

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY PRESIDENT JULIUS MAADA BIO ON THE THEME:
“EDUCATION FOR DEVELOPMENT” AT THE LAUNCH OF THE FREE QUALITY SCHOOL EDUCATION
PROGRAMME**

VENUE: MIATTA CONFERENCE CENTRE

DATE: MONDAY 20TH AUGUST, 2018.

Hon. Vice President
Hon. Speaker of Parliament
My Lord the Chief Justice
Hon. Members of Parliament
Ministers of Government
Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps
Your Worship the Mayor of Freetown Municipality
Mayors of other City Councils and Chairmen of District Councils
Our Development Partners
Representatives of Civil Society Organisations
Revered Paramount Chiefs
Pupils and Students
Members of the Fourth Estate
Distinguished Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen

During the election campaign when I promised free quality education, my political opponents said it was never possible and described it as a political gimmick. My political opponents also said, the promise was a political deception just to win votes and the cynics thought it was the usual election promise that quickly disappears after election results.

In less than six months since I assumed Office as President, we are gathered here today to say free quality education is POSSIBLE. What the opponents described as a political gimmick and a deception, today we are making it a political reality. And, the promise the cynics thought will disappear after election results, today we are here to formally honour that promise. This is a new beginning for Education in Sierra Leone.

Education is an investment for human and economic development. It is a strong pillar for the nation's industries and also the foundation of moral regeneration and revival of its people. Without quality education, a nation cannot get the needed manpower for socio-economic advancement and an enlightened citizenry. This is why, it is argued that the quality of a nation's education determines the level of its national development.

Ladies and Gentlemen, my Government inherited an educational system that did not only fail to provide increased access but was also in rapid decline. Whether it was the scene of two or more pupils sharing a single examination paper during public examination or children and parents carrying chairs and desks to examination centers, the poor standards in education became a stain on our collective conscience especially for a country once celebrated for having the “Athens of West Africa”.

My Government is determined to have a break from our immediate past. This is why as a Presidential Candidate, I prioritized Education in the SLPP Manifesto and continued as President during my Address on the occasion of the State Opening of the First Session of the Fifth Parliament. In both documents, education is espoused as a powerful instrument for national development and progress.

As President, in order to demonstrate my commitment to education and in keeping with my promise, my Government has increased the budgetary allocation to education to 21% of the National Budget and several strides have already been made in so short a time to commence the implementation of the Free Quality School Education Programme. However, we cannot do this alone as a Government and that is why we are calling on our development partners and friends to come onboard and support this programme.

My Government has established a Technical Committee to provide the road map and technical guidance to the Inter-Ministerial and Partnership Group (IMPG) on the Free Quality School Education Programme. The committee has submitted a report to the IMPG with recommendations on the components of the Free Quality

School Education Programme (FQSEP), an estimated budget and strategies to ensure efficient and effective implementation of the programme.

The first phase of the implementation of the Free Quality School Education Programme has already commenced with additional classes this August 2018 for newly promoted Senior Secondary School (SSS 2) students in all Government and Government-assisted schools.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am also delighted to inform you all that the inherited 6-3-4-4 system of education has been reverted to the 6-3-3-4 system starting this 2018/19 school year which commences on 17th September, 2018. This means, from September 2018, there will be NO MORE SS4. I promised the pupils that there will be no more SS4 and today I have honored that promise.

Mr. Chairman, to help oversee implementation of the Free Quality School Education Programme, various structures have been put in place. These include Ward Education Committees (WECs) which are to be established in all 154 Political Wards in the country. The WECs are different in make-up and responsibilities from the Ward Committees under the Local Councils. They are charged with, amongst other things, the responsibility for monitoring the education sector in their respective geographical areas.

Also, my Government has interfaced with our Commercial Banks to address issues of invalid/inaccurate school Bank Account details for early payment of school subsidies before the re-opening of schools in September this year.

