

**SLCCIA PRESIDENT SPEECH AT THE GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING HELD AT
MIATTA CONFERENCE HALL ON TUESDAY 10TH OCTOBER 2017.
THEME: “REBRANDING YOUR CHAMBER”**

Your Excellences, members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps, Bilateral Partners, distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen; on behalf of the Sierra Leone Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture I welcome you to yet another General Membership Meeting. I am honored and humbled to serve as the President of the Sierra Leone Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture. I follow a strong legacy of leaders who have worked together with the staff, Council and businesses to make Sierra Leone Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture (SLCCIA) the voice of the business community.

In March 2016, The Chamber hosted a Strategic planning weekend for its Council Members, at the end of which a 5-year Strategic Plan was agreed. Amongst the nine pillars identified was Stakeholder engagement, the need to restructure the secretariat and brand development. These initiatives are crucial towards rebranding the image of the Chamber, and today we are gathered here to update you on some of achievements we have all made together in line with the strategic plan.

The Chamber under my leadership made a top priority to invest and acquire a new building. The building which is located at 24 Charlotte street, central business district housed two important arms of the Chamber namely; the African Growth Opportunity Act (AGOA) Trade resource centre and the Centre for Alternative Dispute Resolution (CADR) .The AGOA Trade Resource Centre has been established to help channel all partners’ effort in a way that will address critical constraint to trade competitiveness, capture opportunities to expand trade, demonstrate regional productive potential to investors, and facilitate greater investment. We are therefore confident that this arm will help increase export and support our local businesses to expand and access international markets duty and free.

The CADR which is also an important arm has been made available to our members and the wider national and regional business community seeking Alternative Dispute Redress (ADR).We believe this will contribute to creating a business environment that increases confidence in the private sector to make investments and to support the growth of businesses of all sizes. More information on how you are able to access these services are available through our website and secretariat desk at the office premises. In addition, the facility also now have a much 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 available for business 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.

Your Excellencies, distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, The Chamber also focused on series of stakeholder engagement, networking, and member support as a means of rebranding the chamber. With our quest and efforts to ensure the business community especially the Chambers SME's has access to finance, our Partner, **IFC** approached us to discuss possible ways by which we can explore/access finance through local currency funding for SME's. As I speak, we have now been given the option to nominate two local businesses that can serve as a test case .The successful outcome of these trials have the potential to make available funding to other businesses.

The Chamber had several meetings in which we engaged government to ensure contracts are given to only corporate bodies that are fully registered with the Corporate Affairs Commission. This will ensure that monies due to the state does not end up in the pockets of the very few at the expense of the majority. This will also ensure that these institutions meet their tax obligation and create an atmosphere of fair play for all businesses.

We also participated on a "Private Sector & NRA Forum" on Taxes & GST and advocated for a review of our taxes and how this can improve our business climate, encourage investment and increase government revenue.

In support of pillar one of the Agenda of Prosperity which focused on Economic diversification, The Chamber organized a private sector seminar on "Made in Sierra Leone" in collaboration with MOFED in which we advocated for this initiative to be private sector/ministerial technical team driven for it to become successful and sustainable. We believe this direction is necessary to enhance continuity of the "made in SL" initiative and drive economic growth through local businesses taking advantage of increased production and export market.

The Chamber has also actively participated in the review and the technical validation of the draft national labour migration policy of Sierra Leone. We believe that if properly implemented and managed, it can help reduce poverty, contribute to overall economic development, and promote the protection of migrant workers and their families, good governance and the creation of decent working opportunities for both migrants and citizens.

Through our Sierra Leone-China Cooperation and partnership, The Chamber has benefitted from several seminars and training opportunities such as meeting of Chambers' of Commerce for English Speaking West African Countries and now Expanding International Markets. These meetings led to the signing of an MOU for private sector cooperation, International trade promotion and people exchange between the two countries under the belt and road initiative.

