

Transforming a Dream into Reality

Statement Delivered by Hon. Alpha O. Timbo, Minister of Basic and Senior Secondary Education, during the Launch of the Free Quality School Education Programme and the Multi-Partner Education for Development Basket Fund at the Miatta Conference Centre, Freetown, Sierra Leone on Monday 20th August 2018

Mr. Chairman,

Your Excellency Mr. President, Rtd. Brigadier Julius Maada Bio,

Hon. Vice-President, Dr Mohamed Juldeh Jalloh,

Hon. Former Vice Presidents, Solomon E Berewa and Dr Albert Joe Demby,

HE First Lady, Mrs Fatima Bio,

Mr. Speaker of Parliament, Hon. Dr Abass Chernor Bundu,

My Lord the Chief Justice, Abdulai Charm,

Colleague Ministers of Government,

Hon. Members of Parliament,

Your Worship the Mayor of the Freetown Municipality and other Heads of Local Councils,

Paramount Chiefs,

Excellencies - Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corp,

Heads of Agencies and Development Partners,

Heads of Civil Society Organisations,

The President and executive of the SLTU,

Heads of Educational Institutions,

Members of the Fourth Estate,

Pupils and Students from Schools and Colleges,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen;

I stand here on behalf of all arms of the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education but particularly the political. All of us at the Ministry are full of joy for today because we are at the dawn of a day that will see Sierra Leone transformed – not to the Athens of West Africa as many would wish but to something bigger

and better – a Sierra Leone that will be the envy of Africa and ultimately – the wonder of the world. This is not just a pipe-dream but a goal that is achievable by the generations to come so long as all Sierra Leoneans are provided with opportunity to receive education of quality and hence to become educated in its fullest sense. Although we have done significant preparatory work, today we take the first officially announced step along the path to free quality school education for all Sierra Leoneans. This is not a journey that can be completed by the Government of any developing country in a day, month or year as some critics may allege. Rather, it is a journey that requires God’s divine intervention, determined political leadership, proper planning as well as sufficient and efficient management of resources to make journey completion certain. Let me take a few minutes of your time to quickly go through our preparations for this journey and our progress to date.

In our Sierra Leone Peoples Party (SLPP) Manifesto, our then Presidential Candidate Rtd. Brigadier Julius Maada Bio made a promise to Sierra Leoneans that on becoming elected he would “introduce free quality education from primary to senior secondary school” as the centre-piece of his plan. In order to ‘give life’ to the words of the Manifesto, my humble self and Madame Emily Gogra were appointed as Minister and Deputy-Minister respectively of the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) to provide political leadership and guide the transformation of the dream of free quality school education to reality. We have since our appointment been spending sleepless nights along with competent staff of my Ministry, development partners and other helpers to make ‘Free Quality School Education’ – FQSE happen using every means at our disposal.

Mr. Chairman, in a statement at the Commonwealth Summit of Heads of State and his address at the State Opening of the First Session of the Fifth Parliament of the Second Republic of Sierra Leone on 10 May 2018, the President repeated his pledge “to increase access to quality pre-primary, primary, secondary, technical and vocational education and training as well as university education” and stated that “starting September 2018, my Government will introduce Free Education from primary level to senior secondary school as promised”. Well – this is 20th August 2018 and we are here to launch the “free education” promised for September 2018, starting with not just the primary level but rather the pre-primary level and not just “free” but “free quality” education.

Cognisant of the huge financial, material and human resource requirement, HE the President announced in the same State Opening of Parliament address, his intention to “establish a Multi-Partner Education for Development Basket Fund” and two Committees – “a High Level Inter-Ministerial and Partners Group (IMPG) on Free Education” and “a Technical Group (TG) on Education”. Both committees have been established with the IMPG having its inaugural meeting at State House, under the able leadership of our extremely competent Chairman for this event – Prof. David Francis, on 7 June 2018 and the Technical Group on 21 June 2018 under the leadership of our able Chief Education Officer – Dr. Alhaji M. Kamara. Through the work of these two committees, staff of my Ministry, technical staff of other MDAs, a large number of unpaid technical assistants (in the persons of Samson Hajalie, Abu Bakar Jalloh, Hamidu Jalloh, Abdul karim Sow, Elias Achioleous, Mohamed Fofanah, Emanuel Deoud, Osman Dainkeh, Abu Bakar Taal, Augustine Bamie Anthony, Desmond Jones and Ibrahim kanu) and partners in education, we have today reached the point that we can launch, what many skeptics believed was impossible when detailed in our Manifesto i.e. a free quality school education programme.

