

**STATEMENT BY SIERRA LEONE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER AT THE NATIONAL YOUTH SERVICE ENGAGEMENT WITH MINISTRIES, DEPARTMENT, AGENCIES AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR AT THE ATLANTIC HALL, SIAKA STEVENS STADIUM ON 28<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2017**

Mr. Chairman, Honourable Minister of Youth Affairs, Representatives of various institutions and Organizations here present, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen.

Companies are in search of solutions that allow them to enhance their brand recognition and develop relationships with talent much earlier in the education process. Employers continue to struggle to find the skilled workers they need to compete. This is why at Sierra Leone Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture (**SLCCIA**), we are dedicated towards promoting the economic interests of members and helping them, according to the requirements of a competitive market economy through informing and mobilizing the business community to be engaged partners, challenging the status quo, and connecting education and workforce reform to economic development.

Mr. Chairman, Honourable Minister of Youth Affairs, Our presence here today shows our commitment to collaborate with the National Youth Service Commission in ensuring that the National Youth Service Scheme is implemented to its fullest.

The Chamber considers this scheme very important as it will build a sustainable, balanced economy and our education reforms designed to extend opportunity to more young people. Engaging with apprenticeships enables employers to identify and meet their skills needs. This also means helping more businesses, particularly SMEs, to recruit their first apprentice. We want to see this scheme expanded into postsecondary universe or leveraged by community-based organizations targeting out-of-school youth. We believe this can be achieved through continuous engagement and collaboration with the National Youth Service Commission and by building sustainable relationships with the business community in which value is shared between young adults and employers alike.

At this point, I would like to update you on some of the steps taken by the Sierra Leone Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture to develop a mainstream route to high-level skills and a path to the professions.

The Chamber acquired a new building at 24 Charlotte Street, and a section in the basement floor has been dedicated as a library and resource centre. The Centre is furnished with computers and has high speed internet facility opened to the public especially for SME's and Students to conduct research on businesses, trade opportunities at zero cost. Young people can also access the library via our website which is currently being upgraded and will be ready in three weeks' time; access the vast of opportunities available at the chamber such as internship opportunities, mentorship, networking with business leaders and potential to start up there businesses in the future.

Additionally, the Chamber is working on a graduate program for schools and colleges in Sierra Leone. Its purpose is to help bridge the gap between businesses and the education sector. It will provide a range of different ways in which the Chamber can help schools and colleges tap into the knowledge, skills and experience that local businesses can provide students for them to succeed in the world of work. It is an initiative that aims to engage youths and other sectors to explore how they can be uniquely positioned to support the business community's efforts to

create a talent pool of skilled workers. This will be a demand-driven approach were we can further collaborate with the National Youth Service Commission and other business associations to address youth unemployment, help Sierra Leone's economy grow, businesses remain competitive, and students access opportunities for success. Students will gain insight into the world of work, and get the chance to learn about the different careers they could have, as well as the routes that they can take to get there. They will also learn what skills - both technical and soft - that they need to pursue a successful career once they leave education.

Best of all, Sierra Leone Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture (**SLCCIA**) will help schools, colleges and Authorities meet requirements around provision of careers advice, preparation of students for employment, and engagement with employers.

We are committed towards ensuring the business community has more experience with the National Youth Service scheme as well as for the National Youth Service Commission to have deeper understanding of the needs of the business community to support students' transition into the world of work. We will keep them inform of new developments through our quarterly newsletter, which devotes a section to equal opportunities issues as well as in our general membership meetings, and all other mediums available for continuous information flow.

We believe it is a shared responsibility between business, education and government to address this youth unemployment issue. We will Increase collaboration between education providers and businesses, through our chamber network and support young people to gain exposure to business. Through public - private dialogue we will collaborate with you to Influence government education and skills policy, to ensure young people develop the skills, experience and attitude to make a successful transition into work.

This is important because we know how educational institutions struggle with how to translate workforce needs into actionable steps for the education community and link programs of work to a company's business strategy. Employer needs are constantly shifting, but education providers are often not positioned to be flexible and responsive enough to maintain long-term relationships.

Mr. Chairman, Honourable Minister of Youth Affairs, as Sierra Leone continues to compete on a global stage, our competitive edge will largely be determined by how well we prepare young adults for the jobs of the future. The Sierra Leone Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture is committed to ensure young people have the necessary exposure and support required to make this a reality.

I thank you all.