

The McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Nutrition Project (All Pikin for Learn IV) Launch – Chairman’s Remarks

(Alpha O. Timbo – Minister of Basic and Senior Secondary Education)

Your Excellency – President of the Republic of Sierra Leone – Rtd. Brigadier Julius Maada Bio

Colleague Ministers of Government

The United States Ambassador to Sierra Leone – Madam Maria E. Brewer

Vice President of Bill O’Keefe and Country Representative Paul Emes of Catholic Relief Services (CRS)

Mr. Dan Archibald of the USDA

Ms. Emily Royse Green of the United States Embassy in Sierra Leone

Koinadugu and Falaba Council Chairpersons and Members

Representatives of my Ministry and other MDAs present

Our Development Partners

Representatives of Civil Society Organisations

Representatives of Paramount Chiefs from Koinadugu and Falaba

Representatives of Beneficiary School Students

Members of the Fourth Estate

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Good Morning to everyone. It is so good to see so many of you here this morning.

I am both pleased and honoured to be here today to chair a ceremony which I know furthers the desires of our president. When he launched the Free Quality School Education (FQSE) Program in August he indicated by his action that access to quality education by all children was his number one priority and a necessary first step to addressing the issue that lies at the heart of the crippling poverty that has most of Sierra Leone in its grip. His dream

and our dreams for the development of our nation can only be met when the great majority, and not just a few of us, are educated. This can only happen when all Sierra Leoneans are able to enter and complete schooling. Programs that encourage children to enter and complete schooling are therefore highly valued by the current government. One such program is the School Feeding Program and its associated support packages. My own personal experience, and that of numerous other Sierra Leoneans of my age group and above, is that the serving of food in school was and is a major factor in many going to and completing schooling. In this regard, school feeding has been playing an important role in helping to reduce inequities in school enrolment and attendance. I'm sure that the CRS is aware of this fact hence its long involvement in supporting Government to provide school feeding and associated support in Sierra Leone.

Currently, school feeding interventions are all focused on the pre-primary and primary levels. CRS covers parts of Koinadugu and Falaba districts whilst the GoSL and its other partners cover parts of other districts. The GoSL school feeding intervention has much greater coverage than those of our partners combined, but even so coverage is not currently a hundred percent. The target of this Government is a hundred percent coverage of pre-primary and primary schools in all needy areas of Sierra Leone and so, whilst the GoSL will definitely be expanding its provision, I hope to hear from the CRS that it's also planning to expand school feeding provisions in the not too distant future.

The McGovern Dole Project which HE launches here today takes school feeding up another notch by ensuring that the food provided is not just delicious and filling but also nutritious and healthy. At the same time the fact that the project also address health and related issues indicates that there is a realisation that a child with a filled stomach is unlikely attend school regularly and/or learn if he/she is constantly unwell. The presence of my colleague Ministers of Government here today is evidence of the importance that this Government attaches to the physical as well as the cognitive well-being of every child. Led by HE the President, this Government is determined to ensure full collaboration of all MDAs in order to make access to and completion of schooling a reality.

I note with pleasure that the McGovern Dole Project Package has provisions for the improvement for teaching and learning in addition to the school feeding. The in-service training of teachers is of particular interest and I will be monitoring its implementation.

The importance and significance of this event is clearly indicated by the fact that HE – The President has taken time off his extremely busy schedule to grace this occasion. This is because of his commitment to the cause of education in Sierra Leone. In this regard, you

can rest assured that all activities that will impact positively on education will get his blessing.

That the US government is represented here by no other person but Her Excellency, the US Ambassador to Sierra Leone herself is a signal of the importance that the US also gives to the McGovern Dole Project. I note with interest that in addition to the Ambassador, a senior staff member of the Embassy and a USDA representative are also present. Please allow me to use the opportunity provided by your presence here to say that it is my hope and wish for ties between Sierra Leone and the US in the field of education to be really strengthened and in this regard Madam Ambassador, please expect a call from me very soon.

Vice-President of CRS, your organisation is a highly valued partner to Sierra Leone in many areas but most especially the field of education. We look forward to further strengthening of the partnership.

Given that this is supposed to be the Chairman's Remarks, I think that I should stop now so that I don't interfere too much with what those making statements will be saying. Before ending my remarks however please allow me to mention something that will be appearing in every part of Sierra Leone very soon – Ward Education Committees (WECs). I mention the WECs because they will be overseeing, monitoring and guiding schools in every Ward to ensure that they not only stay above the MBSSE minimum standard for schools but that they improve continuously. Amongst other things, this means that at the Ward level the WECs will be monitoring schools benefitting from the McGovern Dole Project intervention. You will hear a lot more about the WECs in the near future.

I end by repeating something hinted at earlier - the presence of so many high level individuals, led by HE, The President of Sierra Leone, here today is a clear indication that the McGovern Dole Project is viewed as having the potential to bring about positive changes in school attendance, teaching and learning in the areas of its implementation – In the long term we see it also contributing to the development of the areas in which it is implemented. It is my hope therefore that there will not only be a McGovern Dole V but also a VI, VII, VIII, etc., etc.

With these few words having been said (JOKE – LAUGH) – let me now invite the Resident Paramount Chief of Kabala to give his Welcome Address.