



PARLIAMENT OF SIERRA LEONE

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6th August, 2024

PRESS RELEASE



PRESIDENT BIO OPENS THE SECOND SESSION OF THE SIXTH PARLIAMENT

The President of the Republic of Sierra Leone, Brigadier Retired Dr. Julius Maada Bio on Tuesday 06/08/2024 formally announced the commencement of the Second Session of the Sixth Parliament of the Second Republic of Sierra Leone.

The Clerk of Parliament, Hon. Paran Umar Tarawally cited Constitutional Instrument No. 9 of 2024 published on 2nd August 2024 that by the powers vested in the President to open Parliament. The Hon. Clerk also stated that, it is enshrined in the Constitution of Sierra Leone Act No. 6 of 1991 that the Second Session of the Sixth Parliament of the Second Republic of Sierra Leone shall commence under such mandate.

Commencement of the Second Session, the Hon. Clerk stated the proclamation of 2024.

"In exercise of the Powers conferred upon him by subsection 1 of Section 84 of the Constitution of Sierra Leone", the Clerk of Parliament said the President hereby makes the following Proclamation.

"Now therefore I Brigadier Retired Julius Maada Bio, President of the Republic of Sierra Leone, Supreme Head of State, Grand Commander of the Order of the Republic, Commander-in-Chief of the

Armed Forces, Fountain Head of Unity, Honour, Freedom and Justice, do hereby proclaim the Second Session of the Sixth Parliament of the Second Republic of Sierra Leone", he stated.

During the State Opening of Parliament, President Bio explained his Government achievements and future plans for the development of Sierra Leone.

Read President Bio's full speech below:

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

DELIVERED BY

HIS EXCELLENCY

DR. JULIUS MAADA BIO G.C.R.S.L. 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 Second Session of the Sixth Parliament of the Second Republic of Sierra Leone In the Chamber of Parliament Building

TOWER HILL, FREETOWN ON

Tuesday, 6th August, 2024 at

10:00 a.m.

HONOURABLE VICE PRESIDENT,

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE SPEAKER OF PARLIAMENT,

THE HONOURABLE CHIEF JUSTICE,

MADAM FIRST LADY,

FORMER VICE PRESIDENTS,

FORMER HONOURABLE SPEAKER OF THE ECOWAS PARLIAMENT,

MEMBERS OF THE JUDICIARY,

MINISTERS OF GOVERNMENT,

HONOURABLE MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT,

OUR REVERED TRADITIONAL AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEADERS,

MEMBERS OF THE DIPLOMATIC AND CONSULAR CORPS,

MEMBERS OF THE SECURITY, PUBLIC SAFETY, AND INTELLIGENCE SERVICES,

MEMBERS OF THE FOURTH ESTATE,

DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

FELLOW SIERRA LEONEANS,

A BLESSED MORNING TO YOU ALL.

I. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members of Parliament,

Today, as we inaugurate the Second Session of the Sixth Parliament of the Republic of Sierra Leone, we stand united in pride and honour. This is not just a ceremonial event but a significant milestone in our nation's democratic journey.

2. This fully constituted Parliament is a living embodiment of our nation's diversity and unity. Each seat in this esteemed chamber represents the voices, dreams, and aspirations of our people, making it a true reflection of our democratic values.

3. Governance and politics, though intertwined, serve different purposes. Politics is the pathway to governance; it is the spirited dance of democracy. Yet, once the elections are behind us, we must

embrace governance with a singular focus. If we allow politics to overshadow governance, we fail not only as politicians but also as custodians of our nation's future.

Our citizens have entrusted us with their hopes and dreams, looking to us to transform political promises into tangible realities.

5. I am heartened by our collective decision to engage in meaningful dialogue despite our differences. This gathering exemplifies the power of redemptive goodwill and our shared commitment to the peace, prosperity, and stability of our beloved Sierra Leone.

6. I am particularly pleased that the historic Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act I signed into law last year has realised our national aspiration for women to be significantly represented in Parliament and to participate fully in the legislative process. This achievement marks a significant milestone in our journey towards an inclusive and equitable society.

7. I commend the leadership of Parliament, the leaders of Political Parties, and the representatives of Paramount Chiefs for their dedication to conducting the affairs of this legislature with mutual respect and a shared vision. Together, we can work towards a brighter, more peaceful, and prosperous future for Sierra Leone.

8. I extend my heartfelt thanks to the African Union, ECOWAS, and the ambassadors of the United Kingdom, the United Kingdom, and the European Union, whose unwavering support of our locally-led dialogue has been instrumental in our journey towards peace and stability.

9. The Cross-Party Committee on Electoral Systems and Management Bodies Review Report will strengthen our efforts to build a more just, inclusive, and equitable democracy. I urge all parties to approach this task with sincerity, commitment, and urgency.

10. I am profoundly grateful to the Independent Commission for Peace and National Cohesion, the Political Parties Regulation Commission, the National Commission for Democracy, the Inter-Religious Council, the leadership of the two major Political Parties, and key national stakeholders. Your dedication to peaceful and constructive engagement has helped ease political tensions and advance our shared national interests. Making peace can be challenging, but enjoying its dividends is deeply rewarding.

