide innovative training and re-training opportunities in areas including ICT, Creative Arts and entrepreneurship as well as introduce Affirmative Action for the recruitment of the physically challenged within MDAs and through discharge of Corporate Social Responsibility.

74. We will review and intensify supplementary feeding for lactating mothers and school children. Furthermore, steps will be taken to review and improve enforcement of the Free Primary Schooling Programme and pilot Subsidized Bussing for Pupils and Students in the Municipalities of Koidu, Kenema, Bo, Makeni and Freetown.

Enhancing National Integrity and Security

75. Mr. Speaker, peace, security and defence are the foundation stones for a nation to become a prosperous society. We will continue to strengthen our armed forces, the Police and other security sector institutions to protect us as we march towards a prosperous destination in the next five years.

76. My Government will sustain peace and stability. To that end we will continue the sensitization efforts on political tolerance and peaceful co-existence. We will also continue the propagation of the Attitudinal and Behavioural Change agenda because we believe it has great potential to help us transform our country as a whole, particularly in the way we interact and co-exist with each other.

77. My Government will improve conditions of service for the Security Forces and intensify their reform.

78. My Government will continue to rise to the challenges of both urban and rural combat against street crime and terrorism. We realize that Law Reform is critical to the judicial system and the observance of the Rule of Law. In that respect, the Law Reform Commission has recommended modernization of the laws of Sierra Leone in many areas and my Government

intends to act upon these within the next five years. We will continue to ensure that all Sierra Leoneans enjoy their fundamental and constitutional rights much more than they have done under previous administrations.

Sustaining the fight against Corruption

79. Combating corruption has been a major priority of my administration. We will enhance national budgetary allocation to boost the capacity of the Anti-Corruption Commission; build and maintain the Integrity of the Commission's officials; and effectively extend the fight to the non-public sectors. We will enhance coordination between such institutions and mechanisms for integrity as the Public Accounts Committee, the Audit Service and the Anti-Corruption Commission. We will also intensify the Attitudinal and Behavioural Change campaign targeted at addressing the widespread public ambivalence towards corruption through public education and awareness raising.

Consolidation of Democracy

80. Mr. Speaker, even though our democracy has become the envy of many nations, more needs to be done to consolidate our system of governance. Consequently my Government will continue to strengthen the institutions of democracy, creating awareness and acceptance of the basic principles that guide the proper functioning of a democratic process and ensure the continued independence of institutions that promote real democracy. We will ensure a review of the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone to ensure that it truly supports a true democracy thriving on a multi-party but inclusive system of government

81. We will continue to observe universal human values such as justice, human rights and human dignity, bring government closer to the people through innovative platforms, scale up the prominence of women in elective and appointive positions, deepen the decentralization process, nurture the culture of the separation of powers, encourage a regionally representative Government, an even spread of national development, and encourage collaboration with the Opposition, our Development Partners and civil society in resolving problems through dialogue.

82. We will ensure that the police uphold a democratic system based on the observance of human rights, facilitate access to justice to all without discrimination, and secure the rule of law based on the norms of accountability, transparency, equality, non-government interference and community participation.

82. While ensuring the continued autonomy and independence of the judiciary and improving on its efficiency and effectiveness especially in dispensing justice in a corrupt-free fashion, we will also be occupied with the modernization of law enforcement through a review or development of policies and laws that will favour the proper tackling of crime and lawlessness in the country.

Deepening Decentralization

84. Mr. Speaker, my Agenda for Prosperity will treat decentralization as an important strategic intervention for the promotion of inclusive and diversified growth, reducing poverty, building local economy and delivering effective services needed for improved wellbeing of the people and prosperity of the nation.

85. We will roll out the new decentralization policy and conclude the review of the necessary legislation especially the Local Government Act 2004. We will continue to facilitate timely, predictable and increased performance-based transfers to local councils. We will provide direct financial incentives for Local Councils to fully enhance local revenue potentials, and ensure that local revenue contributes meaningfully to local development. We will introduce legislation on local government finance and property taxation that clearly establish procedures for revenue collection and sharing between local and chiefdom councils and the administration of property rates, respectively. Local councils shall be empowered through legislation and policy frameworks to create conducive environments to maximize local economic development.

