

STATEMENT DELIVERED BY MR. TAMBA M. NGEGBA, DEPUTY HIGH COMMISSONER FOR SIERRA LEONE, AT THE LAUNCH EVENT OF ENGINEERS FOR CHANGE HELD AT THE INSTITUTION OF CIVIL ENGINEERS HEADQUARTERS, LONDON ON 30TH SEPTEMBER 2015

Mr. Chairman, my learned colleagues, distinguish ladies and gentlemen

Let me first of all thank Engineers for Change Sierra Leone and the Commonwealth Engineers Council (CEC) for organizing this well-timed event on the subject of Post Ebola strategy: Consequences for Sierra Leone and its Development. It is indeed timely and essential that in the wake of the Ebola epidemic, our nationals in the Diaspora should already be engaging themselves in conversations guaranteed to contribute to national efforts at recovery from the impact of the Ebola Virus Disease epidemic and its attendant consequences. I am happy to observe that the name Engineers for Change share some similarity to the nomenclature of the hugely successful poverty reduction and development programme of Sierra Leone, the Agenda for Change, which was implemented from 2007 – 2012. I hope that the Engineers for Change will be as successful as the Agenda for Change and further that they will contribute to some of the priority areas in our Change Agenda particularly the engineering discipline related areas of energy and infrastructure.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished Guests,

The Ebola epidemic is nearing its end. There are now but a few isolated incidences challenging our objective of attaining zero rate of infection. We had recently begun the countdown to zero - meaning that we had gone for two weeks with no new infection and were hopeful that this could be maintained for a period of 42 days after which the country would be declared Ebola free. However new cases appeared in Kambia – four and later Makeni – one, which has led to the quarantining of over 1,500 people across the two districts. Given the epidemiology of the disease, getting to zero and staying zero is the most difficult part of the struggle against Ebola. Ending Ebola involves building the resilience into our health sector, stepping up contact tracing and surveillance, while caring for the survivors and supporting those orphaned and widowed as a consequence of the scourge. Ending the virus involves ensuring that kids who only recently returned to school remain safe. It involves reinforcing the private sector as a means of rebuilding livelihoods and putting the country back on the path of growth and economic development as it was before the epidemic.

While we have almost succeeded in defeating Ebola, the socio-economic impact of the EVD has been cumulative and with devastating effects. More than 8,000 infection cases and 3,100 deaths have been recorded. The toll has been heavy on the nation. Among the victims of the virus were a number of our professionally trained health care workers, with 221 losing their lives in the line of duty including 11 specialized physicians. Over 295 were infected.

Before the outbreak of Ebola in Sierra Leone, the country was making steady progress with its programme for economic development known as the Agenda for Prosperity. Gross Domestic Products (GDP) growth rates before the epidemic, in 2012 and 2013 stood at 15.2 and 20.1 percent respectively. The country's performance was not only encouraging in terms of economic growth, but also in poverty reduction and human development. The national poverty headcount dropped from 70 percent in 2003 to 52 percent before the Ebola outbreak. These strong indicators slumped at the onset of EVD, with the economy suffering shock from both the outbreak and a simultaneous sharp decline of iron ore prices. Agricultural activities were significantly disrupted leading to a decline in agricultural output with consequences ramifying into the labour market. The private sector has been severely affected, with a 50 percent decline in formal employment. Manufacturing lost 60 percent of its employees, and a number of new investment ventures have been postponed. Cross-border trade which was a growing and significant part of our GDP was also severely affected. Of course among the first sectors to suffer as the disease gained traction was the Air transport sector with many international flights ceasing operations with the exception of Brussels Airlines and Air Maroc. Sea transport also saw a marked reduction.

On the social front, children have been orphaned, wives and husbands have been widowed, resulting in loss of incomes and livelihoods with knock - on effects for the aged and other vulnerable members of our society.

MR. CHAIRMAN DISTINGUISHED GUESTS,

As the Ebola epidemic ebbs in Sierra Leone, the Government is cognizant of the huge tasks ahead to mitigate the impact of the epidemic on the socio-economic fabric of the country and to put the country back on its development trajectory. The Government therefore developed a framework called the National Ebola Recovery Strategy for Sierra Leone which was launched in July 2015. The overarching objectives of the Plan are to eradicate Ebola, restore basic socio-economic services across the country, and improve economic

growth rates. The Strategy aims to stem the reversal of the gains made in managing macroeconomic stability and human development. It is a blueprint to put the country back on track, in particular, to address and reverse the carnage wreaked by the epidemic on the economic and social fabric of Sierra Leone and transition back to programmes in the fight against unemployment, poverty and vulnerability as outlined in the Agenda for Prosperity.

As you can see from the outline I have given on the impact of Ebola, there are pressing priorities to be immediately addressed. The Strategy was therefore developed with a two prong approach, one for addressing urgent and immediate recovery priorities within six to nine months and the other for building National Systems for Resilience and Sustainable Development in the ensuing 24 months. The Immediate Recovery priorities include (i) Getting and Maintaining Zero Infections; (ii) Managing and Mitigating the Immediate Ebola Impact in the Social Sector including healthcare, water and sanitation, education, gender, children and social protection, and labor and youth employment; (iii) Restoring Economic Growth and Output, which focuses on actions to re-launch economic activities, stimulate state revenue generation and restore viable public investments, including agriculture, fisheries, tourism and air transport, trade and private sector development, road development, energy services, mining operations, domestic revenue mobilization, and financial services. , infrastructures (roads) and financial services; and (iv) Strategies To Strengthen Governance, Justice And Security.