11. I thank every citizen of this great nation who has remained committed to peace despite attempts by a few to incite violence and fear. What would we be as leaders and politicians without the citizens to serve? post-conflict words of Nelson Mandela, "Great anger and violence can never build a nation."

12. As politicians, we must emulate the courage of our people who have resisted division. We must rise above those who spread incivility, disinformation, hate, fear, and division.

13. Turning to one another with empathy, compassion, and respect for our diversity is the only way to maintain our place among the top ten most peaceful countries in Africa and as a global leader in religious tolerance. This is the only way to nurture our democracy.

14. Alongside a cooperative citizenry, we owe our peace, security, and stability to the tireless dedication, vigilance, and heroism of our security and intelligence services. They have confronted and foiled violent insurrections, coups, and numerous threats designed to destabilise our nation. We will never forget the sacrifices of those who have paid the ultimate price to protect our democracy.

15.Their firm dedication to defending our democracy and ensuring the safety of every Sierra Leonean is truly commendable. Our national security architecture is better coordinated, and early warning and response mechanisms are now more proactive and robust.

II. THE MEDIUM-TERM NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2024-2030

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members,

16.No Government can succeed without concrete and implementable medium and long-term goals meticulously designed to address the unique needs of its people and reflect the realities of its time.

17.Even the best-laid plans can encounter obstacles, but without such foresight, a nation remains vulnerable to the unpredictable challenges of our globalised world.

18.For a relatively small country like ours, it is imperative to possess a clear vision that shields us from the shifting winds of circumstance. This underscores the importance of Sierra Leone's Medium Term National Development Plan 2024-2030, a cornerstone of our socio-economic development strategy.

19.Launched on January 30th this year, the Plan transcends local aspirations and aligns seamlessly with global ambitions for a more developed and equitable world. It serves as a comprehensive blueprint for transformative acceleration in critical areas such as food security, human capital development, and job creation. It guides our journey towards sustainable development and the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. Furthermore, it harmonises with the African Union's Agenda 2063

20.Our commitment to this Plan is reflected in the earnest efforts we have already undertaken. As I share our key achievements over the past year, I invite you to view them not merely as statistics but as milestones in our journey towards a future where our citizens live more dignified lives and Sierra Leone stands proud and resilient on the global stage.

21.Let our National Development Plan and its implementation be a testament to our collective ambition and a guiding light for the prosperous nation we are building together.

22.Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, as I outline some notable achievements of my Government's National Development Plan, a more comprehensive report has been laid to this House for your consideration.

III.AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SECURITY

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members,

23.Agriculture and Food security are the cornerstones of a nation's stability and prosperity. They transcend mere sustenance and form a crucial pillar of national resilience, economic growth, and social well-being.

24.Without the ability to feed our people, we risk sitting atop a volatile precipice poised for unrest and turmoil. The adage "a hungry man is an angry man" holds profound truth, highlighting the direct link between food scarcity and national security.

25.In my address to this esteemed House last year, I emphasised that prioritising investments in agriculture can mitigate food price volatility, enhance our resilience to external shocks, and advance our journey towards food self-sufficiency.

26. Increasing investment in the agriculture sector has the power to create jobs, reduce dependency on essential food imports, boost export earnings from cash crops, and catalyse sustainable economic growth. This investment is a safeguard for national security and a vision for a prosperous future.
27. As we prioritise "FEED SALONE" in our new Medium-Term National Development Plan, our vision for a robust food production system is private sector-led, transforming every aspect of our agricultural value chains.
28. My Government has focused on addressing key constraints such as finance, soil fertility, water management, mechanisation, quality seed input, infrastructure, and the deployment of technology and research to boost agricultural productivity.
29. Since the launch of the FEED SALONE Programme in October last year, we have made the following strides in collaboration with International Partners and Non-Governmental Organisations:
- I. Expansion of Rice Production: We have expanded rice production areas to include inland valley swamps, irrigated fields, and mechanised services to expedite land preparation.
 - II. Mechanisation of the Value Chain: We increased mechanisation by providing tractors, harvesters, rice mills, and three landing craft for riverine areas.
 - III. Research and Quality Inputs: Utilising research to deliver high-quality inputs for optimal yields in key value chains, including rice, cocoa, and onions.
 - IV. Revival of Cooperatives: We have reintroduced the cooperative system to support rice farming and cocoa production and marketing.
 - V. Development of Agribusinesses: We supported the establishment of the first cocoa processing factory, a sardine factory using local ingredients, a cashew processing factory, and a large-scale egg production and poultry hatchery.
 - VI. Establishment of Agro-Industrial Hubs: We have created hubs in key rice production areas, rehabilitated markets, replaced hand-drawn ferries with bridges and constructed a dyke and 35 kilometres of feeder roads.
 - VII. Support to Armed Forces Agriculture: We enhanced the Armed Forces Agricultural Unit with machinery and high-quality inputs to scale up rice production.
 - VIII. Financial Instruments for Agriculture: We tailored financial solutions such as Community Banks, a US\$10 Million Agriculture Credit Facility at a 10% interest rate, and a pioneering crop insurance scheme worth NLe28 Million.
 - IX. Ag-Tech and Climate-Smart Agriculture: We introduced technology to support agricultural research, established an early warning system for food security, a soil digital information system, and a national farmers registry linked to national identity numbers.
 - X. Empowerment of Women and Youth: We expanded the participation of women and youth in agriculture, particularly in post-production rice processing.
 - XI. Improved Farmer Earnings: We launched a pilot Out-Grower Scheme in Kambia District to increase the production, processing, marketing, and distribution of locally produced parboiled rice at affordable prices.
30. Our Government has partnered with international coalitions to enhance agricultural strategies, create an enabling environment for private sector participation, and strengthen inclusive food systems and institutions.
31. Sierra Leone currently co-chairs the Alliance of Champions for Food Systems Transformation and is a signatory to the Republic of Korea's K-Rice Belt project, supporting select African countries in achieving rice self-sufficiency.

