

SPEECH DELIVERED BY THE PRESIDENT OF SIERRA LEONE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, INDUSTRY AND AGRICULTURE (SLCCIA) AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING CEREMONY OF THE CHAMBER'S OFFICE BUILDING ON FRIDAY 19TH JANUARY 2018.

Your Excellency, Dr. Ernest Bai Koroma, President of the Republic of Sierra Leone,
Ministers of Government,
Honourable Members of Parliament,
Representatives of various MDAs,
Members of the Forth Estate,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

It gives me great pleasure to welcome all of you on behalf of the Council, the entire membership and staff of the Sierra Leone Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture (**SLCCIA**). It is also an honour to welcome one of ours, a past Council Member in the person of His Excellency the President of the Republic of Sierra Leone to this memorable occasion. This occasion will allow the Chamber to look back on its past achievements and at the same time open a new era for its future success.

Your Excellency, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, the Chamber had its general membership meeting at the Miatta Conference Centre on 10th October 2017 with the theme; "Rebranding your Chamber". In that meeting, I highlighted some of the key achievements, some of which included; restructuring the secretariat and rebranding the Chamber; our advocacy and engagement with stakeholders such as IFC to ensure Chamber SMEs and Corporate businesses have improved chances to access Finance through applying good governance in their businesses; our cooperation with the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development to support and promote the "Made in Sierra Leone" initiative; participation in the review and technical validation of the draft national labour migration policy of Sierra Leone; internal and external training opportunities for members; participation in the National Youth Service Scheme workshop at the National Stadium ; our Private Sector lead collaboration and support to the flood and mudslide victims and recently, our cooperation with the Ministry of Trade and Industry in the draft of the national AGOA strategy to name but a few. In respect of Governance, we continue to work with IFC by providing sessions with our SME members that are proving beneficial to them.

Today we are gathered here for the official opening of the Chamber's building. Please permit me to acknowledge and to pay tribute to all those who contributed to making this building a

reality and to thank you for being here today; I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks and profound gratitude to all past Presidents of the Chamber, Council Members and Staff for their selflessness in actualizing this dream despite resource constraints. All of you have worked tirelessly starting from the idea conception stage to raising the funds that led to the acquisition of this building, even though you are all very busy with your responsibilities at your various organizations and businesses. This achievement would not have been possible without your membership fees, participation in trade fairs, sponsorships, hard work and voluntary self-financing. I truly appreciate your dedication. I hope that everyone would take the results of our concerted efforts to inform and educate the public as well as encourage non-members to register and take advantage of the opportunities available at their disposal in the Sierra Leone Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture.

For those of you who have come to this building for the first time, you will be surprised to note that this upscale office with modern architectural design was in fact converted from an old warehouse previously managed, many years ago, by Sierra Rutile. In the 1990s, I used to visit this building as Country Manager of a UK based procurement Service Company dealing in, amongst other items, the supply of mineral processing equipment. It was a place that housed different offices and provided storage facilities. Today, the physical transformation and modernization of the Chamber's new office bears a strong resemblance to the transformation of the Council and membership over the past years. The Chamber has grown in size and importance, gradually establishing itself as the voice of the business community. Its staff base has increased as well as scope of activities and engagement in identifying issues and finding solutions to business growth and national development.

Your Excellency, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, this building houses two important arms of the Chamber namely; the African Growth Opportunity Act (AGOA) Trade Resource Centre and the Centre for Alternative Dispute Resolution (CADR). These arms have been established to help channel all partners' effort in a way that will address critical constraints to trade competitiveness, capture opportunities to expand trade, demonstrate regional productive potential to investors, and facilitate greater investment. We are therefore confident that these arms will support and expand businesses as well as enhance a business environment that increases investor confidence, and provide the services necessary for a sustainable and competitive environment.

In addition, the facility also now has an improved working environment for our staff, visiting members and partners; who may want to use any of the three board rooms and library/resource centre for business research, meetings and conferences. In the past, we occupied a rented floor

at Guma Valley building with limited space to offer the kind of services and work environment we now offer. This building has a larger floor area, to meet the increasing demand and expectations of our business community. We believe in moving with the times, and the acquisition of this building is in line with our shared vision and commitment to promote the interest of our members, increase accessibility with the assurance that the Chamber will continue to thrive and serve you over the years to come.

Your Excellency, I would like to bring to your notice that the Chamber has expanded its membership category to include Patron and Institutional (students and NGOs) membership, embracing a wide range of profit and not-for profit sectors to support the work and mission of the Chamber on a mutual benefit basis. This category of membership will help to streamline connections through a variety of interactive career-based learning experiences and business education seminars which will allow students to explore within the country and beyond. It will further help develop employability skills which are needed to improve employment opportunities especially for graduates.

We need to prepare our young people to meet future business challenges, help them overcome the daily impediments to sustainable business growth and economic development. The Sierra Leone Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture is committed to this objective and has therefore offered free of cost membership to students with accompanying benefits such as limited free access to the library, internship opportunities and 50% discount to participate in Chamber networking events. It is our sincere hope that this gesture will offer students the opportunity to identify their skills and strengths, explore career pathways, acquire a broad business knowledge base, build strong networks and associations, be able to understand contemporary issues and be informed as responsible citizens with a sense of national and global identity. This new building will be the place where these students and small businesses will build their capacity along with their aspirations, supported by our membership and staff, who are available to offer business consulting services as part of our contribution to develop our country's leaders for tomorrow.

The Chamber has so much potential and opportunities on offer. This building is just the first step of many projects to be implemented that offer opportunities. The building alone cannot infuse the vision and passion that guide the Chamber's development. It is the human spirit and interaction between Chamber members and staff which will make the difference and ensure the new building supports higher levels of business continuity. I therefore encourage everyone to make maximum use of this building and facilities therein. Our next challenge is to construct an exhibition centre that will encourage business and economic growth, saving costs, and

strengthening the Chamber's underpinning role of supporting businesses in Sierra Leone. Our mission is to be the focus for the whole business community by promoting commercial, industrial and agricultural growth through the private sector. The Chamber has some of the very best businessmen and women with influential standing in the country today, and we believe this building will be an addition that takes us closer of making available business services that will benefit the business community.

It is of great importance to us all – our members and guests gathered here today - that His Excellency, has graced this occasion to officially open this building. This will further encourage us to strengthen our resolve that the future of this Chamber shall be worthy of those men and women of character and ability, the result of whose labours we inherited. We look forward to showing your Excellency the sections housed here within the next 30minutes or so, and to keeping you informed of our progress.

Thank you for listening and most of all, thank you for making a difference. I now have the pleasure of handing over to our Chairperson, Mrs. Alice Onomake. Thank you and God bless us all.