Mr. Chairman, Colleague Ministers, I bring you warm greetings from His Excellency the President, Brig. (Rtd.), Julius Maada Bio and the People of Sierra Leone.

The name Sierra Leone may bring memories of the Ebola outbreak in 2014 and the Mudslide in 2018; both of which, exposed the weakness of the health systems.

I however will like to report a silver lining as a consequence of these horrendous events.

Firstly, Government’s commitment to the health sector has been remarkable. The expenditure to the health sector in the budget has moved from 7.5% in 2018 to 11% in 2019; hoping to get to the Abuja Target of 15% by 2020.

An external evaluation by WHO country office affirmed considerable progress in the development of policies and structures to respond to health emergencies. The disease surveillance and laboratory platforms are now
capable of detecting epidemic prone diseases in real time. The detection of the Bombali and Marburg viruses in recent times is a reflection of the improvement in our science base. The health sector could now be reasonably considered as robust with its preparedness for disease detection and outbreaks responses.

This is now a good platform to strengthen primary healthcare services as the bedrock to Universal Health Care.

Firstly the health workforce is to increase by 40%; 15% were recruited in March and 25% will be recruited in September 2019. Furthermore, 200 Community Health Nurses (SECHNs) are receiving upgraded training to Registered Nurses (SRN) and 200 Certificate Midwives upgraded to Diploma Midwives. Further, redistribution of trained health personnel from hospitals to community health centres will be a major step for equitable service.

Recognizing a weakness in medicines, and medical supply chain, an Act of Parliament has established an Agency to bring efficiency and effectiveness to procurement, storage and distribution of medicines and medical supplies to support hospitals and community health services.
In the recognition that maternal deaths are related to teenage pregnancy, the First Lady championed the programme **“Hands off our Girls”**, which reverberated nationwide through Paramount Chiefs and their wives.

Stiff legislation against gender violence and rape has considerably reduced adverse/accidental events against adolescent girls and women.

Reproductive, maternal and child health services are considered as key in the universal health care. We are addressing the **“Three Delays”** that are deemed to contribute to maternal deaths by establishing the **Ambulance Services** to significantly reduce the time for a pregnant woman to access hospital services, solar refrigerators for Blood Services and laboratories in **Community Health Centre** to conduct 20 basic tests.

Furthermore, we recognize the School as a vital institution for an expanded Health programme. School Health is being strengthened and expanded to integrate family planning, compressive sexuality education, sexual and reproductive services. Also the significant rise in NCDs (Cardiovascular diseases, hypertension, Diabetes and cancers) has warranted Government to develop and implement policies & strategies on NCDs including Mental Health, tobacco use and substance abuse in schools.
Concluding, Sierra Leone has learned lessons from the Ebola outbreak and Government through a win–win partnership and collaboration with donors, civil society and communities continues to strengthen the health systems towards universal health coverage and national development.

I THANK YOU