IV.HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT: EDUCATION AND SKILLS TRAINING

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members,

32.Beyond feeding our population, we must enrich their lives and equip them to achieve their fullest potential.

33.Human Capital Development is a profound commitment to our people's well-being and future. It is the cornerstone of a nation's resilience, fostering inclusive, transformative, and sustained growth. By investing in education, healthcare and nutrition, we lay the foundation for a prosperous and equitable Sierra Leone.

34.Over the past six years, my Government has significantly increased funding for basic education, technical and vocational training, and higher education. Our achievements in education financing, legislative reviews, governance reforms, inclusive tuition-free access, student retention initiatives, gender parity, STEM education, teacher training, and student learning outcomes have garnered international acclaim from our Development Partners and the United Nations Secretary-General.

35.We have expanded nationwide facilities for tertiary, technical and vocational education, reskilling, and entrepreneurship training, particularly for youth and women, strengthening our middle workforce development.

36.Investment in education and skills training catalyses inclusive and sustainable economic growth, fostering innovation, entrepreneurship, and a competitive, productive workforce.

37.This attracts new capital, ventures, and foreign direct investments. My Government will continue to collaborate with existing partners and seek new cooperation frameworks for education and skills training.

38.Measures to this end will be presented to this House in due course

V. HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT: HEALTHCARE

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members,

39.Our commitment to affordable and quality healthcare aligns with the global call for Universal Health Coverage. Building on the successes of the past five years, we have leveraged health financing through partnerships with the World Bank, Global Fund, and FCDO, among others, implementing schemes to reduce patient out-of-pocket costs.

40.We have recruited 5,000 healthcare workers, increased the number of doctors to over 600, and invested in capacity building to improve healthcare efficiency.

41.Training on new procedures, deploying new technologies to support disease detection, diagnosis, and patient management and ensuring the delivery of essential medicines and supplies to reach the last mile users have enhanced our national health system.

42.The Public-Private Cost Recovery Pilot Scheme and mobile medical services through Hospitals-On- Wheels have further reduced healthcare costs for patients.

43.Our partnership with Mercy Ships has provided 5,000 free surgeries to Sierra Leoneans, and other public-private projects are ongoing.

44. Healthcare infrastructure investments have increased significantly through collaboration with partners, including JICA, Partners in Health (PIH), and the UAE Government. We are rehabilitating 16 Government Hospitals and have completed a new hospital in Jojoima, a 110-bed field hospital in Port Loko, and the 142-bed Julius Maada Bio Pediatric Centre of Excellence in Lumley, Freetown.

45. Additional projects include constructing the Waterloo Hospital, the 166-bed Hospital Centre of Excellence in Kono, a new midwifery school in Kenema, therapeutic oxygen plants, regional laboratory facilities, the rehabilitation of the obstetric fistula operating theatre in Bo, and installing solar electrification at 6 Hospitals and 200 Peripheral Health Units (PHUs).

46. Our healthcare initiatives have led to significant improvements in child and maternal health. Sierra Leone has met the 80% global standard for Special Care Baby Units in every district, with survival rates at these facilities at 87%. Special Care Baby Units will soon be extended to the remaining two districts, Karene and Falaba. New programmes focused on reducing child mortality and maternal mortality rates have been established.

47. Introducing the first WHO-approved malaria vaccine (1.7 million doses are available until 2025) and routine HPV vaccinations for girls aged ten have strengthened our health outcomes

48. More Sierra Leoneans are receiving anti-retroviral treatment, and the Government's multi-sectoral response to HIV-AIDS has improved.

49. Our handling of the COVID-19 pandemic received high commendation. To build on this, we have established the National Public Health Agency to coordinate global and regional partnerships and lead prevention, responsiveness, surveillance, diagnostics, and vaccines for epidemics.

50. We are committed to broadening access to clean water and sanitation facilities through ongoing urban and rural water supply projects. Efforts to protect water catchment areas and promote waste management have prevented major disease outbreaks.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members,

51. I extend my gratitude to Parliament for enacting key legislative changes, including the Allied Health Professions Act and the Tobacco and Nicotine Control Act and transforming the Nurses and Midwives Board into a Council.

52. These measures advance our Government's healthcare initiatives. Further Bills will be presented to this House to continue our work in improving the health and well-being of Sierra Leoneans

VI. JOB CREATION AND RURAL LIVELIHOODS Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members,

53. Job creation is crucial for a thriving economy. Our "Youth Employment Scheme" focuses on protecting, supporting and creating jobs across the country for our growing and youthful workforce.

54. We are committed to a cohesive approach, investing in education and skills training, developing inland valley swamps, digital jobs, and technical skills to integrate youth into public sector agencies.

