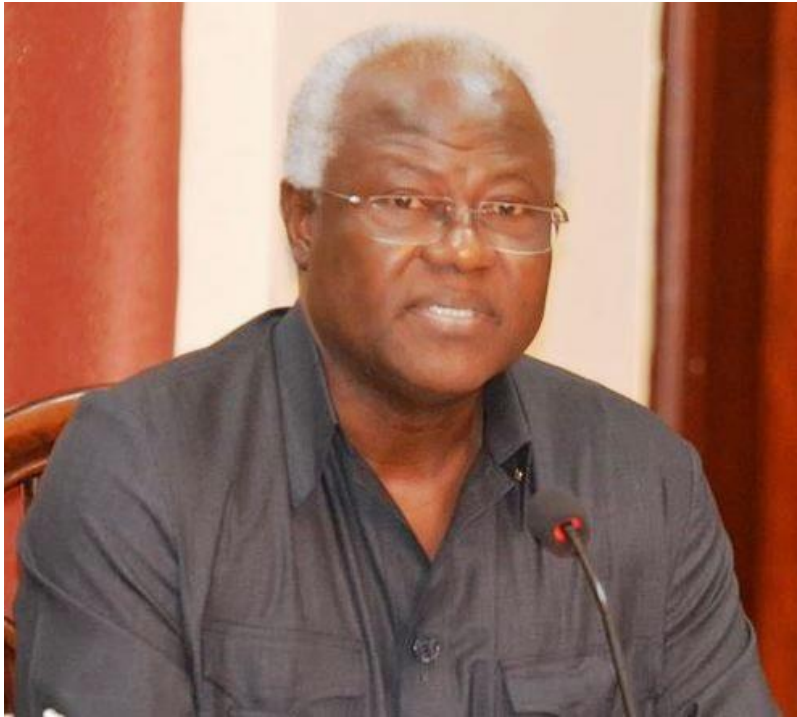


ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY DR ERNEST BAI KOROMA,



PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE TO PLENARY OF THE 40 CHANCES FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM, A JOINT PROGRAM OF THE HOWARD G. BUFFET FOUNDATION, MINISTER TONY BLAIR'S AFRICAN GOVERNANCE INITIATIVE AND THE WORLD FOOD PRIZE FOUNDATION. THE ROLE OF ENTERPRISING YOUTH IN SIERRA LEONE'S AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

EXCELLENCIES

I would have been here with you today in person, but I have stay put in my country to lead our fight against the deadly Ebola virus that is threatening the very survival of my nation.

Since the first cases of the disease in Sierra Leone in May, over 2900 of our people have been infected, of which there are over 570 survivors. Our people are dying, farmers are being felled by the disease in the food production and commercial crop centers of the land; the majority of victims of the disease are persons between ages 15 and twenty, the most active age category comprising all of our youths. A disease that strikes youths and farmers is a disease that destroys food production; it is a disease that weakens the present and starves the future. The Ebola disease is a disease against agricultural productivity; it is a disease against youth; it is a disease that compromises the role of Youths in Agriculture.

The founder of the World Food Prize, Dr. Norman Borlaug would definitely have supported the fight against Ebola. He was a man who loved food production; he was a man who loved youth. I distinctly remember looking through your website and coming across a simple question of how people have been inspired by Dr. Norman Borlaug. I immediately came to the consideration that in the 1940s while other scientists were attempting to split the atom to cause destruction, Dr.

Norman Borlaug was attempting to split the wheat to feed nations. That to me is as inspiring as I can confess because on balance, Dr. Borlaug's work and legacy still stand the test of time, it has raised millions out of poverty and food insecurity and in the process done more for humankind than those who split the atom. But more inspiring was his belief in Youths; a belief that enabled the creation of a worthy institution like the Global Youth Institute where each year hundreds of students participate in research, peer group learning and exchanging ideas with global leaders in the fields of science, industry and policy. In its attack on youths, agriculture and food security, Ebola is a grave threat to Dr. Borlaug vision in our part of the world; and a threat to that great vision anywhere is a threat to it everywhere.

I thank you very much for inviting me to give this keynote address on Enterprising Youths in the Development of Agriculture. I believe in the youths of my country, I believe in the youths of the world. When youths are on to great endeavors, not only the present, but also the future is secured. The fate of humankind is as good as the fate of its youths; the fate of agriculture is as good as the fate of youths in agriculture.

My country is a nation of young people; over three fourth of the population is below 40. Youths, defined in my country as those between ages 15 and 35 comprise about a third of the country's population. Without their participation, their health, and their positive role, our nation is doomed; there would be no present and no future. Agriculture is the occupation of the majority of our people; this is why this topic that speaks to the relationship between the majority of our people and our country's major occupation is so very important to us.

Youths can do it themselves, but their efforts at constructing lives would be better served by the scaffolds and safety nets of a national development vision, program of action and relevant institutions. In Sierra Leone this national program of action had been our Agenda of Change, which has now been transformed into our Agenda for Prosperity.