In August of this year, our country witnessed so much death and devastation caused by the floods and mudslides at Regent and the surrounding communities. This sad event rendered many helpless families without food, clothing and shelter. The floods swept away their meager belongings and destroyed their homes. Children and the elderly have been the most vulnerable victims. To assist Government in dealing with the consequences of the mudslide and flood, I appealed for your support and collaboration to support victims affected by this disaster. Mr. Oluniyi Robbin-Cocker led the private sector coordination from our side, and I would like to thank each and every one of you for your cooperation, support and assistance provided. It is imperative to continue to work together and act in one voice for the sake of posterity and our beloved country and generations yet unborn. There are other people who made personal donations and such money has been put together to provide food, beddings and other items of need to the victims. This activity will take place soon on a date to be announced. May the souls of the faithful departed continue to rest in peace.

Recently, the University of Makeni in partnership with the University of Milan in Italy joined the Chamber. Their membership also provides opportunities for business seminars; assist businesses in developing realistic business plans that could be used to access finance; The University also offer training on Entrepreneurship and many other topics with certifications. There are also many businesses within the membership that provide high quality business development and training services in various sectors, areas and discipline. The Chamber intends to engage all of these institutions with the aim of negotiating discounts for some of you who may be interested in their services. You can also obtain on-line training on a variety of topics through our website. Our chamber emphasizes that we work to find ways for you to network with other members, have opportunities, showcase and promote your business, obtain valuable information and training, get your business name in front of potential customers and get involved in the chamber through your participation and committee membership.

We do know that our members are in search of solutions that allow them to enhance their brand recognition and develop relationships with talent much earlier in the education process. We also

do know that they continue to struggle to find the skilled workers they need to compete. This is why your Chamber recently participated in the National Youth Service Scheme workshop at the National Stadium to collaborate with the commission with the aim to build a sustainable, balanced economy and our education reforms designed to meet the business community labour needs. Engaging with apprenticeships enables you to identify and meet your skills needs. This also means helping more businesses, particularly SMEs, to recruit their first apprentice.

We believe this can be achieved through continuous engagement and collaboration and by building sustainable relationships in which value is shared between the Commission and business community alike.

Your Excellencies, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, let me now focus on other services we now have to offer to ensure we continue to remain relevant to the membership and our Partners. Recently we have reviewed our membership categories to include Students and Patrons. Detailed benefits of these categories can be found on our brochures and website. The chamber recognizes the importance of small businesses and therefore have included free business consulting and advisory services to Chamber small business members .The Chamber is upgrading its website and the homepage of this site is also dedicated to promoting the profile of our businesses and to connect with the entire world. I implore you all to take advantage of this opportunity.

Your Excellencies, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, I can confidently say the Chamber has increased its role by proactively and actively participating in the country's business climate and economic development. In the past, we were, in some cases involved in key issues only when they have been passed by the state. It would have far too late to make meaningful contributions or changes to the outcome. Today, we have taken the lead and it has begun to bear some yields. We are actively moving from a Chamber that was considered to identify problems to one that is regarded as solution driven; a private sector leadership which encourage all constituents such as business and government to get involved together through the Public-private dialogue window.

In spite of the successes we have achieved together, we have also over the years faced challenges, but I want us to be able to look back and say we are better because of the challenges we overcame together to make Sierra Leone Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture what it is today. Throughout it all, the Chamber has been an encouragement and resource to lead the way for a brighter future.

Ensuring that all voices are heard and participate in the country's future is not easy. We will not relent and we will not give up. I believe it is a challenge for all of us to begin or continue supporting in our own ways activities that will help continue to make the Chamber a great place to network, support our businesses, live and work. I have every confidence that working together will help us achieve the much desired result we are all anticipating. I want us to reflect on the theme "**Rebranding your Chamber.**" To start, let's reflect on ourselves personally and professionally. Where are we? How do we want to see the Chamber in 5 or 10 years' time? Do we need to work together to fight the common cause of our membership that can be lighthouses to guide us into the future? Do we need to help those coming behind us? This kind of self-evaluation isn't always easy, but as passionate and determined members we have to understand that we're all in this together. As we grow and succeed individually, we build our businesses, our chamber and country together. Together we can continue to make Sierra Leone Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture the best place to network, live, work and play in the future, too.