55. Sectoral policies, developed with the active involvement of young people, will map out job quality and quantity.

56. In addition, my Government has helped resolve over 70% of industrial disputes, including the payment of severance benefits, collective bargaining agreements, and union disputes.

57. We have reinforced these actions by enacting and proposing new legislation, including the Employment Act 2023 and the Work Permit Act 2023. Upcoming bills such as the Industrial Relations

and Trade Union Bill, the Workers Compensation Bill, the Social Protection Bill, and the Occupational Health and Safety Bill will further support workplace equity and safety, affirming the right to decent work and pay.

58.The Sierra Leone Local Content Agency fosters market and job linkages through supplier-market development programmes, tailored TVET schemes, dedicated Made-in-Sierra Leone shelves in retail outlets, and bookkeeping and entrepreneurship skills training.

59.Eighteen cocoa, coffee, and cashew block farms have been established, increasing productivity, entrepreneurship, sustainable livelihoods and creating thousands of jobs in the informal economy and rural communities.

RURAL LIVELIHOOD

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members,

60.Rural development is crucial for our nation's growth and stability. A significant portion of our farming and food production occurs in rural communities.

61.Rural does not have to mean poor; by developing our rural areas, we can alleviate the burden on cities and ensure even growth across the country.

62.We have invested in rural roads, bridges, markets, and social infrastructure across five regions to create safe farm-to-market channels, facilitate farm input delivery, and ensure quicker access to medical and essential services.

63.My Government will continue introducing measures, policies, and agreements to boost rural economic activity, support livelihoods, and enhance the quality of life for all Sierra Leoneans.

VII. INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT AND TECHNOLOGY

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members,

64.My Government views infrastructure investments as essential public goods catalysing inclusive, sustainable, and resilient economic growth.

ENERGY INFRASTRUCTURE

65.Accessible, reliable, and affordable energy is critical for economic development. Recognising this, we have reformed the energy sector and expanded the country's electricity infrastructure.

66.With Parliament's approval, we launched agreements for nationwide generation projects integrating renewable and thermal energy sources, tripling our generation capacity.

67.We have strung over 500 kilometers of transmission lines, rehabilitated the distribution network in the Western Area, Bo and Kenema, and added new towns to the CLSG/WAPP Transmission Network.

68.Solar mini-grids in 45 towns now serve nearly 10,000 households, and 200 health facilities and libraries are powered by off-grid solar systems.

69.The feasibility studies for the northern and southern transmission corridors are complete, and further measures will be presented to this House.

ROAD INFRASTRUCTURE

70.Road infrastructure connects economic centres and promotes service delivery to underserved areas, accelerating growth and development.

71.Projects like the Manowa, Mattru Jong, and Gendema bridges are ongoing, with new projects such as Sumbuya, Moselelo, Kabba Ferry, and Batkanu set to commence soon.

72.The resurfacing of urban roads in major regional centres and the operational clusters of the Integrated Resilient Urban Mobility Project, including the Waka Fine buses, pedestrian bridges, median barriers, and street lighting, enhance connectivity. Traffic signals have been reintroduced at key intersections in Freetown.

73.Road safety improvements include secure digitised number plates, Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) vehicle licenses, digital record and fitness cards, and biometric driver's licenses. The Sierra Leone Road Safety Authority (SLRSA) has decentralised services with new electronic connectivity to outstations and reactivated the emergency toll-free 244 call centre.

PUBLIC BUILDING INFRASTRUCTURE

74.Public building infrastructure projects are ongoing, including the new Audit Services Sierra Leone building and its regional offices, and the Military Parade Ground at Wilberforce. The RSLAF Engineering Unit has registered a public liability company, leveraging military engineers' expertise for commercial and civil ventures.

PORT INFRASTRUCTURE

75.I thank this Honourable House for repealing and replacing the old Ports Act (1964) with the modern Sierra Leone Ports and Harbours Authority Act (2023). Our port has passed the International Ship and Port Security Code and rigorous International Maritime Organisation's (IMO) audits, earning recognition from the Ports Management Association for West and Central Africa as the most improved port in terms of ease of doing business, cargo productivity and turnaround time for two consecutive years.

76.The Sierra Leone Maritime Agency has reviewed inspection audits and standards and undertaken capacity building with the Regional Maritime University.

AIRPORT INFRASTRUCTURE

77.Our new international airport scored an unprecedented 72% in an International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) audit.

78.I thank the House for ratifying Bilateral Air Service Agreements (BASA) with several countries, enhancing air travel options.

79.Ethiopia Airlines has started scheduled flights to Freetown International Airport, and further aviation sector measures will be presented to this House.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE

80.Telecommunications investments have improved last-mile fibre connectivity, expanded networks, increased telephone users, and narrowed the digital divide.

81. These efforts have enhanced digital literacy and skills development, particularly for women and girls, and extended digital financial services to rural and unbanked populations, improving financial inclusion and overall economic development.

82. The National Telecommunications Agency is working with mobile operators to extend and improve voice and data services, boosting economic activities and public service delivery.

83. To enhance cybersecurity resilience, we have conducted capacity audits and training for high court judges, prosecutors, and law enforcement officers.

84. As we work with sub-regional bodies to establish a fully functional national cybersecurity incident response team, I thank Parliament for ratifying the Budapest Convention.

