



GOVERNMENT OF SIERRA LEONE

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

DELIVERED BY

HIS EXCELLENCY, DR JULIUS MAADA BIO, GCRSL,

President of The Republic and Commander-In-Chief of the Republic of
Sierra Leone Armed Forces

**On the Occasion of the Opening of the Sixth Parliament of the
Second Republic of Sierra Leone**

In the Chamber of Parliament Building

Tower Hill, Freetown

On Thursday, 3rd August 2023, at 10:00 am

Honourable Vice President,
Honourable Speaker of Parliament,
The Honourable Chief Justice,
Madam First Lady,
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 and Intelligence Services,
Members of the Fourth Estate,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,
Fellow Sierra Leoneans,

1. I address this sixth Parliament of our illustrious Republic with a profound sense of honour and gratitude, having once again received the resounding mandate of the people to serve this great nation for another five years.

2. I extend my heartfelt appreciation to the citizens of this noble land for the unwavering trust they have placed in me personally and in the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) to continue steering the course of our democracy towards sustainable progress and prosperity.

3. **Within the hallowed chambers of this esteemed Parliament, I am humbled by the weight of its significance. As a staunch advocate of democratic principles, I hold this institution in the highest regard. It embodies the very essence of the people's will. Here, our fellow citizens' collective aspirations, concerns, and voices resonate and find expression. Parliament is not merely a forum for legislation; it stands as the vanguard of democratic ideals and pulsates as the lifeblood of our nation.**

4. I seize this opportunity once again to congratulate the esteemed Honourable Speaker, Dr Abass Chernor Bundu and Deputy Speaker, Honourable Segepoh Solomon Thomas, for their re-election by the elected Members of Parliament to lead the legislative arm of Government.

5. A hearty congratulations to all the elected Members of Parliament for the resounding mandate to serve the people of our great nation with a steadfast commitment to the greater good. The high voter turnout at the fervently contested multi-tier elections signifies an inclusive democratic process, attesting to our citizens' engagement and participation.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members

6. **Today marks a momentous occasion in Sierra Leonean politics. As I gaze upon the composition of this Parliament, a swell of pride engulfs me, for it reflects the remarkable progress we have achieved. A Government of the people, by the people, and for the people cannot be fully realised if we systematically exclude half of our population. I am, therefore, gratified by the increased representation of women within these halls.**

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members

7. **The recent elections witnessed a commendable 15% rise in women's representation, with 30.4% of directly elected representatives now being women. Women are not**

merely women, as we have erroneously defined them in the past. Women are also policymakers and leaders, constituting the backbone of our society, the very anchor of our families. The presence of more women within this Parliament and our democracy enriches the tapestry of our nation, infusing it with compassion, empathy, and resilience.

8. This sixth Parliament presents an opportunity to showcase the maturity of our democracy. Any political party's absence of a two-thirds majority necessitates constant engagement, encouraging us to amplify all voices and engenders a more harmonious, stable, and prosperous Sierra Leone. By fostering collaboration, cooperation, and negotiation, we can transcend political divides for the ultimate benefit of our people.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members

9. In the tapestry of democracy, continuity is pivotal, intricately woven with threads of stability and progress. It is through the seamless transition and preservation of

democratic principles and institutions that a nation's identity endures.

- 10.** Five years ago, I stood before this Parliament, presenting my Government's New Direction Manifesto and pledging to honour critical promises. Despite facing unprecedented challenges, my Government resolutely fulfilled most of those promises, even amidst global shocks that have impacted the cost of living. Through strategic policy interventions and investments in local food production, job creation, and the betterment of our public servants' livelihoods, we have shielded our people from the adverse effects of these shocks.
- 11.** To any impartial observer, Sierra Leone is a nation markedly better off today than it was five years ago. Across every indicator, our prioritisation of Human Capital Development has borne fruit.

12. In the realm of healthcare, we have surpassed the health outcomes of many neighbouring countries, a testament to our unwavering commitment to the well-being of our citizens. Moreover, we have dedicated special attention to empowering women and girls, ensuring their meaningful participation in every facet of life, from education to politics, and safeguarding their social protection.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members,

13. Today, I stand before you with immense pride as we embark upon a new five-year mandate that echoes the call for continuity. With great honour, I present the **New Direction: Consolidating the Gains and Accelerating Transformation Agenda**. This ambitious vision builds upon the principles outlined in the 2023 People's Manifesto of the SLPP. This agenda encapsulates the spirit of progress, seizing the newfound opportunities we have forged while confronting emerging challenges and propelling Sierra Leone towards middle-income status by 2035.