Additionally, Lesson Plans for Basic Education and Senior Secondary Education have been developed, so also are structures to recruit and retain support staff to help in ensuring quality service delivery in schools. The support staff will assist in effective lesson planning and delivery to support the progress of all children in the classroom. Children at their earliest ages should learn and realize the importance of education in their lives. It is imperative on us to show them that Education is the ticket to fulfilling their dreams and having a productive life.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, given the breadth of issues to be addressed including the financial and capacity constraints, the implementation of the Free Quality School Education Programme will be phased over a period of 5 years to allow us to achieve our goal. All Government and Government-assisted schools will benefit from the Free Quality School Education Programme starting from 17th September 2018.

In a related vein, all unapproved schools that meet the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) minimum standards are in the process of being approved. All public schools that are approved and request Government's financial support will become Government-assisted schools.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, the first phase of the Free Quality School Education Programme will consist of the following:

School fees subsidy for all Government and Government-assisted Pre-Primary, Primary, Junior Secondary and Senior Secondary Schools Accelerated Primary School Programme for 'over-aged' children in Non-Formal Education Learning Centers NPSE, BECE, WASSCE and NVQ Examination Fees for students attending Government and Government-assisted Schools Textbooks in the four 'core' subjects of English Language, Mathematics, Integrated Science and Social Studies/Civic Education Essential Teaching and Learning Materials (TLMs) for schools and pupils at all levels of schooling. The package will include exercise books, pens, pencils, chalk, registers, sports equipment, etc.

Making the Teaching Service Commission (TSC) more fully functional Bringing additional teachers on to the payroll Salary increases for teachers on Grades 1 to 6 of the GoSL salary scale Commencement of School feeding for Government and Government-assisted Schools in areas to be announced shortly by the Minister of Basic and Senior Secondary Education Supply of some furniture for Government and Government-assisted Schools identified as having the greatest need. This is to be a precursor to more significant supplies in the coming school years with a maintenance regime to be prescribed by the Minister of Basic and Senior Secondary Education and Rehabilitation/Expansion/Re-construction of Government and Government-assisted schools and classrooms.

Therefore, with this first phase of the Free Quality School Education Programme, I am delighted to announce that commencing 17th September 2018, there will be:

No school fees nor admission fees in Government and Government-assisted schools for Pre-Primary, Primary, Junior Secondary and Senior Secondary education
Timely fee subsidy payments to Government and Government-assisted schools
Free accelerated Primary School Learning Programme in the Ministry of Education
Non-Formal Learning Centers
Free exercise books, pens, pencils, etc. for students attending Government and Government-assisted schools
Free chalk, registers, sporting equipment, etc. for Government and Government-assisted schools
Free four core subject textbooks for pupils attending Government and Government-assisted Schools with support from DFID.

NPSE, BECE, WASSCE and NVQ Free for students attending Government and Government-assisted schools
More schools in deprived and under-served areas benefitting from school feeding through support from CRS, WFP, JAM and GoSL
More trained and qualified teachers placed on the Government payroll
Much needed furniture supplied to schools badly in need in all districts
Preliminary work on the infrastructure of selected schools in all districts

Whilst my Government will provide all of the above during the first phase of implementation of the Free Quality School Education (FQSE) Programme, it is worth noting that 17th September 2018 is just the date for the start of the first phase not the date on which everything will be completed or delivered.

It is also important to note that whilst my Government will be covering all 'core' costs as described earlier, parents and guardians will also be required to show their commitment to the education of their child/ward by covering the following ancillary costs during the implementation of the first phase of the Free Quality School Education (FQSE) Programme. These ancillary costs will include:

Footwear

Transportation to and from school where applicable

Extra/Additional pencils, pens, erasers, exercise books, etc. above the allocation per child made by the Government

Optional Subject Textbooks

School uniforms

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, let me also be very clear, parents, guardians, teachers, school heads and proprietors should note that inefficient and ineffective teaching and learning will have no place in our educational system. Whilst my Government is prepared to cover the cost of one repeat per level of schooling (primary, junior secondary, senior secondary), the cost of more than one repetition will have to be covered by the parent or guardian.