85. Sierra Leone recently hosted the Innovates Tech Summit, which saw 4,000 delegates explore technology's role in development.

86. The Digital Transformation Project aims to expand broadband internet, upgrade national telecommunications infrastructure, improve resilience and digital skills, and enhance the Government's capacity to deliver digital public services.

87. Starlink, the world's first and largest satellite constellation using low Earth orbit to deliver broadband internet, is now available in Sierra Leone, making it the 9th African country to offer this service.

88. We seek to land a second submarine fibre cable and operationalise the Sierra Leone Internet Exchange to improve connectivity and digital interactions within our borders. Further measures and regulations will support our progress in the telecommunications and digital sector.

VIII. PUBLIC SERVICE ARCHITECTURE REFORMS

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members,

89. Effective public service architecture is essential for delivering the dividends of democracy and ensuring seamless public service delivery. It strengthens governance, enhances public performance tracking, and ensures accountability and transparency at all levels.

90. This principle is central to our new Medium- Term National Development Plan. My Government will implement the following initiatives, supported by forthcoming measures:

- (i) Annual public sector reform dialogues,
- (ii) Reviews of outdated policies and laws,
- (iii) Human resource audits for all public service employees,
- (iv) Development of a performance management policy,
- (v) Publication of annual state of public sector reports,
- (vi) Institutional capacity needs assessments, (vii) Effective coordination and monitoring, and (viii) Rationalisation and harmonisation of public sector mandates and structures.

91. The Wages and Compensation Commission is operational. Civil service reforms include reviewing the Civil Service Code, Regulations and Rules and developing a Competency Framework to guide recruitment, professionalism, and performance management.

92.To ensure fairness and transparency, promotions in the civil service are now based on a merit-based individual performance appraisal system. Regular audit verification and reconciliation maintain the accuracy and integrity of the public sector payroll.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members,

93.Moving on from key achievements of our Big Five Game Changers, I will now brief the House on significant crosscutting areas, starting with the economy.

IX.BUILDING A RESILIENT AND DIVERSIFIED ECONOMY

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members,

94.Our prudent economic policies and public financial management reforms over the past year have stabilised the economy and ensured sustainable recovery from multiple shocks.

95.Our economy is now larger than in 2018, and we are on track for a 4.0 percent growth rate in 2024, driven by increased productivity in agriculture, mining, local manufacturing, and services.

96.Economic diversification is integral to our sustainable development strategy. Through import substitution and light manufacturing, we have increased agriculture and fisheries' contributions to GDP from 3% to 14%, creating more jobs.

97.Sierra Leone is now a net exporter of vegetable oil to the ECOWAS market and produces a variety of local products, including soaps, cement, soft drinks, fruit juices, confectioneries, beers, iron rods, roofing sheets, seasoning cubes, tomato paste, onions, sardines, and wood products.

THE BLUE ECONOMY

98.In the fisheries sector, we have exceeded revenue targets, curbed illegal fishing, protected fish stocks, and improved export certification. We will develop commercial aquaculture systems, increase fish production, and create more jobs for women and youth in rural areas.

99.The fish harbour investment is critical for our economy, generating billions of Leones, creating thousands of jobs, and stimulating related investments.

100. We assure responsible ecosystem monitoring and evaluation. Our Medium-Term Plans include making the harbour a centre of excellence for marine education and a duty-free trade zone for exporters and importers.

THE MINING SECTOR

101. Adhering to international Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) best practices, local mining communities now benefit from significant payments, including surface rent and Community Development Agreement (CDA) funds.

102. Over the coming year, we will enhance revenue generation, review legislative instruments, support artisanal and small-scale mining, protect mining-affected communities, employ advanced technology to combat illegal mining and boost women's participation in the sector.

TOURISM

103. Our National Strategic Tourism Plan is integral to economic diversification and aligns with the Big Five Game Changers. This Plan will enhance tourism infrastructure, safeguard sustainable

resources, and attract public-private investments, thereby increasing tourism arrivals, revenue, and job opportunities.

104. We will also promote the orange economy, stimulating job creation and infrastructure investments in the cultural and creative industries to enhance its contribution to GDP.

DOMESTIC REVENUE MOBILISATION Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members,

105. Our Medium-Term Revenue Mobilisation Strategy is improving domestic revenue collection, exceeding targets in 2023 and the first half of 2024. Prudent expenditure management has reduced the budget deficit.

106. We maintain fiscally responsible and sustainable debt levels. Inflation declined from 55% in October last year to 32% in June 2024, instilling optimism and hope for the future among our citizens and stakeholders. The Leone has stabilised and appreciated against major currencies.

107. We have increased storage capacity for strategic petroleum stocks and reduced fuel costs, easing the transportation and economic burden on Sierra Leoneans.

108. These efforts demonstrate our commitment to building a resilient and prosperous economy.

X. MOBILISATION OF EXTERNAL RESOURCES Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members,

109. In a world where smaller nations grapple with limited resources, creatively mobilising funding and forging supportive partnerships is paramount. Crafting visionary plans is one thing, but without resources, they remain mere words on paper. Strategic funding mobilisation is a cornerstone of our commitment to sustainable development and economic growth. Our recent achievements in securing external resources highlight this commitment.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members,

110. Our prudent economic policies have restored donor and investor confidence, leading to substantial support from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank.

