



**ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY,
PRESIDENT JULIUS MAADA BIO
ON THE OCCASION OF THE
OFFICIAL COMMISSIONING OF
THE SENGBE PIEH MEMORIAL
BRIDGE. FREETOWN, JUBA, 25
APRIL 2019.**

OFFICIAL COMMISSIONING OF SENGBE PIEH MEMORIAL BRIDGE 2

The Chief Minister,

Ministers of Government Present,

His Excellency, the Ambassador of the People's Republic of China,

Members of the diplomatic and consular corps,

Members of Parliament present,

Development Partners,

Community and youth leaders present,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning.

Less than six months ago, I commissioned the start of work on this project. I started off by telling a story about a time when road projects were exorbitantly costed, poorly planned, poorly coordinated, and never completed on time.

Those in charge then cut corners and pocketed millions of dollars from those road construction contracts.

Whatever little they did was about partisan showmanship and slogans.

There should have been a second bridge here several years ago as part of the original Lumley–Tokeh (Peninsular Road) Project funded by our development partners.

The last government allocated \$4.4 Million for the construction of this bridge over an eighteen-month period. They were in power for 11 years but they never built a bridge here. **The people of Sierra Leone deserve to know what happened to the \$4.4 million allocation.**

I promised the people of Sierra Leone that under the New Direction Government, we would **deliver purposeful and well thought-out infrastructural projects that are affordable by this country, transparently well-managed, and purposefully designed to serve the inclusive development needs** of every Sierra Leonean.

With the partnership and generosity of the People's Republic of China, we have delivered a well-built bridge in 5 months just as I announced back in November 2018. We are a talk and do Government.

On behalf of the Government and people of Sierra Leone, we acknowledge, with much gratitude, the continued generous support of the Government and people of the People's Republic of China.

They have, for nearly 50 years of friendly relations, consistently provided technical assistance and capacity building for various sectors, improved public health and healthcare institutions, enhanced livelihoods, helped modernise agriculture, and developed infrastructure in our country.

Let me again extend a warm fraternal welcome to the new ambassador of the People's Republic of China to the Republic of Sierra Leone.

I also want to acknowledge the great work of Dr. Tambi and his team at the Office of Presidential Infrastructural

Initiatives, the SLRA, technical experts, engineers, contractors, and dozens of local Sierra Leoneans who worked diligently to construct this bridge in record time.

My government built the bridge in 5 months for less than \$2.4 million. Here is how we funded the project. The Government of the People's Republic of China gave the Government of Sierra Leone a grant of \$3Million: \$1.5 million for the provision of 30 garbage collection trucks and skips, and \$1.5 million toward a market.

We commissioned the 30 garbage collection trucks and skips two months ago. We had \$1.5 million left over.

The government deemed it necessary to construct the second Juba bridge as a priority to decongest the Juba/Lumley interchange first. **The Government therefore added Nine hundred thousand US dollars to the remaining \$1.5 million in order to meet the quoted construction cost of \$2.4 million.**

We also ensured that locals were employed here as part of the workforce. So in real terms, the entire bridge cost the Government of Sierra Leone only \$900 thousand and we built the bridge in 5 months.

But here's more good news.

Quite unlike so-called infrastructural projects in the last 11 years when government officials cut corners in order to steal, this bridge has been built to budget and in accordance with international standards.

The bridge abuts the existing two lane bridge therefore providing a total of four traffic lanes.

It also has a pedestrian walkway complete with accessible mobility ramps, enhanced safety railings, and solar lighting.

What this project demonstrates is very simple.

We can build bridges and roads that meet international standards faster, better, and for far less money.

We can do infrastructural development without government officials stealing millions of dollars meant for the project.

We can do infrastructural developments without burdening the people of Sierra Leone with huge foreign debt.

We can do infrastructural developments that employ our own people, local Sierra Leoneans, as part of the workforce that builds our roads and bridges. The locals will be thus both financially empowered and gain valuable work skills and experiences.

This was the New Direction promise; this is what we have delivered; this is how we will develop infrastructure in this country.

But even more, my Government maintains a long term and holistic approach to infrastructural development. So in addition to the bridge, my government deems it necessary to build a bigger and more conveniently-located market and a transportation

interchange for minibuses, taxis, and other commercial vehicles.

We also intend to build a connected pedestrian flyover across this road so that commuters can walk across the road safely to the market and the transportation interchange.

The Office of Presidential Infrastructure Initiatives has undertaken comprehensive assessment and planning. Once we finalise discussions about funding sources, work will get underway.

So here is why all this is important.

The bridge and related infrastructure will unlock the tremendous economic potential in tourism, fisheries, and other sectors associated with this part of our city.

It will relieve traffic congestion, make urban commuting and access to markets, public facilities, offices, schools, hospitals easier, faster, and safer.

These developments are also good for air quality, respiratory health, and general sanitation and public health.

This cluster of infrastructural projects contributes toward our meeting Sustainable Development Goal 11 set by the international community. It will make our city and our communities around and beyond Juba and Lumley more productive, safer, healthier, more accessible, and therefore more sustainable and resilient.

We will replicate the Juba-Lumley example in various parts of our city in a purposeful and planned way in order to continue making our city more accessible, more liveable, more attractive, and more productive.

For the community, my government thanks you immensely for your support during the construction period.

We look forward to more cooperation as we roll out other planned infrastructural projects in this community.

We expect you to comply with all traffic rules and regulations and all safety requirements as we continue to develop infrastructure that makes your lives better.

We also expect the community to respect that dual carriageways or pedestrian walkways are not markets and they should also refrain from placing their market stalls on the streets and pedestrian walkways and desist from littering the streets with garbage.

We should all play a responsible part in making our city more accessible and more liveable.

As we **aspire toward the values of leadership with integrity and persistence**, it is but fitting that we formally commission this bridge **after a national hero who resisted slavery, stood up for justice, and returned to make the lives of his compatriots even better.**

I formally commission this bridge, **the SENGBE PIEH MEMORIAL BRIDGE.**