This means that, it is the responsibility of teachers to teach properly and the duty of the parents and guardians to ensure that the child goes to school, stays in school for the full school day and has time at home to rest, do homework and study. Subjecting a child to excessive domestic work or sending her/him out to do street trading instead of studying will not be acceptable.

Also, I wish to remind parents and guardians that the current Education Act of 2004 makes it compulsory for parents including guardians to send their children to school to receive primary and junior secondary education. The Education Act further provides that a parent including guardian who neglects to send his child to school for primary and secondary education commits an offence and shall be liable on conviction to a fine or imprisonment or both. Because this provision in the law has not been enforced, many children of primary and junior secondary age are out of school. This cannot continue to happen now that education in Government and Government-assisted Schools is free.

Therefore, once the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education is satisfied that provision in terms of availability of schools nation-wide is adequate, not only in terms of numbers but also in terms of easy accessibility by pupils, and that all functioning schools have been approved to operate either as private, Government or Government-assisted, the Education Act of 2004 will be strictly enforced.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, some proprietors of Government-assisted schools have been having a field day. Whilst it is true that many of the Mission Schools that are now benefitting from Government

assistance brought formal education to many parts of the country and have rendered note-worthy service to the nation, almost all have handed their obligations and responsibilities to the Government. Some of these proprietors of Government-assisted schools do nothing and rely on the Government for everything including construction of buildings, classrooms, toilets, supply of furniture, teaching and learning materials, provision of teachers and payment of their salaries, etc. This cannot continue to happen.

Proprietors will now be required to declare their contributions to the running cost of their schools or risk full take-over by the Government. In this regard, the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education will hold discussion with proprietors of schools in the coming school year to determine the percentage of the running cost of a school that should be covered by the proprietors.

Also, whilst Government acknowledges the good intentions of many partners, both local and international, communities and prospective politicians to start school projects, sadly these groups and individuals end up causing serious challenges for Government. This is because, they start these schools without any reference to the Education Ministry knowing fully well that they are going to pass the burden on to the Government and knowing that they haven't followed the Ministry's standards or met its requirements for that area. This cannot continue to happen.

Therefore, let me state here that no school is to be established or started without prior clearance from the Minister of Basic and Senior Secondary Education. Please take this as word of advice to the many individuals and organisations establishing schools simply to profit from the Free Quality School Education Programme.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I am also pleased to inform you all that in order to ensure schools do not resort to practices that will negate provisions made under the Free Quality School Education Programme, my Government has established a hotline at the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education for reporting all acts of impropriety by school officials. All reports will be investigated where necessary and appropriate actions will be taken. The number of the hotline is 4060 and it is free.

My Government has decided to go down the path of free quality education because it is no hidden secret that in modern times, educating the citizens of a country will not only serve as a catalyst for growth and development but also as a firm foundation that supports every fabric of society. Education is a fundamental right of every Sierra Leonean and can bring about desired change and development in both the human mind and the nation.

I cannot end without acknowledging the commitments made by our development partners with regard to this bold venture. I hope to see their beautiful words transform into action. I look forward in particular to seeing the commitments of our partners and donor countries already providing support to education in Sierra Leone as well as those which can potentially provide support. I also look forward to seeing what the business enterprises operating in Sierra Leone can do to support the Free Quality School Education Programme.

At this point, it will also be remiss if I fail to thank all those in diverse ways who have contributed towards the preparation and actualization of the first phase of the Free Quality School Education Programme. This is not only a legacy we are leaving for our children but also it is a precious inheritance for future generations.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, I now have the pleasure to officially launch the Free Quality School Education Programme, which I believe has the potential to transform our beloved country and provide a ladder of opportunity for every child to unleash its potentials.

I thank you all and may God continue to bless our beautiful Sierra Leone.