

ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY DR ERNEST BAI KOROMA PRESIDENT OF THE  
REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE AT THE EU EBOLA RECOVERY CONFERENCE,  
BRUSSELS 3 MARCH 2015

## **PROTOCOLS**

I come with greetings from a country and a region at the forefront of a war waged by the Ebola virus against all humanity.

We never saw this war coming; we were never prepared for it. We were implementing policies that were making our country one of the fastest growing economies in the world. The economy grew by 14 percent in 2013 and was projected by the IMF to grow by 11.3 percent in 2014. But the outbreak is moving our economy towards recession this year. Private sector job losses are now set at 50%, 33% of loans are non-performing and five new private sector investment ventures worth an estimated US\$1.2 billion have been suspended. Agricultural output has declined by 30% and 280,000 made food insecure. 1,760,000 children have not attended schools for the last six months. Over 8,320 people have been infected by the virus and over 3,100 lives lost including over 440 children. We have over 8000 orphans and we have also lost thousands more to non-Ebola diseases which incidences we had been reducing before Ebola struck. However, with support from our partners, including the UK and the EU, we are turning the tide against the virus.

Although the topic of this panel is post-Ebola Recovery, I must remind everyone that we are still in a battle to get to zero cases. There are no half victories against Ebola; there is only total victory, and until we get to zero cases, we cannot declare victory, fold up and leave the battlefields.

There can be no recovery before zero.

There can be no rest before zero.

We intend to redouble our efforts to achieve this in the Mano River Union by April 16. But we cannot do this alone. We need our international partners to continue to stand by us in this fight until the job is done.

But even when we get to zero, we can only ensure a resilient recovery when we start to respond to the many ways this disease has made the country vulnerable. This means we must deliver better social services more effectively than we have before, and we must do so urgently.

In line with this we are drawing up a NEW SOCIAL SERVICES DELIVERY PACT to ensure resilient recovery.

My four priorities of our New Social Services Delivery Pact are: Restoring health Services; getting kids to school; protecting the vulnerable; and sustaining the recovery through expanding government's fiscal space and enabling the private sector.

One: We will restore health services. Our topmost priority in the health sector is the creation of a resilient standing army against these types of viral outbreaks, so that wherever and whenever it rears its head, we can shoot it down before it kills our people. In line with this, we are proposing the transitioning of the Ebola Response Capacities into Centers for Disease Control in the three most affected countries. These centers will build upon pre-existing capacities and the newer

assets and personnel deployed to fight Ebola to create core capabilities and an army of reserve workers with surge capabilities. Other priorities in the health sector include Primary Healthcare Units, promoting maternal and child health, control of infectious diseases and the establishment and gradual expansion of a health insurance scheme as a means of sustaining universal access to healthcare.

Two: We will get kids back into schools. We will reopen schools for 1,760,000 children beginning March 30, when we are confident that Ebola is contained and 100% of our cases are identified from contact lists. We need to ensure catch up of time lost due to school closures, promote better health habits through provision of schools with water and sanitation facilities; and equip teachers and pupils with the necessary skill sets that are prerequisites for preventing diseases and fighting against future outbreaks. We will also integrate social protection measures into our plans for education, including school feeding, free tuition for all students this year, establishment of a school feeding program and special programs for girls, all geared towards getting the majority of kids whose families have been ravaged by the disease to attend school.

Three: We will protect the vulnerable. We will identify and target assistance to the most vulnerable and affected individuals such as Ebola survivors, orphans, widows, and widowers and establish interim care centres and homes.

Four: We must ensure sustainability of the New Social Services Delivery Pact through expanding government's fiscal space and enabling the Private Sector. This includes closing our fiscal gap through budgetary support, debt forgiveness, and newer concessionary loans and grants from our international partners; restoring livelihoods of farmers, who constitute the majority of our people, through provision of starter kits - farm inputs and prioritising women and youth; and support for the revamping of the private sector through the re-capitalization of Community Banks and Financial Service Associations to support SMEs in rural areas; provision of capital to the newly established SME Fund; and IFIs provision of trade finance and other risk guarantee to facilitate investment.

Leadership is the foundation on which these priorities sit.

For my part, I am strengthening our systems and getting leaders within Government behind an early recovery drive to deliver Sierra Leone's priorities over the next few months. While we push forward with the fight to zero cases under the leadership of our National Ebola Response Centre, a new team under my direct control will coordinate and oversee the complex tasks of our transition away from the Ebola response and into early recovery.

Transparency and accountability will be critical to the success of these proposals. In Sierra Leone, in line with my pronouncements at the very commencement of our fight against the virus, our accountability watchdog agencies – the Audit Services, Parliament and the ACC have commenced actions on ensuring this. We ask donors to improve their transparency also by publishing what they fund according to the International Aid Transparency Agreement. This will make us more effective and allow donors and our citizens to hold us to account.

We also advocate for a coordinated regional approach but for country specific implementation and for traditional partners to pool resources into a regional basket fund to be disaggregated equally amongst the three countries with little bureaucracy and administrative costs. We urge

partners to use country systems in providing support to promote aid effectiveness and the strengthening of institutions.

In closing, let me, on behalf of the people and government of Sierra Leone and our sister republics, and in my own name, register our sincere gratitude for the support of the EU in our battles against this new threat to our collective existence.

I'm very pleased to hand over to my Minister of Finance who will now outline for you our priorities for immediate recovery in more detail.