111. In November 2023, we successfully concluded our previous IMF programme, meeting all benchmarks and securing over US\$200 million, essential for delivering services and mitigating external shocks.

112. Building on this success, the IMF has greenlit negotiations for two new programmes: the Extended Credit Facility (ECF) and the Resilience and Sustainability Trust (RST). These initiatives will provide approximately US\$500 million to support economic stabilisation and combat climate change, fostering a resilient economy. We have met the fiscal and monetary targets required to continue these negotiations, with final approval anticipated by mid- October 2024.

113. Furthermore, over the past three years, we completed three Budget Support Operations with the World Bank, resulting in US\$265 million in direct budget support. We are currently negotiating additional operations that could bring US\$65 million in direct budget support for the 2024 fiscal year.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members,

114. In June, I co-chaired an Investment Roundtable on Renewable Energy and Food Security for Sierra Leone in Vienna, Austria, in conjunction with the OPEC Fund Development Forum and the Arab Coordinating Group. We presented the Bumbuna Hybrid Solar Project and the Feed Salone Rice Industrial Cluster at Torma Bum.

115. I am pleased to report that our partners responded positively, pledging US\$800 million to support our aspirations for energy and food security by 2030. The pledges include (1) the OPEC Fund (US\$250 million), (2) BADEA (US\$250 million), (3) IFAD (US\$90 million), (4) Africa 50 (US\$130 million), and (5) the Qatar Fund For Development (US\$80 million).

116. Trusted partners, including the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), Africa Finance Corporation (AFC), Arab Gulf Programme for Development (AGFUND), UNIDO, and the Saudi and Abu Dhabi Funds, have made further bilateral commitments to support our development programmes.

THE MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORPORATION (MCC) COMPACT

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members,

117. Attaining the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) Compact for the first time in our nation's history is a significant achievement, placing us among countries that meet rigorous standards of stability, democratic governance, public finance transparency, and economic freedom.

118. The MCC provides grant funding for large- scale infrastructure projects, reducing fiscal pressure, allowing for increased investment in social goods and signalling Sierra Leone as a prime investment destination.

119. The US\$480 million MCC Compact will drive profound governance reforms in the energy sector, enhancing financial viability, increasing access to reliable energy, and stimulating growth in agriculture, mining, and manufacturing.

120. Furthermore, the MCC investments will create jobs and new income streams for Sierra Leonean businesses.

XI.GOVERNANCE, HUMAN RIGHTS AND JUSTICE REFORMS

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members,

121. Justice and transparency form the bedrock of a stable and prosperous society. Corruption erodes the soul of a nation, entrenching systemic injustice with lasting consequences.

122. As stewards of this nation, we must embody the rule of law, ensuring that justice and transparency guide our every decision and action.

123. My Government has consistently scored high marks in international anti-corruption indicators, such as those by the MCC and Afrobarometer, due to our dedication to fighting and minimising fraud, waste, and abuse.

124. The Anti-Corruption Commission's rigorous strategy has led to record-high recoveries, doing so independently.

125. Confidence in the Audit Service has increased. It now covers 85% of Government expenditures and is expanding into new audit areas like environmental and climate change, information systems, forensics, and the extractive industries. The Audit Service collaborates with the Anti-Corruption Commission, civil society organisations, the media, and local communities.

126. The National Public Procurement Authority ensures transparency and user-friendliness in government procurement, promoting ethical governance, efficiency, fair competition, and economic growth.

127. With the European Union's support, we are deepening decentralisation, empowering local authorities to more effectively identify, plan, budget, monitor, and assess projects.

128. The Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development has advanced peaceful coexistence in communities, particularly in selecting traditional leaders and resolving tensions.

129. The Human Rights Commission, maintaining its 'A' accreditation and complying with the Paris Principles, continues to strengthen partnerships with international and regional entities. Its significant contributions to monitoring elections have ensured oversight and a reduction in election-related violence, thereby safeguarding the democratic process.

Legislation will be introduced to empower the Commission further to hold duty-bearers accountable and highlight citizens' responsibilities.

130. My Government will pursue a legislative agenda addressing gaps in existing laws to ensure swift, impartial, and equitable justice. A modernised Criminal Procedures Act has been duly passed, and we have invested in state-of-the-art judicial infrastructure. We will address gender disparity in the judiciary and alternatives to detention for children in conflict with the law.

GENDER EQUITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members,

131. Since the enactment of the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act, gender has been mainstreamed in policies and legislation across Government.

132. We have strengthened response strategies for sexual and gender-based violence and implemented actions for the financial inclusion and empowerment of women, especially in rural areas.

133. The bipartisan support for the private member Bill prohibiting child marriage, championed by the First Lady, marks a significant step towards realising the full potential of our girls, underscoring our collective commitment to their well-being.

134. In the wise words of Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala: "Investing in women is smart economics, and investing in girls, catching them upstream, is even smarter economics".

135. My Government's firm commitment to promoting and protecting the rights of women in Sierra Leone is a promise for a more equitable and prosperous future.

SOCIAL INCLUSION

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members,

136. Empathy and compassion in governance are not merely about ticking boxes; it is about genuine inclusion and transforming the lives of the most vulnerable.