Mr Chairman, your Excellency getting FQSE started has involved significant consultations at all levels nation-wide. We started with Cabinet Ministers, the leaders of the political parties represented in Parliament, the Parliamentary Oversight Committee for Education, Local Councils, traditional leaders, religious leaders, proprietors of schools, Donors, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and other partners working in Education, the Conference of Principals of Secondary Schools (CPSS), the National Council of Head-Teachers (NaCoHT), representatives of private schools, the Association of Independent Schools, the leadership of financial institutions (Banks) through whom payment to schools and teachers are made, the Sierra Leone Teachers’ Union (SLTU), Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), representatives of textbook publishers and writers, representatives of students, market women, Members of the Fourth Estate, etc., etc.

Global evidence shows that profound changes in education, such as the introduction of free quality education have improved the educational opportunities of millions of students. With the foregoing in mind. We at the MBSSE dissected the contents of the SLPP Manifesto and State Opening of Parliament address proposed and placed recommended activities and

interventions, timelines for start-up as well as related issues that should be taken into consideration in the implementation of the programme.

Mr. Chairman, during a Cabinet Retreat organised by the Chief Minister, i.e. your humble self, a number of ideas were generated that called for a review of the path we originally intended to follow as per our Manifesto. With Cabinet confirming adoption of Free Quality Education as the Flagship Programme of Government, our enthusiasm was taken to new heights and we plunged ourselves into the work of making free quality school education happen.

Mr. Chairman, re-invigorated by the support from Cabinet, we threw ourselves into work already started on estimating the magnitude of the programme. We double-checked information on estimating enrolment at all levels of schooling using different scenarios together with likely numbers of 'over-aged' pupils to be accommodated as well as associated numbers of teachers. By this means we were able to arrive at a robust estimate of the maximum number of pupils that the Government would have to cater for if provisions had to be made for all children or only those attending Government and Government-assisted schools. Currently we are targeting, for the first phase of the FQSE programme, a total of approximately 2.14 million pupils and 8,000 schools Government and Government-assisted schools, using a projection based on average annual changes in enrolment from the 2015 to 2017 and estimated increases resulting from the introduction of the programme.

Under my directive and with the support of DFID and the World Bank, the 2018 National school census has been conducted using tablets and the latest data gathering software. Both the tablets and software were provided by the World Bank, with the Education Specialist – Andy, and DFID's Jordan providing strategic guidance and leadership. Currently checks are being conducted and cleaning ongoing on the data collected. When completed, the clean data will be uploaded and used to update enrolment, teacher and school numbers. The data will be available at the click of a button by HE the President, the Ministry of Finance and other stakeholders. With the checks and new structures that are going to be in place, ghost teachers and schools will become fewer and fewer until finally all ghosts return to where they belong - out of education system and in another world.

We are happy to report here that the Ministry of Finance has made significant provisions to ensure coverage of much of the costs associated with the projected

enrolment, school and teacher numbers for Government and Government-assisted schools. In particular, in order to re-inforce the quality aspect of the FQSE, the Ministry of Finance has not only provided for items to soon be announced by the President, but for a more than adequate supply of teachers – ***Ministry of Finance under the leadership of the Minister Jacob J Saffa, the Financial Secretary – Sahr Jusu and his Deputy Matthew Dingie, Dausy Wurie, Sorie Kamara, Richard Williams, accountant general, Laurence Caulker and Abu Bakar Conteh among others– Stand up and take a bow!***

With regard to free core subject textbooks to be provided under the FQSE Programme, for the 2018/19 school year, extensive consultations were held with various authors, publishers and development partners on the specific books to be supplied to schools. A new ‘core’ subject is French but textbooks for the subject have not been procured to meet up the start of the 2018/19 school year because of the current paucity of teachers to teach French in schools. In order to address the situation, a Task Force has been appointed to work with the Teaching Service Commission and teacher training institutions to revitalize the teaching of French in our educational institutions. We see the revitalization of the teaching of French as having benefits that extend beyond the boundaries of the education sector to other sectors that are key in advancing our development agenda.