14. As espoused in our SLPP People's Manifesto, which we used to campaign to citizens with our message of hope, unity and prosperity, my new administration's national development agenda will emphasise five key initiatives that will shape the course of our nation.
15. First and foremost, "**Feed Salone**" will ignite agricultural productivity, safeguard food security, and foster inclusive economic growth, laying the foundation for sustained prosperity.
16. "**Human Capital Development**," with a deliberate focus on gender equality, will nurture the skills required for the industries of the 21st Century, empowering our workforce for a transformative future.
17. The "**Youth Employment Scheme**" will unleash a focused initiative to create abundant job opportunities, providing our young talents with a platform to flourish and contribute to our nation's progress.
18. The "**Technology and Infrastructure Initiative**" will serve as an engine for sustained economic growth, harnessing

the power of innovation and robust infrastructure to propel Sierra Leone to middle-income status.

19. Finally, "**Revamping the Public Service Architecture**" will usher in a new era of delivery efficiency and professionalism, enhancing the efficacy of our public sector institutions.
20. These strategic initiatives form the bedrock upon which we shall usher in profound change, serving as catalysts to revolutionise economic growth, alleviate hunger and poverty, elevate public service efficiency, generate abundant employment prospects, and foster resilience in adversity.
21. We have meticulously chosen these initiatives to maximise the manifold opportunities before us, drawing invaluable lessons from the crucible of crisis-era governance.
22. By concentrating our efforts on these transformational endeavours and harnessing the insights gleaned from our trials, our Government aspires to build upon the

remarkable progress achieved thus far. We shall propel Sierra Leone further along the trajectory of sustainable development and unparalleled prosperity.

23. Our ultimate objective is to forge an unyielding framework that ensures our nation's continued advancement, harnessing the boundless potential for growth and profound positive changes that lie before us in the years ahead.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members,

24. Allow me to expound on my Government's "**Big Five Game-Changers**" for our nation's sustainable economic development and social progress.

I. FEED SALONE

25. Food security holds paramount importance in the quest for a stable and democratic society, transcending its role as a mere necessity to becoming a foundational pillar upon which the prosperity of a nation is built. A country that ensures citizens' access to a dependable food supply cultivates resilience, safeguards public

health, and fosters social cohesion. This symbiotic relationship between food security, democracy, and stability empowers individuals, promotes economic stability, and mitigates the perils of social unrest.

26. Recognising this profound interconnectedness, the flagship "**Feed Salone**" initiative is an unwavering testament to our commitment to forging a self-sufficient Sierra Leone where agricultural productivity thrives, hunger diminishes, and societal resilience flourishes.
27. Through an array of comprehensive pledges and strategic endeavours, we embark upon a transformative odyssey that harmonises agricultural development, economic growth, and societal progress, firmly anchoring the future of our nation upon the bedrock of food sufficiency and sovereignty.

II. HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT: NURTURING SKILLS FOR 21ST CENTURY INDUSTRY

28. My Government's commitment to Human Capital Development recognises its importance in fostering

stability and driving progress within developing nations. Over the past five years, our flagship programme, Free Quality School Education, has propelled us to remarkable achievements, resulting in an unprecedented surge in school admittance and university entrance examination pass rates.

- 29.** With a robust policy and legislative framework, we stand poised to surpass these milestones and reach even greater heights. Our profound understanding of the significance of Foundational Learning has solidified our commitment to investing in primary and secondary education. Furthermore, we have made significant strides in expanding access to higher and technical education, particularly in STEM courses, while establishing technical and vocational centres across most chiefdoms nationwide.
- 30.** Moreover, our steadfast investment in robust health systems is an indomitable force propelling the cultivation of a productive society capable of making substantial contributions in the modern era. Prioritising specialised

skills and bolstering public health and emergency systems, we are well-prepared to meet our nation's ever-growing demands for healthcare services.

- 31.** Looking ahead, the focus of my Government over the next five years centres on translating these achievements into the development of a highly skilled labour force equipped to tackle the challenges of 21st-Century industries.
- 32.** Our efforts will be directed towards bridging the gap in the missing middle of the labour force while nurturing talents for professional roles in both the private sector and the Civil Service.
- 33.** Through our unwavering dedication to Human Capital Development, we pave the path towards a future where our workforce is empowered, skilled, and ready to embrace the challenges and opportunities of the 21st Century.

