

Your Excellency, the President of the Republic of Sierra Leone
Members of Parliament
Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps
Honourable Minister of Basic and Senior Secondary Education
Chairman of Council
Your Worship, the Mayor of Freetown
Leaders of Delegation and Chief Government Nominees on Council
Members of Council
Former Chairmen of Council
Former Registrars to Council
Former Heads of National Office
Distinguished Friends of Council
Staff of the Council
Students
Media Representatives
Ladies and Gentlemen

INTRODUCTION

I have great pleasure in welcoming you to the formal opening of the 67th Annual Council Meeting being hosted in Freetown by the Government of Sierra Leone. It is also my honour to welcome specially our Chief Host, His Excellency the President and Commander-In-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Sierra Leone. We are grateful to the Government of Sierra Leone for accepting to host the meeting. Five years ago, precisely in March 2014, we were in this historical city for the 62nd Annual Council Meeting. The sweet memories of our week-long interactions with the good people of this great country lingered for a long time after our departure. Based on that memorable experience, we had looked forward for five solid years to another opportunity to be in Sierra Leone. Here we are again. We are glad to return to the warm embrace of our brothers and sisters who inhabit this beautiful city of Freetown. Immediately on arrival we paid a visit to the eminent Mayor of Freetown, and he graciously gave us the key to the city. I therefore, encourage all delegates to feel free to visit the various places of interest around, and also interact freely with the highly hospitable inhabitants of Freetown. You will be pleasantly surprised to discover cultural similarities and historical connections between Sierra Leoneans and the peoples of your own country. For your much-needed relaxation, please endeavour to squeeze out time from your daily engagements to visit the cool beaches and engage in the people's recreational activities. For delicacies, try the local dishes with fresh fish and assorted sea foods. You should also learn to speak *Creole*, which is the most developed variety of *Pidgin English* spoken in the respective countries of all delegates. Creole is the

Lingua Franca

of the people of Sierra Leone.

ROTATIONAL PRINCIPLE

Your Excellency, the five member countries of WAEC – The Gambia, Ghana, Liberia Nigeria and Sierra Leone – take their turns to host the Annual Council Meeting based on a rotational arrangement earlier agreed upon. Following this arrangement, each country gets to host Council once in every five years when the Meeting must have gone full circle round the five countries. It was in observance of the extant rotational principle that Liberia hosted the meeting in 2015, Ghana in 2016, Nigeria in 2017 then, at the end of the 66th Meeting in Banjul, The Gambia in March 2018 Council accepted an invitation from the Government of Sierra Leone to hold the 67th Meeting in Freetown in March 2019. We are indeed glad to be back to the *Athens of Africa*

THE COUNCIL'S EXAMINATIONS

Two categories of examinations are administered by WAEC in the sub-region. The Council's international examination, the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) is conducted for candidates in all the member countries while the country-specific national examinations are conducted within the respective member countries, except Nigeria. The Council also administers aptitude tests, selection tests and some examinations on behalf of other examining bodies in the member countries.

In 2018, all the Council's national and international examinations were conducted hitch-free and leakage-free in the member countries. All the member countries - The Gambia, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone presented candidates for both the School and Private Candidate editions of WASSCE. The Gambia, Ghana, Sierra Leone and Liberia also presented candidates for various national examinations. The Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) was conducted for candidates in The Gambia, Ghana and Sierra Leone while the Junior High School Certificate Examination was conducted for candidates in Liberia. In addition, the General Business Certificate Examination (GBCE) and the Advanced Business Certificate Examination (ABCE) were conducted for candidates in Ghana, the National Primary School Examination (NPSE) was conducted for candidates in Sierra Leone while the National Assessment Test (NAT) was conducted for candidates in The Gambia.

PATRONAGE

A total of 2,277,588 candidates sat the West African Senior School Certificate Examination in

2018. The total figure comprised 1,976,537 school candidates who sat the examination in May/June and 301,051 private candidates who sat the November/December edition. Enrolment for the examination increased in 2018 by 61,414 candidates (or 2.77%) compared to the 2017 figure of 2,216,174. The 2.77% increase might appear minimal, but it was quite important because it stopped the yearly decrease in candidature which had been the trend since 2013. A country by country analysis of the 2018 WASSCE enrolment figure shows that The Gambia enrolled 17,766 candidates (or 0.78%), Ghana registered 450,731 candidates (or 19.79%), Nigeria presented 1,691,415 candidates (or 74.26%), Sierra Leone got 77,521 candidates (or 3.40%) while Liberia had 40,155 candidates (or 1.76%).