86. My Government will continue to promote transparency and accountability in local governance by making local councils directly accountable for their actions to their citizens and nationally while adhering to the best practices of open government.

87. We will continue to build local ownership and operational efficiency of the decentralization process through effective development planning and budgeting, financial management, monitoring and evaluation, and other managerial functions and to provide an effective link between national development priorities and local level development initiatives.

88. We shall reform the structure of municipal governance by the creation of new area councils within the City of Freetown, with appropriate functional assignments, and revenue assignment between the area councils and the greater Freetown City Council. Similarly, growing peri-urban towns exhibiting incoherent growth will be upgraded to town councils to prepare them for city status in the medium term. Consequently, all existing Local Council boundaries shall be reviewed and criteria will be set for the establishment of new Town Councils.

89. We will strengthen Local Councils to coordinate service delivery and development in their localities. Local Government Organizations, such as the Local Councils Association of Sierra Leone (LoCASL) shall be recognized and supported in their role of representing their members.

A Coordinating Committee for the Western Area shall be established to coordinate public service delivery, with the same mandate as the existing Provincial Coordinating Committees in the other Provinces.

Strengthening Chiefdom Governance

90. Mr. Speaker, my Government recognizes and upholds the principle that Chiefdom and Traditional Administration are important components in the governance and development of Sierra Leone. We will continue to maintain the relevance of the institution of Paramount Chieftaincy; ensure timely filling of chieftaincy and sub-chief vacancies in accordance with the provisions in the Chieftaincy Act; amend the Chieftaincy Act 2009 to ensure its consistency with the Chiefdom Governance and Tribal Administration Policy and the revised Local Government Act 2004 and other relevant legislation; and introduce the Chiefdom Finance Bill for enactment to address the fiscal challenges confronting chiefdom and tribal administration.

91. We will build the capacities of key functionaries of the Chiefdom Administrative Units to effectively perform their sacred functions of ensuring the people of Sierra Leone live in an environment of peace, stability and development, and one in which respect for customs and

tradition is maintained as the foundation for social harmony and peaceful co-existence. Further, we will improve the functional relationship between the Chiefdom and the Local Councils to build synergies and collective responsibility for the overall development of their localities.

92. We will restate customary laws and usages to inform the formal as well as the local court systems to assist the various actors and the courts in arriving at consistent conclusions to disputes and to generate more coherent understanding of the social context in which they are applicable. Proper sensitization will be undertaken so that people are properly informed and advised on the laws relating to their customs and traditions, and on matters affecting their access to justice.

Empowering Women

93. Deeply embedded socio-cultural practices have over the years skewed the development of women in Sierra Leone and tilted the gender equality scale to the detriment of the nation. In our Agenda for Change, we passed gender equity legislations, appointed women to higher positions more than any government, and ensured the provision of free healthcare to pregnant women, lactating mothers and children.

94. In our Agenda for Prosperity, we commit ourselves to the delivery of more initiatives with a view to further narrowing the gender inequality and hence facilitate growth. We will scale up all our interventions with a view to facilitating the participation of women in the economy and politics; we will enact legislation on the 30% quota for women in politics; we will encourage women to enter into sectors hitherto traditionally the exclusive reserve of men.

Foreign Relations

95. Mr. Speaker, my Government will continue the impressive strides in marketing the country as a destination for international business and investment. We will continue to maintain those relationships we have known, continue to strengthen the emerging ones and build new rewarding ones. My Government will continue making positive contributions to sub-regional, regional and international initiatives which seek to promote democracy and stability, and will always condemn coups and undemocratic ascent to power. We will seek to gain prominence and provide leadership where necessary within the various international bodies of which Sierra Leone is a member.

96. As we continue to conduct our international relations with emphasis on economic diplomacy and a focus on trade and investment promotion, the status of our diplomatic missions and the capacity of our Foreign Service personnel to deliver our foreign policy objectives will become critical. Additionally, a reassessment of our diplomatic representation shall be undertaken with a view to increasing representation where our strategic interests will be better served by such an increase and a reduction, closure or merger of missions for efficiency in the use of taxpayers monies where this becomes absolutely necessary. We are committed to nurturing a cadre of diplomats well-seasoned in the art of diplomacy and therefore more able to effectively implement our foreign policy objectives.