137. To ensure the right to work and a decent livelihood, my Government has provided financial support to the vulnerable, the aged, and other disadvantaged populations through cash transfers to supplement household incomes. Older people at the King George VI Memorial Home will continue to receive financial and health services.

138. In line with our commitment to the global Disability Inclusive Sustainable Goals, we are domesticating international instruments to improve representation and service delivery for persons with disabilities.

139. The mass digital registration of social safety net recipients and the development of the Social Protection Bill will formalise our commitment to supporting the most vulnerable populations, building household resilience against short-term and lingering shocks, and aiding their transition into stable employment.

140. Our single-digit interest MUNAFA scheme has seen high recovery and repayment rates, with nearly ten thousand participants. A World Bank grant is supporting sixty agro-processing SMEs across various value chains.

SYNTHETIC DRUGS AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE

141. My Government is urgently addressing the threat of illicit drug trafficking and addiction, particularly the rise in synthetic drug use, such as kush, which has led to increased fatalities among our youth.

142. We declared a National Emergency On Drugs And Substance Abuse in April and established the National Task Force on Drugs and Substance Abuse to address drugs and substance abuse through a comprehensive Strategy.

143. We will continue to enhance psychosocial services, skills training for rehabilitated addicts, and law enforcement against illicit drug activities. Additionally, we will advance mental health care by enacting comprehensive mental health laws this year.

ANTI-HUMAN TRAFFICKING

144. Since the Anti-Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Act (2022), we have intensified efforts to combat human trafficking by expanding securitised births and deaths registration, civil registration, and ID management systems as well as establishing a Statelessness Secretariat to reduce statelessness.

PRESS FREEDOM AND CIVIC EDUCATION

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members,

145. Following the repeal of seditious libel laws and the enactment of the new Independent Media Commission Act and cybersecurity laws, my Government remains committed to supporting a free press in which no journalist is harmed or jailed for practising journalism.

146. Our civic education and engagement strategy will build trust and counter fake news with proactive, accurate, and timely information. Weekly press conferences are simulcast on major national media platforms, supported by our new Civic Education Agenda and Communications Strategy, which provides synchronised messaging on the Government's BIG FIVE agenda, climate and environmental justice, public health, and digital literacy.

XII. FOREIGN POLICY AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members,

147. Just as it is vital to care for domestic affairs and ensure Sierra Leone works for Sierra Leoneans, we must also consider our nation's relationship with the rest of the world.

148. The fate of nations is often greatly influenced by the quality of their foreign policies, which can either promote thriving economies or exacerbate suffering. Multilateralism, therefore, plays a crucial role in a country's growth and development, fostering collaboration and shared prosperity.

149. Sierra Leone continues to progressively shape and advance its foreign policy in line with global realities and regional developments while promoting national interest.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members,

150. Mindful of recent developments within our subregion, including breaches of constitutional order, my Government remains committed to peace, security and safeguarding the sanctity of constitutional democracies.

151. As a founding ECOWAS member, we recognise the importance of a collective approach to security and will continue to engage positively with sister states in transition.

152. Our Government acknowledges the link between security and development and strives to deepen our contributions to regional and international peace. Sierra Leone's recent membership in the African Union Peace and Security Council (PSC) for 2024-2026 will amplify its voice in advancing peace and preventing conflict in our subregion and continent.

153. We are committed to expanding our diplomatic presence globally to improve our competitiveness and benefit from friendly relations. We recently opened a Diplomatic Mission in Qatar and plan to open embassies in France and Algeria. Additionally, more countries are establishing embassies in Freetown, including Iceland, Saudi Arabia, and Morocco, with Russia, South Korea, and Brazil expressing similar intentions.

SIERRA LEONE AT THE UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members,

154. I am proud to announce that Sierra Leone commenced its historic second tenure as an elected member of the United Nations Security Council on January 1st, 2024.

155. This transformation from a situation country to a principled and effective member resulted from my leadership and a concerted effort by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.

156. Sierra Leone now has a seat at the highest table on matters of international peace and security. This presents a unique opportunity to participate in global discussions and influence decisions at the world's premier body responsible for maintaining international peace and security.

157. In the past six months, Sierra Leone has pursued its priorities through partnership and effective representation. We have called attention to critical issues affecting Africa and the broader international community, advocating for peace, security, accountability, and sustainable development to address conflict root causes.

158. Through collaborative strategies and a commitment to multilateralism, Sierra Leone has significantly contributed to the Security Council's work. In coordinating the A3-Plus mechanism and the elected ten members of the Council (E10), we continue to enhance our profile and influence globally.

159. Our leadership, whether as Chair of the Sanctions Committees on the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan or in various working groups, demonstrates our commitment to advancing peace and security.

160. Leveraging our experiences and collaborating with international partners, Sierra Leone has co-signed important commitments on Women's Peace and Security, Climate and Food Security, and support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA).

161. Sierra Leone has taken an active role in debates, supporting UN peacekeeping operations and sponsoring resolutions on African security issues, post- conflict reconstruction, peacebuilding, and conflict prevention. Highlights include co-writing and adopting the presidential statement on "Peace Consolidation in West Africa", co-sponsoring a Ceasefire Resolution In Gaza and facilitating a press statement on the Guyana-Venezuela situation.