In order to address the key challenges encountered in preparing for the start-up of the FQSE Programme in the area of textbooks, a Textbook Task Force will be appointed in the 2019/20 school year to oversee the integration of materials by various authors and publishers to produce textbooks that fully meet the requirements of the programme and the new textbooks policy. In the meanwhile it is heartening to note that the Department for International Development (DFID) of the United Kingdom (UK) under the Leh Wi Lan Project is providing junior and senior secondary pupil textbooks in English Language and Mathematics so that implementation of FQSE can proceed as planned. ***Thank you DFID and MOTT Macdonald (Leh Wi Lan).***

Notwithstanding the allocation of 21% of the recurrent budget to education by the Ministry of Finance, without the kind of additional support provided by DFID, implementation of even this first phase of the FQSE Programme would be very challenging. Additionally, as we move on to subsequent phases of the implementation of the programme, especially those requiring additional ‘quality’ interventions, the financing and other resources challenges will increase. This is

one reason we need the Multi-Partner Education for Development Basket Fund that will be launched here today, together with other internally generated non-budget sources of funds as well as donations from companies, groups and ordinary Sierra Leoneans in-country and in the diaspora. In short we need everyone to “put their hands to the wheel”.

Mr. Chairman, it is worth noting that in addition to the recently established Cabinet Sub-Committee on Education under my leadership, we are putting in place an FQSE implementation oversight structure which involves not just the IMPG and Technical Committee/Group (TG) working alongside traditional bodies such as the School Management Committees (SMCs) and Boards of Governors of Secondary Schools but also new innovative decentralized entities such as Ward Education Committees and District Education Committees. The terms of reference (TORs) and memberships of these new innovative bodies are being finalized and some leaders of political parties have started submitting the names of their nominees for membership of the Ward Education Committees, while NGC have done so already.

Mr. Chairman, all present, all watching and listening, we have not fooled ourselves at the MBSSE into thinking that we are the fountain of all knowledge and understanding. We have thus worked tirelessly with other MDAs and our partners on the constituent parts of FQSE as well as the associated implementation risks, costs, timelines and implementation strategies. ***At this point, I would like MDAs and partners represented on the IMPG and Technical Committee/Group to rise up and take a bow – You have really done fantastic work.*** The Department for International Development (DFID) – our Lead partner, UNICEF – our supervising/management agency for our Global Partnership for Education (GPE) Programme, the World Bank, and the European Union deserve special mention as our main sector donors and the providers of significant support for the FQSE and other sector interventions. ***Representatives of the donors just announced and those implementing education projects on their behalf - – Hamid, Chris Berry, Celeste, Kayode Sanni, Barrie, Bunting, Dan, Giuseppe, Manfred, Andy, Annie Homer – the whole team – you know yourselves - Please Stand so that your contributions can be recognized. Hamid and Celeste of UNICEF will be helping us greatly with implementation of our new GPE programme.***

I wish to stress here that the FQSE Programme is one that is phased over a number of years – the journey is long. As we move along, we will take new things on board,

we will change trains to others that are bigger and better with newer technology and innovations and we will move on to even more futuristic modes of transportation. The possibilities are endless and we are determined to ensure that the journey goes well and that we get to our destination safely. Notwithstanding the determination of the Government, we all have our roles to play and duties to perform to ensure that the journey goes as planned. In this regard, parents/guardians, pupils, teachers, heads of schools, proprietors must all realize that they have important roles to play. There is ample evidence that high quality teaching, increased and equal access for all has opened the doors to great schools, classrooms, etc. We can all contribute to making our schools great. Parents/Guardians – you must ensure that your children go to school and provide them with time at home to rest and study. Teachers – You must go to the classroom on time and teach for the whole period. Pupils you must stay at school, go to class and focus on what is being taught rather than on things that will hinder your education. Heads of schools you must ensure that learning takes place in the school. Proprietors – you must ensure that the school/classroom environment is conducive for learning. Since a failure of anyone to play his/her role properly is likely to result in unwanted problems, the Government will not take kindly to defaulters.

