

*(Salutations)*

I am happy that this bridge, the **EU funded Magbele Bridge** will today be commissioned to the public by His Excellency, the President of the Republic of Sierra Leone.

Many dedicated individuals of diverse tasks, responsibilities and skill-sets have contributed to this achievement: engineers, managers, officials, accountants, politicians, secretaries ... and others.

Committed people who work for different types of organisations, who come from different regions and countries ... and ...

who speak an array of different languages at home with their families (Krio, Temne, Mende, English, Limba, French, Italian ... and others!).

The **EU funded Magbele bridge** is part of a package of road infrastructure projects Sierra Leone and the European Union intend to round off before the 2023 rainy season.

Other key parts of that road infrastructure package are the **Mabang bridge** and road links from Moyamba towards Yonibana / Mile 91 and from Bandajuma to the Liberian border.

Infrastructure support always requires a **sustainable long term planning**: Preparatory discussions and planning work to pave the way for the realisation of these infrastructure projects started in 2012/13... The construction of the new Magbele Bridge was launched in March 2018. As all partners intend to do things properly, this time was needed. The result is a concrete and sustainable result.

It is even more reassuring that the institutional and administrative stability on either side of our partnership with Sierra Leone ensures the necessary continuation. I am therefore thankful to the **Sierra Leone Road Authority**, which

stands for this long-term stability. Ambassadors come and Ambassadors go. Governments come and Governments go, but the institutional and technical expertise of the Sierra Leone Road Authority remains and is key for success, including for the important aspect of maintenance. Sierra Leone can be proud of the continuity and of the professionalism of this infrastructure agency.

Beyond Magbele, Mabang, Moyamba and Bandajuma, most of you will of course **always** remember that Sierra Leone and the European Union have worked successfully on many more road infrastructure improvements than the bridge and road package that brought us here today.

Essential roads among which I am proud to mention

- the Masiaka-Bo highway including the widening of seven bridges
- 85 km of road along the Freetown-Conakry highway
- the Makeni-Kabala highway
- 175Km of feeder roads in Koinadugu, Tonkolili and Bombali

**We – Sierra Leone and the European Union – have a strong track record of working together in this field and we have all reason to remind ourselves and others of that!**

We are here right now in Port Loko district...

... Tonkolili district is “around the corner” ...

... and Moyamba district is not a lot more than a stone throw away.

Coming from the Western Peninsula, ...

... the EU funded **Magbele** Bridge here in Port Loko district is the **first river crossing** towards the **North** ...

... and the EU funded **Mabang** bridge in Moyamba district is the **first river crossing** towards the **South via the route through Mabang**.

**Bridges connect, bridges last ... last long.**

The new EU Magbele bridge takes over from the old one lane bridge, ...

... which is in fact **older than both the independent nation of Sierra Leone and the European Union!**

**Building bridges is important, also between nations.** It is not by coincidence that on the back of all Euro banknotes you will find drawings of bridge constructions.

What we witness today here in Magbele also is part of a huge program of building bridges between nations, as this road is part of network connecting whole West Africa. The European Union believes in the “Global Gateway”. The cooperation of the EU and Sierra Leone, our teamwork has contributed to more connectivity in the sub-region.

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Please allow me to mention that the cordial partnership between Sierra Leone and the European Union not only extends to infrastructure projects.

We cooperate closely also on education, governance, decentralisation, agriculture, environment, rural electrification, the management of public finances and many more. Important priorities of the Government in line with the National Development Plan.

Team Europe, which includes the EU Delegation and EU member states, is proud to be among the key partners of the great nation of Sierra Leone.

In recent weeks and months, we have stepped up our dialogues with Government and other stakeholders to proceed towards identifying concrete support under the European Union's **Multi-Annual Indicative Programme** for partnership and cooperation with Sierra Leone for the period **until 2027.**

Its interrelated **priority areas, stressing important priorities of the Government, are:**

**1. Green Economy ... where sub-themes include ...**

- access to sustainable **energy**
- employment-oriented **agriculture** food systems
- management and protection of **ecosystems** and **biodiversity**

**2. Human Development ... where sub-themes include ...**

- basic and secondary **education**
- technical and vocational education and training

**3. Governance and Human Rights ... where sub-themes include ...**

- peaceful, inclusive, transparent and credible **elections**
- effective **governance** and **public service delivery**
- strengthening **public finance management**
- transparency and domestic resource mobilisation

*(Salutations)*

Please allow me to express my gratitude once more to all who have helped build this bridge. I am grateful to witness today that His Excellency the President will commission this EU funded bridge to the people.