Before I took over office as President in 2007, there was hardly any government institution specifically dedicated to serving youth interests. But this has changed. We have created a separate ministry of Youths, a National Youth Commission and Youth Councils at chiefdom, districts, regional and national levels to ensure active youth participation in development programs. I have also appointed a Presidential Youth Aide in my office to integrate youth work into my daily activities at State House. We are presently concluding the framework for the creation of a National Youth Service that will help to nurture positive habits, patriotism, and facilitate career development that will help our youths to achieve their professional goals. With the dedication and support of young people during our implementation of the Agenda for Change, we are transforming our country's infrastructure and energy, enhanced agricultural productivity and improved our health and other human development indicators. Agriculture was the pre-eminent of the five sectors we emphasized during our implementation of the Agenda for Change. Our vision was to make Agriculture the engine for socio-economic growth and development through commercial agriculture and the promotion of the private sector and farmer-based organizations. We were able to establish over 200 Agricultural Business Centers, about 500 farmer based organizations, nearly 40 financial services organizations and a number of community banks. Our policies also brought in hundreds of millions of private sector investments in the sector employing thousands of youth. Our actions have ensured that the

primary production of major crops and other agricultural products have more than doubled the 2007 figures. The country now exports high grade quality cocoa and coffee, fetching high prices from the world market more than at any time in the nation's history. From 2007 to 2012 food production generally increased by between 34 and 40 percent compared to the previous five years and this trend has continued. Private sector participation in agriculture continues to expand. Alongside the support for smallholder commodity commercialization, support is being provided for medium and large scale farmers through hire purchase schemes which have made it possible for them to own tractors and medium-size rice mills.

Earlier this year we launched the Blue Print for Youth Development in the country as the guideline for deepening youth integration in our Agenda for Prosperity. With our youths we developed this document because we collectively want to face up to our challenges through pro-youth private sector development and youth friendly agencies and services; we want to ensure more skills training for the youth, more education, more employment, and more participation.

But there are still challenges; many youths are too unskilled to seize the growing job opportunities; a number of cultural and other practices are too restrictive for youths; and many people are refusing to acknowledge that the day of the youth is come upon us; that the youths can no longer wait in the side-lines, that the youths of today want to be in the premier league of national development.

But let the youths also know that a good development player must train hard, a talented development player must be disciplined; and must obey the rules of development. Development is teamwork; without the energy and skills of the youth, the team will be very weak; the team will not be able to score goals. And all those involved with youths in agriculture it is mainly about providing support to the youths to score development goals; it is about the role of youth serving agencies and other stakeholders in providing technical advice to the youths; it is about how to motivate youths who feel let down; it is about how to organize youths into a formidable team; it is about how to inspire these most energetic players in our team to bring more development trophies.

Let me at this moment emphasize a very important section of the youth population often neglected in youth agriculture programs, that is the female youth. Without the participation of female youths in our agriculture programs, we cannot truly talk of a national youth program. Female youths are very active where ever you go in the value chain. And in most of these sub sectors, they show greater commitment and dedication. I salute the female youths in agriculture. But there is no better way to appreciating the valuable contributions of female youths than working to address the great challenges they face. That is why I believe that development should also have a female face; that is why we must all ensure that our actions in agriculture are informed by the specific challenges faced by female youths.

Our current national development programme, the Agenda for Prosperity represents a vision for Sierra Leone to become an inclusive green middle income country status by 2035.. In this national vision, we mainstreamed youth affairs and gender concerns as cross cutting themes on Government's development agenda. We are also embedding our young people in strategic positions. From the Chairman of the National Revenue Authority to the Minister of Water

Resources, Youth Minister and Presidential Adviser on youth affairs, exuberant young people are in authoritative positions to determine and implement government policies.

Making young people responsible for their own destinies in a country's major occupation integrates their energies into the better aspirations of their nations. Youths are the best adapters and innovators, and our nations need innovations in agricultural practices to push ahead. Youths are the greater masters of the new ICTs, and Africa needs ICTs in transforming its agricultural extension, marketing and other value adding activities. Youths must be allowed to play these roles; and youths must take up this challenge of transforming agriculture and the continent through their better skills and greater knack for innovations.

Of course, this is not about writing off the tried and tested. In my country, we are grateful to Prof. Monty Jones, our own indigenous World Food Prize Laureate for spearheading a project on Agriculture Fisheries and Agri-based Industries. His office has managed to sequester involvement from across six Ministries who are now ceding oversight and coordination to a central coordinating Unit at State House for direct executive sanction and greater priority on improving and lifting millions out of food and nutrition poverty in Sierra Leone.

In Africa and other parts of the World, we would continue to tap on the knowledge and expertise and genius of World Food Prize laureates, implementing their successful agricultural landmarks and enabling the research experience of agricultural expertise to work within our scope for enhanced development. I have made for myself a commitment to this legacy of Dr. Norman E Borlaug; we must utilize the wisdom of the tried and tested, but only the youths, our most energetic age group can carry us through. Youths are the sinews of our efforts, the sustainers of our better aspirations.

But today, as I speak, these champions of our endeavors and everybody in our nation face a grave threat from a virus of death and destruction. The deadly Ebola virus is infecting more youths than any other age category in our region, our gains are being reversed; the economy is slowing down, nurses, the overwhelming majority of whom are youths are dying, food production is going down; widespread starvation may result and shut out Dr. Borlaug's vision for the youths and people of Sierra Leone and the general Mano River Basin

But I believe with the support of the devotees to the ideals of the World Food Prize, we shall overcome. We will defeat Ebola and its deadly ramifications. I strongly hold this belief because the energy for life is stronger in a young country than the hold of Ebola; with your support, the strength of our youth will defeat the virulence of the virus.

I thank you for your attention.