162. We also collaborated on the El Fasher situation in Sudan and facilitated the renewal of the International Residual Court for Criminal Tribunals' mandate. Sierra Leone hosted an Arria formula meeting on "Combating the Rise of Terrorism and Violent Extremism in West Africa and the Sahel."

163. As Coordinator of the Committee of Ten African Union Heads of State (C-10), we continue to champion the Common African Position on the Security Council Reforms and the need to rectify the historical injustice of Africa's exclusion from the Permanent Category of the Security Council.

164. This month, we have assumed the presidency of the Security Council, coordinating its affairs and showcasing our national resilience and commitment to sustainable peace.

165. Through our efforts, we advance the Agenda for Women, Youth, Peace, and Security, support post- conflict reconstruction, and address climate change.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members,

166. Sierra Leone's proactive participation at the United Nations Security Council is the legacy we will bequeath - a principled and respected Sierra Leone on the global stage.

XIII. CLIMATE CHANGE, THE ENVIRONMENT, AND DISASTER MANAGEMENT

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members,

167. Addressing climate change is not just an option - it is a necessity in a climate-vulnerable country like Sierra Leone. The catastrophic potential of climate- related events can erase decades of development in an instant. Ignoring the climate means courting disaster, and there will be no country to enjoy or be proud of if we fail in this duty.

168. Last year, I established the Presidential Initiative on Climate Change, Renewable Energy, and Food Security (PI-CREF) within the Office of the President. This Initiative recognises the interconnected priorities of climate change, renewable energy, and food security. PI-CREF aims to ensure policy coherence, mobilise international partnerships and resources, provide advocacy, and support implementation across government agencies. These efforts are vital for addressing climate impacts, achieving sustainable energy access, and enhancing food and nutrition resilience.

169. Our Government has undertaken significant environmental management initiatives, including sustainable forestry, reforestation, carbon sequestration assessments, and access to voluntary carbon credit markets. We have also taken strong action against illegal activities, dismantling 80 dredges and arresting 25 individuals involved in illegal mining.

170. The Sierra Leone Meteorological Agency now provides tailored forecasts for various sectors based on real-time data. The National Protected Area Authority works diligently to monitor and conserve our natural parks and mangroves.

171. Meanwhile, the Nuclear Safety and Radiation Protection Agency ensures compliance with safety standards for medical and industrial X-ray equipment. We are also developing a National Plastics and Plastics Waste Management Bill to address the pressing issue of plastic waste.

172. The rising frequency of adverse weather patterns, driven by global climate change, brings significant economic, social, and environmental risks. To combat these challenges, we established the National Disaster Management Agency (NDMA). Over the past year, the NDMA has worked with communities to assess risks and respond to disasters, developing a comprehensive Disaster Risk Financing Strategy. Further measures will be presented to this House.

XIV. CONCLUDING REMARKS

173. Mr Speaker, Honourable Members of Parliament, a profound responsibility lies before us. Our journey from the enthusiasm of electoral politics to the solemn duty of governance is not merely a transition; it is a sacred pledge to the dreams and aspirations of every citizen of Sierra Leone.

174. Today, we are called to transcend partisan divides, unify our efforts, and guide our beloved nation toward a future marked by prosperity, equity, and stability.

175. Our Medium-Term National Development Plan is the manifestation of our collective vision, a meticulously crafted roadmap that guides our steps towards sustainable development.

176. Through this Plan, we chart a course for economic growth, infrastructural advancement, and social welfare. The achievements of the past year are testaments to the Plan's efficacy and our dedication to our people's well-being.

177. However, the realisation of these aspirations demands more than plans and promises; it requires stability. A stable Government ensures continuity, fosters trust, and provides the fertile ground for our development initiatives to flourish. In this stability, we find the strength to tackle challenges and the resilience to weather any storm.

178. As we turn the wheels of governance as the executive, legislative, and judiciary branches, we must never take our citizens' faith and patience for granted.

179. We hold positions of leadership, but the true holders of power are the citizens, the only group of people from whom we derive legitimacy to hold our various positions. Our fingers must never drift away from the nation's pulse. We must be both responsible and responsive.

180. We owe a profound debt, too, to our International Partners, whose steadfast support and collaboration enhance our capacity to achieve our goals and to every individual and organisation that stands with us in this noble endeavour. Your contributions are the lifeblood of our national progress.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members,

181. In this August Chamber, you are both representatives of your constituencies as well as architects of Sierra Leone's future. It is incumbent upon us all to rise above the din of political discord and to focus on the greater good. The task before us is monumental, but so too is our collective will.

182. Your dedication, collaboration and commitment to the principles of good governance are vital. Together, we can build a Sierra Leone where every citizen has the opportunity to thrive, where justice and equality are not mere ideals but lived realities, and where peace and prosperity are the defining features of our national identity.

183. As we move forward, let us be guided by the wisdom of our ancestors and the hopes of future generations. Let us lead with integrity, act with compassion, and govern with the resolute belief that our best days are yet to come.

184. United in purpose and steadfast in our resolve, we shall navigate the path ahead with courage and clarity. May our endeavours be blessed with success and enduring impact.

185. May God bless the Republic of Sierra Leone and her people.

186. Thank you for your attention.

Parliamentary and Public Relations Department

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