97. We shall continue to meet our international obligations in the fight against transnational organized crime including drugs trafficking, child trafficking, money laundering and terrorism; work with other member states to realize the goals of the United Nations, ECOWAS and the

MRU with emphasis on the community interest. We shall continue to participate in peacekeeping operations at sub-regional, regional and international levels in furtherance of our national interests and in meeting our international commitments. We shall become a force for peace as well as a force for reform through our efforts within the UN system and manifest renewed faith in the peaceful resolution of international conflicts.

98. We shall work towards the attainment of internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). We will ensure the human treatment of refugees at all times.

Conclusion

99. We remain relentless in maintaining a progressive and unified nation and we will continue to stress our similarities, not our differences. We will take development to every corner of this country because this is right and it is what this nation deserves. We have always believed in gender equality and continue to promote and protect the rights of every citizen irrespective of gender, ethnic group and region. We will harness the capacity of the youth and physically challenged. Everyone deserves attention and fair treatment; and everyone

has a role to play in the political and economic development of the country.

100. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members of Parliament, Ladies and Gentlemen, on November 17, Sierra Leoneans asserted their rights to choose their leaders. For the presidency they chose me, for members of parliament, they elected persons from the APC and SLPP, and for mayors, chairpersons and councils they again chose the APC and SLPP. They affirmed their faith in the ability of my party, the All People's Congress, to provide overall leadership for this country, to preside over the transformation and meet the hopes and aspirations of all of the people in the country. I vow to live up to this expectation. I also challenge MPs here present, from both the APC and SLPP, to live up to the faith placed in you by your constituents. I call upon you all, from both the APC and SLPP to be faithful to the aspirations of our people for good laws, fair representation, peace, development, and for dialogue with the holders of executive power. No MP succeeds without dialogue with the Executive, and I know my success as President depends on collaboration and dialogue with the esteemed representatives of the people. I am here today to inaugurate this dialogue, and to ask for your support for the actions I have been elected to take. Our two great political parties have been put together in this house by the people of this country so that we can work together as mandated by the constitutional and legal distinction of the roles of President and Parliament; Government and Opposition, Central Government and Local Council.

101. The two great parties are in parliament; the two great parties have been mandated to run local governments in the country. In essence the two great parties are in government. As leader of the Government, I hereby vow to respect this inclusion, as regulated by law and as mandated by the assertions of our people. The time for action has come; the time for working together is upon us. The bonds that unite us are stronger than the issues that divide us. We all have relatives, friends, schoolmates and good neighbours in the other political parties, or the other religion and

ethnic group. These deep ties are the sources of our unity, the mainstay of our nation; and a cause for thanksgiving.

102. Let us applaud the beauty of our country, and the friendliness of our people. Let us take pride in our achievements, but let also commit ourselves to building on these achievements. It is not enough for us to rest on these achievements; rather we must work harder on the challenges that we still face. We need to transform our great social friendships into greater political friendships; we need to utilize our religious tolerance to fashion greater political understanding; we need to utilize our ties of *daemia* and *komeneh* to transcend the ethnic divisions in our politics.

103. We need to utilize our heritage of great scholarship to truly commit ourselves to acquiring the skills and discipline required to pick up the blessings God has bestowed upon our country. We need to utilize the best in the traditions and achievements of SLPP and APC to deliver a destiny of peace, development and prosperity for our people. We cannot afford to lose time on bickering, on playing up our bitterness and anger when what is needed by our people is leadership, service delivery, and urgent actions for creating more jobs; more hospitals, more schools, electricity and roads.

104. My dear compatriots, I have an abiding faith in the desire of every Sierra Leonean to see our country progress. I believe that we all collectively aspire to improved agricultural productivity, increased electricity generation, and the completion of our road building programmes.

105. Progress on all these fronts is a national necessity. It is Sierra Leone that wins when we progress on creating jobs for the youths; it is Sierra Leone that wins when we promote gender equity; it is Sierra Leone that wins when we collectively bring home the fruits of the Agenda for Prosperity. I want Sierra Leone to win; and the time is now.

106. God Bless Sierra Leone.