III. Youth Employment Scheme: A Catalyst for Democracy, Economic Productivity, and National Security

- 34.** Youth unemployment, persistently prevalent within our society, presents a formidable threat to sustaining economic growth, stability, and the overall prosperity of our nation.

- 35.** In Sierra Leone, the youth demographic, encompassing individuals between the ages of 15 and 35, constitutes over a third of our population. Unfortunately, a significant portion of these young individuals residing in urban areas, who are neither attending school, university nor engaged in formal training, face the distressing realities of unemployment and vulnerability to drug addiction.

- 36.** Even in rural areas, the lack of compelling incentives has resulted in limited youth participation in productive endeavours. Furthermore, our university graduates, regrettably, often find themselves unemployed. Trapped in this unemployment cycle, urban and rural

youth become susceptible to exploitation by opportunistic forces, leading to unproductivity and delinquency.

- 37.** To harness the boundless energy and potential of the youth and foster inclusive and enduring prosperity throughout Sierra Leone, my Government pledges to continue championing their cause.
- 38.** Our commitment to this mission extends to nurturing patriotism, fostering national pride, and cultivating resilience among our young populace.
- 39.** In pursuit of these objectives, my Government will institute a Presidential initiative focused on youth employment and job creation within the next five years. These employment opportunities will span various sectors, encompassing skilled and unskilled positions and long-term and seasonal engagements.

40. By steadfastly adhering to our commitments to the Youth Employment Scheme, we instil hope, provide opportunities, and empower our youth to forge a prosperous and secure future. Together, we develop a path towards a stronger democracy, enhanced economic productivity, and heightened national security.

IV. Enhancing Public Service Architecture: Empowering Democracy and National Development

41. Public Service is the cornerstone for driving transformative change in Sierra Leone. Since assuming office in 2018, my Government has diligently developed a comprehensive Civil Service Training Policy, laying the groundwork for robust capacity building within the public sector and establishing the Civil Service Training College. While these efforts have incrementally bolstered capacity, the current Public Service architecture necessitates strategic reforms to align with our governance agenda.

- 42.** My Government is fully committed to revitalising the Public Service, emphasising delivery, fostering a culture of professionalism, meritocracy, and continuous improvement, ultimately enhancing its effectiveness and efficiency in serving the people of Sierra Leone.
- 43.** Our ultimate objective is to cultivate a Public Service that attracts and retains our brightest talents, positioning them at the forefront of overcoming our most arduous challenges. The ongoing constitutional review process presents a unique opportunity for a lasting transformation of the Sierra Leone Public Service.
- 44.** By undertaking transformative measures for revamping the Public Service architecture, we will redefine the Public Service, positioning it as an exemplar of professionalism, efficiency, and accountability. This renewed Public Service will serve as the bedrock of our democracy, propelling Sierra Leone towards sustainable development and prosperity.

V. TECHNOLOGY AND INFRASTRUCTURE INITIATIVE

- 45.** Envisioning a future of robust economic growth, socio-economic progress, and boundless innovation, our Technology and Infrastructure Initiative is an indispensable cornerstone of our transformative agenda.

- 46.** Recognising the barriers posed by excessive energy costs and inadequate road networks that impede private sector expansion in Sierra Leone, my Government remains steadfast in committing to rapidly augmenting energy capacity within key production zones. Our comprehensive approach will propel our development by leveraging renewable and non-renewable energy sources. Moreover, numerous road and bridge construction projects are poised to be initiated, focusing on connecting vital production areas.

- 47.** In tandem, my Government recognises that technology and digital innovation are catalysts of paramount importance, presenting unparalleled opportunities to expedite transformational change in Sierra Leone.
- 48.** Over the past five years, my Government has established the Directorate of Science, Technology, and Innovation (DSTI), working with the Ministry of Information and Communications to lay the foundation for harnessing the power of technology and innovation to drive service delivery and economic growth.
- 49.** We have fostered an improved ecosystem conducive to progress through extensive enhancements to the national Fibre network, expanded internet and mobile access, and the proliferation of mobile money agents across chiefdoms.
- 50.** Over the next five years, the convergence of infrastructure, technology, and innovation will be pivotal enablers for sustaining high economic growth. Our objectives encompass transitioning the majority of monetary transactions to cashless systems, bolstering

financial inclusion, expanding energy production for productive applications, and constructing roads that seamlessly link production centres to markets.

51. Through the resolute implementation of our Technology and Infrastructure Initiative, we forge ahead, poised to unlock the full potential of Sierra Leone, driving economic prosperity and societal advancement and ushering in a future of limitless possibilities.