The total candidature for the Council's main national examinations in 2018 was 860,028, which showed a decrease of 0.34% below the previous year's figure of 862,988. Out of the 2018 total figure, The Gambia presented 87,846 candidates (or 10.21%), Ghana 523,777 candidates (or 60.90%), Liberia 41,270 candidates (or 4.80%) and Sierra Leone 207,135 candidates (or 24.08%). As earlier indicated, the Council does not conduct national examinations in Nigeria.

Various institutions and organisations also presented candidates for the Council's aptitude/selection tests in the member countries. A total of 52,098 testees sat the tests across the sub-region, out of which were 41,832 testees in Ghana, 1,770 testees in Liberia and 8,496 testees in Nigeria.

In summary, the Council's WASSCE, national examinations and aptitude/selection tests recorded an improvement in total patronage in 2018, as the total candidature rose to 3,189,714 indicating an overall increase of 2.71% above the 3,105,406 candidates that patronised the examinations and tests in 2017.

EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE

Your Excellency, examination malpractice remains a scourge in the education sector of WAEC member nations. The malaise has continued to distract education administrators and examining bodies from their core tasks, as it pervades the school system at all levels posing a challenge to the propensity for academic attainments and a threat to the reliability of assessment processes. WAEC has always been at the vanguard of the war against examination malpractice and we are resolute to carry on the fight. The Council has continued to deploy cutting-edge technology to sharpen the existing monitoring mechanisms and to strengthen its investigative systems across the sub-region. We are grateful to some school proprietors, principals, teachers and community leaders who, through their actions and pronouncements, have demonstrated zero tolerance for examination malpractice. We also continue to appreciate the efforts of the various associations

of school principals and teachers in the member countries that have relentlessly sensitized their members against all forms of compromise in public examinations. We wish to reiterate our constant appeal to the member governments that urgent steps should be taken to activate all existing relevant legislations, or promulgate new ones where none exists, to discourage the perpetration of examination fraud in their respective countries. We want to specially acknowledge the efforts being made by Mr. President through the Anti-Corruption Commission to collaborate with WAEC in fighting examination malpractice in Sierra Leone.

DEPLOYMENT OF ICT TO SERVICE DELIVERY

Your Excellency, most aspects of WAEC's operations and activities have been computerised. Its transactions and interactions with stakeholders across the globe are internet-driven. The Council has therefore, continued to upgrade to modern equipment and deploy state-of-the-art ICT facilities in its National Offices in line with global trends. It also seeks to satisfy the expectations of its stakeholders through efficient service delivery systems. Over the years, the Headquarters and the National Offices of the Council have consistently maintained very active and informative websites, in addition to other ICT installations, towards the accomplishment of the Council's goals. With the use of ICT we have reduced the period for the processing of the results of WASSCE for School Candidates from an average of 84 days in the past to an average of 47 days, and the compression is still ongoing.

The Council has recently installed a facility to connect all its offices for Videoconferencing across the sub-region. At the moment, the Headquarters Office in Accra and the International Office in Lagos have been connected on the facility. Work is currently in progress to connect the Gambia National Office before the end of March 2019. The Ghana, Liberia and Sierra Leone National Offices are expected to expedite action on the acquisition of the necessary equipment and software to enable them to hook up to the network in the current year. The facility is aimed at revolutionising the Council's interpersonal and group interactions. It will totally remove or at least drastically reduce the risks, delays and costs involved in carrying out committee meetings and other interactive activities of the Council.

WAEC is also irrevocably determined to migrate fully into digital administration of examinations in a few years from now. In the march towards this goal, the Council has started establishing Computer-based Testing (CBT) installations and test-running e-marking software and equipment.