We need you to provide the Chamber with information on issues that affect you to enable us act. Let your voice be heard. Make use of your membership. Don't give up on your Chamber. The Chamber is as good as your input and contribution. Honour your commitment and refer non-members to become members of the Chamber. We are all volunteers and we expect that our members will lend a hand throughout the year with their time, talents and great ideas to continue discovering ways to promote business in our community. We want to be in a situation where we will participate in the development of government policies and to directly improve each corporate member's quality of service. The Sierra Leone Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture have been carrying the torch and rallying on behalf of the business sector through your membership. If we are to eliminate the obstacles that impede our competitiveness potentials, our Leadership along with our vigilance to succeed should be set. Leadership along with vigilance should exist on the floor. To link vigilance and operational reality, performance measures should be set to refine our common goals of creating a better business environment for economic growth and sustainability. We need to act, speak together with one voice. Change the way we have been doing things and a willingness to take new and innovative approaches in order to best serve our members. Change can pose big challenges for any organisation but I am glad to say that I think the changes we will make will bear fruit.

I look forward to all of us doing our part towards rebranding the chamber and building a stronger network, powerful voice by helping each other combat issues and problems hindering our

businesses from being fully productive and globally competitive.

Thanks to the work of the Chamber's Council and its staff, our membership is growing gradually and we have added more categories to reach out other interested members. I believe we are moving in the right direction and in the long-run, we will become sustainable.

There is tremendous good will towards the Chamber and the role that we seek to play in promoting business between public and private partnership. However, in order to continually attract new members and to offer unique services to our members, we must be agile and our support structure must reflect our size and membership needs.

We are grateful for the support of the following institutions that supported this rebranding initiative;

- NP(SL) Ltd
- Mercury International (SL) Ltd
- Sierra Leone Commercial Bank Ltd
- Rokel Commercial Bank
- Sierra Leone National Shipping Company Ltd
- Guaranty Trust Bank and
- Electricity Distribution and Supply Authority

A special word of thanks to the CEO and his team for the huge effort they put into the meeting to make it such a success. We all strive for continuous improvement but I think you will agree that this general membership meeting saw a massive step forward in responding to the needs of our members and an engagement with stakeholder's point of view.

In the months ahead, Sierra Leone Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture will play a leading role in public-private dialogue(PPD) in collaboration with MOFED, MTI, Banks etc. ;extend stakeholder engagement and foster Technical and Bilateral relations of Economic Cooperation with our Partners with the aim to further provide Capacity Trainings for Chamber Members as well as Logistical Support; Invest in Research on pro poor private sector development initiatives and Launch Business Education Seminar. We will Partner with relevant institutions to support universities and women entrepreneurs as part of our Corporate Social Responsibility drive; organize match-making events to promote SMEs. We will continue to

engage Government on the high taxes and environmental laws that continue to affect our business climate and discourage investment. We will not work alone but, we will work side by side with the Government of Sierra Leone to pursue this agenda and also use our own business networks to advance the case.

I want to thank our Council, our Management Committee, board representatives and our staff for their continued work on behalf of the Chamber. We exist to serve our Members and I especially thank all our Members for their support and engagement in the interests not only of their own businesses but of the wider contribution of trade to the wellbeing of all

At your Chamber, we work hard to provide real benefits for you and your employees, and we hope you will continue to join us in making Sierra Leone Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture a great place to live, work and play. Remember, membership in the Chamber is an investment in your community and in Sierra Leone's future.

We thank you for being an integral part of that future