In the immediate aftermath of the epidemic therefore, Government is working to (i) restore health services and build a robust health care system that is resilient and strengthened to prevent emergencies and recurring tropical diseases, (ii) restore educational facilities and attendant services, (iii) enhance food security initiatives, (iv) expand provision of water, sanitation and hygiene services, (v) support increased private sector participation in the economy, (vi) expand the coverage of social protection services to extremely poor, disabled and vulnerable members of society, and (vii) close the fiscal financing gap.

Getting to and maintaining zero involves, stepping up efforts to completely eradicate the disease through enhancing disease surveillance and contact tracing; improving infection prevention and control; maintaining safe and dignified burials; deepening community engagement; increasing cross-border surveillance; sustaining support for mental and psychological services; and improving operational services.

Restoring Health Services will include a review of the national health system, strengthening of health care facilities, and ensuring compliance with infection protection and control standards; leveraging existing foreign medical teams to address immediate health staff shortages; new recruitment/training of health personnel; restoring the trust of communities; improving surveillance and health management information; ensuring the thorough disinfection of all facilities used as holding and treatment centres; and providing for post-Ebola complications and challenges, especially those associated with Ebola survivors.

Improving access to water and Sanitation will include providing emergency water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services to Ebola care centres; disinfection of affected communities and monitoring of WASH services' functionality; restoration of water, sanitation and hygiene service delivery in health units and schools; promotion of the retention of positive health and hygiene behaviour through community engagement and ownership.

Getting Kids to School is already an ongoing process and involves the decontamination of educational institutions used as holding and treatment centres; repair schools to basic operational level; promote better health habits and access to water and sanitation; train teachers on Ebola and psychosocial therapies; provide early Ebola detection devices; engage communities on child care; expand the school feeding programme; provide incentives for pupils to return to school; and support the most vulnerable children, including those with disabilities and girls, as well as Ebola survivors.

Protection of the Most Vulnerable will include providing recovery assistance targeted at the most vulnerable and affected persons – Ebola survivors, orphans, widows and widowers. Provisional care centres and homes will be established. Reintegration programmes for Ebola survivors and related health workers, including burial teams, into their communities will also facilitated, and livelihood support provided.

Restoring economic growth and output requires prudent macroeconomic policies that involves providing support to the agricultural sector; rebranding the country and improving its image through de-stigmatization campaigns to restore tourism and attract private investment; ensuring the resumption of air and sea transport operations; providing support to the energy sector; resuming public infrastructure programmes, including road works; improving the implementation of revenue collection strategies; strengthening the

implementation of financial services policies and maintain appropriate monetary and debt policies to stabilize the financial sector.

The second part of the strategy seeks to address within a twenty-four months period, the Building of National Systems for Resilience and Sustainable Development. This involves building a resilient health system; community development; building trust in public institutions and peacebuilding; establishing an integrated national security and disaster risk management system; strengthening the implementation of current public sector reforms; strengthening aid effectiveness; restoring trust in the private (and informal) sector; dealing with inequalities; exploring regional opportunities; and strengthening economic and financial policy management; and in other areas of governance and coordination of public policies.

MR. CHAIRMAN DISTINGUISHED GUESTS,

To ensure and monitor the implementation of this bold and urgent strategy for recovery from the impacts of the Ebola epidemic, a delivery team has been set up under the Office of the President in State House. As public servants, we follow in the precepts of His Excellency President Ernest Bai Koroma, who, in launching the Strategy committed Government to be open with partners about its plans, progress, challenges and resource allocation, to deliver more detailed implementation plans for the medium-term priorities in health, energy, water and private sector development and to guarantee effective delivery of those priorities through a strong delivery mechanism that will provide support and solve problems at all levels of government cascading down to local service delivery.

Distinguished Guests, it may please you to note that at the UN Pledging Conference on Ebola held in New York to raise funds for the Ebola Recovery Strategies of the three most affect countries i.e Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia, a total of \$804.2 million was pledged directly to Sierra Leone for as funding commitments to its post-Ebola Recovery Strategy.

DISTINGUISHED GUESTS,

As a Trust Organisation, there are many innovative ways Engineers for Change can come in to support Sierra Leone in its efforts to transition back to its development agenda.

Much of the sectoral development programme of Sierra Leone relies on the bedrock of infrastructural development. The broad discipline of engineering, from civil to mechanical to electrical have a plethora of applications to the ongoing development work in Sierra Leone in various sectors including energy, construction, manufacturing, the extractive industries etc. One way the Engineers for Change could contribute to the current development efforts as we transition back to the Agenda for Prosperity could be in facilitating training of engineers in the area of water and sanitation which is an urgent priority in both the Ebola Recovery Strategy and the Agenda for Prosperity and also to support with programmes on delivering infrastructure for water and sanitation systems. The Trust may also consider supporting engineering institutions in Sierra Leone to assist in the restoration of schools used as holding centres during the epidemic. Engineers for Change could also play a useful role in facilitating investment inflows into the construction industry in Sierra Leone for example; the tourism industry, a sector with significant multiplier effects on employment which could benefit from the construction of hotels and tourism facilities to cater for current unmet demand in hotel rooms and conferencing facilities.

In closing, let me take this opportunity to thank the Sierra Leone Diaspora for their immense support material and financial, in the fight against the EVD in Sierra Leone. I should also again take the opportunity to thank the British Government for the overwhelming support and contributions to the Government and People of Sierra Leone which included building and staffing treatment centres with healthcare personnel and providing research leadership for the development of vaccines and treatments. These, together with the efforts of the international community massively contributed to stemming the tide of the existential threat of the Ebola epidemic and indeed brought the virus to its knees in Sierra Leone and in the Mano River Union.

I thank you.