FINANCE

Your Excellency, over the years reports concerning funding for the Council have been consistently negative. This has been the situation because getting the member governments to fulfil the statutory payment of Contribution to the Headquarters and Subvention to the National

Offices has remained a herculean task. Even though the narrative about funding did not change much in 2018, we have abundant reasons to be grateful to the Government of each member country. The Secretariat is conscious of the financial situations of most of our member countries. We therefore, profoundly appreciate the much that each country has been able to offer to keep the Council in existence and guarantee the enabling environment to deliver quality service for sixty-seven years.

WAEC ENDOWMENT FUND

Your Excellency, Distinguished guests, yesterday, the 24th WAEC Endowment Fund Lecture, titled *“Innovative Approaches to Measuring Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes of Students.”* was delivered by Professor Joe A. D. Alie - Dean, School of Postgraduate Studies, University of Sierra Leone. Those of us who attended the lecture agreed that it was a masterpiece. We appreciate Professor Alie for his erudite delivery of the lecture.

Today, under the auspices of the WAEC Endowment Fund, the WAEC Excellence Award in respect of WASSCE for School Candidates, 2018 will be presented to three candidates - Master Arotiba Peter Seunara (1st Prize), Miss Opoku Wilhermina (2nd Prize), Miss Afrifa Brago Sarpong (3rd Prize).

The three winners emerged from a total of 1,976,537 candidates who sat WASSCE for School Candidates, 2018 in The Gambia, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone.

The Augustus Bandele Oyediran Award for the Best Candidate in West Africa will also go to Master Arotiba Peter Seunara.

At this ceremony also, we shall witness the conferment of the prestigious award of *Distinguished Friends of Council*

on an eminent Sierra Leonean, Mr. A. J. Lasite, former Member of Council, Item-Writer, Chief Examiner, Supervisor and Invigilator, for his contribution to the success of the work of WAEC.

CONCLUSION

Your Excellency, Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, in ending this report it is worthwhile to glorify God Almighty that WAEC delivered creditably on its mandate by providing the required examinations and other services for the stakeholders during the past year. We are grateful to our member governments for the absolute trust reposed in us by entrusting to our organisation

very crucial assessment tasks that impact the lives of the teeming youth of their respective countries. We appreciate them for many years of collaboration with our organisation and for sustaining the atmosphere conducive to planning, conduct and processing of examinations. By extension, we are thankful to the Ministers of Education, Permanent Secretaries, Chief Directors, Directors-General, Directors and other Principal and Professional Officers in the ministries of education who have spared no effort over the years at sustaining the relationship and collaboration between WAEC and the Government of their respective countries. The successes and achievements of WAEC during the past year were made possible by the cooperation and support which it received from government functionaries and people of the member countries.

Mr. President, nothing can be more gratifying and heart-warming to us in WAEC than declaring education a flagship programme in our member country. I wish to commend your visionary leadership and your hardworking team for the free quality education agenda aimed at gradual restoration of the glory of the education sector in Sierra Leone. Sierra Leone was at a period in history regarded as the Mecca for tertiary education seekers in the West African sub-region. We also appreciate the people of this country for their cooperation and support for the transformational initiatives of the present administration.

With your kind permission, Mr. President, I wish to commend the Honourable Minister of Basic and Senior Secondary Education for his grasp of educational policy implementation and his firm commitment to a paradigm shift in the education sector geared towards capacity building for the country's workforce, enhanced manpower production, sustainable national development and a brighter future for the Sierra Leonean child. He is quite passionate about the development of education and so under his watch education is moving to greater heights in Sierra Leone. We have received unofficial information that he has commenced consultations and arrangements to spearhead a coalition of education ministers of the sub-region to create a veritable platform for their interaction, cooperation and collaboration.

We appreciate the Chairman of Council, the Vice-Chairman and the entire Council Members at all committee levels for their invaluable contributions to the achievements and successes recorded by the Council in the past year.

I commend the efforts of the Heads of National Office and all other staff of WAEC at carrying out successfully the Council's assignments in their respective countries.

We appreciate our service providers – item writers, moderators, centre supervisors, invigilators, custodians/depot keepers, internet providers, cyber café operators, and others - for their contributions to the success of the Council over the years.

Mr. President, we appreciate you, Sir, for the great honour done our organization by your presence on this occasion.

Most of all, we thank the Almighty God for the divine favour which our organisation has enjoyed in the sixty seven years of its existence. We pray for divine guidance towards greater successes and achievements this year and in the years ahead.

I thank you all.