CONCLUSION

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members

52. Today, we gather here to reflect upon the importance of cohesion in politics and to recognise the paramount significance of unity and collaboration in our noble endeavour to serve the people.
53. In this very Parliament, where no party has attained a two-thirds majority, the need for dialogue and negotiation resonates with utmost urgency. We must find common ground within the political divides. Through

unity, we can achieve stability, progress, and prosperity in our democracy.

- 54.** Let us not forget that the true holders of power in a democracy are the people we represent. We must always remember their voices, aspirations, and hopes for a better future in every debate and conflict.
- 55.** Our individual egos must yield to the greater national cause, and our quest for power must never overshadow our deep-rooted desire to be a Government that genuinely serves the people. Our purpose transcends personal enrichment or fleeting fame; it is firmly grounded in pursuing our nation's and people's collective well-being.
- 56.** The path to greatness lies in putting the nation's interest first, transcending party lines, and forging alliances beyond political affiliations. As Parliamentarians, it is your duty to embody the spirit of statesmanship and to seek dialogue and common goals, even in the face of differing opinions. We can foster progress through such

engagement, laying the foundation for Sierra Leone's ascent to middle-income status by 2035.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members

- 57.** On behalf of the Executive, I pledge to nurture a healthy relationship with this esteemed Parliament and all branches of Government. Together, we shall strive to achieve our shared goals over the next five years, remaining steadfast in our commitment to democracy, peace, and the Rule of Law.
- 58.** We have long since departed from the darkness of conflict and embraced the illuminating light of freedom and democratic principles. Let this Parliament, this beacon of hope, continue to lead the way, exemplifying dedication to the noble task of nation-building.
- 59.** Let us never take the peace and stability we currently enjoy for granted. Look around us, both on our continent and worldwide, and we witness the devastating consequences that unfold when political actors fail to

resolve their differences with maturity and respect for the law.

- 60.** It falls upon our shoulders to safeguard this democracy, to support our citizens as we propel the economy forward, and to create a safe and stable atmosphere where every Sierra Leonean can flourish, holding their heads high with pride on the global stage.
- 61.** To our neighbours, brothers, and sisters in the West African sub-region and the broader African continent, I call upon your sustained support for our hard-earned democracy. Together, we can forge a future of hope, progress, and mutual prosperity.
- 62.** I eagerly anticipate collaborating with partners within and beyond our borders, including regional organisations such as ECOWAS, the African Union Commission, and the wider international community. With their support, my Government shall continue to ignite the flame of hope in the hearts of our cherished citizens.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members

- 63.** My Government remains committed to ensuring that State institutions undertake their mandates efficiently. In my last administration, we fully supported the Electoral Commission for Sierra Leone (ECSL) and other related Election Management Bodies (EMBs). The ECSL has a Constitutional mandate supplemented by the Public Elections Act 2022 for planning and conducting public elections in Sierra Leone.
- 64.** The June 24th Multi-tier elections identified some logistical limitations that were, however, assessed as not negatively impacting the overall outcome of the Multi-tier elections in Sierra Leone. To improve ECSL's continued planning and conduct of transparent and fair elections, a National Electoral Systems Review Committee will be established to assess the planning and management of the 2023 electoral cycle.

- 65.** The National Electoral Systems Review Committee's objective will be two-fold:
- i. To review the prevailing legal framework, related institutional and operational arrangements, and local and international observer missions' reports.
 - ii. To propose key reforms for institutionalising the recommendations to enhance the operations of the entire electoral architecture in Sierra Leone.
- 66.** The National Electoral Systems Review Committee, with a broad membership of the Government, Development Partners, Civil Society and Professional Organisations, will be led by the Honourable Vice President and supported by an ad-hoc Technical Secretariat. The key deliverable of the Review Committee will be an Electoral Systems Review Report that will lay the foundation for critical reforms in the electioneering process with reference to the ECSL and all other EMBs in Sierra Leone.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members

- 67.** Gratitude must be extended to our security forces, judiciary, media and Civil Society. They have been pillars of strength in advancing the cause of democracy in Sierra Leone. I pledge to uphold their independence, for there can be no democracy without the rule of law, no democracy without security, and no democracy without a free press that informs, educates and holds public officeholders accountable.
- 68.** As we embark on this shared journey, let us move forward with optimism and determination. May God's blessings be upon every one of us, and may His divine guidance bless the Republic of Sierra Leone.
- 69.** Thank you, and let us continue this noble work together for the advancement of the country that we love, our Sierra Leone.