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Guests, children of Sierra Leone, teachers, we have been presented with a new open exercise book with just one heading written by His Excellency the President – Free Quality School Education for Sierra Leone – We have been invited to write into that book – We need to take care of what we write for what we write can never be erased and we will be called to account for what was written by generations to come – not as members of a political party or a particular ethnic group or religion but as a Sierra Leonean since what we write will determine the future development and prosperity of the whole nation. Through what we write we are opening doors for the children of Sierra Leone. The current Government, under the distinguished and determined leadership of Rtd. Brigadier J. M. Bio supported by the First Lady Mrs. Fatima Bio and the V. P. Dr. Mohamed Juldeh Jalloh, may have taken the lead but this venture is one that needs all Sierra Leoneans on board. This is why we are heartened by the support given by various leaders of the opposition in the persons of Hon. Chernor M. Bah of APC, Alhaji Dr. Kandeh Kolleh Yumkella of NGC and Hon. Sahr Emerson Lamina of C4C, during the debate on the President’s State Opening of Parliament address. I, as the Minister responsible for the time being for Basic and Senior Secondary Education, have

opened and continue to open my arms to representatives of all political parties, ethnic groups, religious groups and civil society organisations, to join with us in this endeavor. Let us for a moment forget about our supposed differences for I am certain that at the end of it all, we all have one common goal in view - that is making Sierra Leone something bigger and better than the Athens of West Africa. Together, we can today start to transform this dream into reality.

Mr. Chairman – I have so much to say and so little time to say it so before I am shown the red card, let me end by thanking the Chairman and Members of the Parliamentary Oversight Committee on Education for the support given to date. We are extremely encouraged by the fact that all of you share our dream and have accordingly taken steps to complement our efforts in every way possible.

At this point, I would like to publicly thank Dr. A. C. T. (Chuku) Dupigny, Education Consultant, MBSSE, Mr. Horatio Nelson-Williams, Executive Secretary, Basic Education Secretariat, the Permanent Secretary – Mrs Nancy K. Tengbeh, the CEO – Dr. Alhaji M. Kamara, the Director of Planning and Policy – Mrs. Adama J. Momoh, the Director of the Inspectorate – Mr. Mohamed S. Sesay, Dr Staneala M. Beckley, chairperson Teaching service commission, Mrs Kona Kamara, Deputy director human resource, Brima M Turay, Deputy director school broadcasting and PRO, S.O.Z. Alghali, deputy secretary, John K Ansumana, deputy director planning and policy, Sahid Conteh, Mrs Salamatu Koroma, Mrs Nana Buckarie, Ms Coker, Secretary/Stenographer and all others at the MBSSE who worked so hard to get us to this point. Let me also thank all of you who, although not mentioned by name here, are, through your words and actions, contributing to making our dream come true. To the Chief Minister and Lansana Keifala, thank you for your overall guidance and support.

To all of you waiting with bated breath – All of you who have been asking me endlessly for the contents of the FQSE package – the long expected day has arrived. As I have always promised, the contents of the FQSE package will be announced by our esteemed President and today is the day that he reveals the contents of the first phase of the FQSE.

Finally, to our audience seated here and listening or watching throughout the length and breadth of Sierra Leone. My Sierra Leonean fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, Aunts, Uncles, Cousins and In-Laws present in-country and in the diaspora – Free Quality School Education is for all of us and I invite all of you to

join in this movement to make Sierra Leone something bigger and better than the Athens of West Africa – I thank you all very much -

MAY GOD/ALLAH BLESS US ALL