

My Priorities are Maximizing Revenue and Protecting Communities: ...Minister of Mines and Mineral Resources.

Date : May 21, 2018

The incoming Minister of Mines and Mineral Resources, Hon. Dr. Morie Manyeh has pledged to work relentlessly to maximize government revenue from the minerals sector and promote the rights of communities affected by mining. He made this commitment while addressing staff of the Ministry and the media during the formal handing over ceremony held in the Ministry's Conference Room at Youyi Building in Freetown, on 16th May 2018, during which the former, Minister of Mines, Hon. Minkailu Mansaray presented his handing-over notes to him as the incoming Minister.

In his statement, Hon. Dr. Manyeh noted that the President, His Excellency Dr. Julius Maada Bio has already clearly outlined his agenda, which focuses on plugging leakages and maximizing revenue collection to improve on the socio-economic welfare of all Sierra Leoneans, and that the mining sector is expected to play a critical role in generating revenue for Government. In this regard, he went on, everything that he will do in the coming days and months will be geared towards ensuring that Sierra Leoneans derive maximum benefits from their mineral wealth to support the President's agenda. This will include fully implementing President Bio's agenda to review the Mines and Minerals Act (2009) and all mining agreements; enact the Extractive Industry Revenue Bill; establish the Natural Resources Account for all revenues generated from extractive sector; strengthen the National Minerals Agency; allocate percentages of revenue from the mining sector to education, health and development of mining communities; ensure full transparency of the sector in line with EITI principles; support value addition; and promote local content and CSR. Ultimately, Hon. Dr. Manyeh hopes to transform the minerals sector to realize its full potential to generate revenue and contribute to national development.

Speaking on his commitment to mining communities, the Minister explained that he grew up in Kono, at a time when the District was the breadbasket of the country, and recalled that he witnessed first-hand the negative impacts that mining can have on local communities. Not only are they exposed to the dangers of environmental damages and pollution, but also they are vulnerable to all forms of social problems, including child labour and early marriage, he stated. He lamented the fact that despite been exposed to all these disadvantages, mining communities have very little to show in terms of tangible development, and that they are often the most deprived communities in the country, creating a paradox of poverty amidst plenty.

Minister Manyeh pledged to change this narrative, and vowed to ensure that Mineral Right Holders in Sierra Leone respect the rights, customs and traditions of local communities; take adequate steps to mitigate the environmental and social impacts of their operations; compensate owners and legal occupiers for land used for mining; and promote the welfare of communities affected by their operations. He promised to ensure that a percentage of the proceeds from mining operations is sent back to the mining communities to promote sustainable development and reverse the resource curse. The Minister further explained that mining communities will no longer be passive recipients of paltry handouts disguise as CSR from mining companies, but that they will forge new compacts that generate inclusive and sustainable opportunities, whereby exploitation and destruction without adequate compensation will be a thing of the past.

In a special appeal to staff of the Ministry of Mines, Hon. Dr. Manyeh admonished them to understand that the time for politics is over, and that they must now give up their best to support the new government

to succeed. He appreciated the level to which his predecessor has raised the Ministry, and call on staff to work with him to raise it to higher heights. The New Direction, he reminded staff, is all about discipline, performance and results, and he will not tolerate lethargy.

Earlier in his handing over statement, the former Minister of Mines, Hon. Minkailu Mansaray, explained that the Ministry has over the years taken several important steps to revise the legislative, policy, licensing and governance framework of the mining sector, as a strategy to support the creation of an enabling environment for mineral sector investment as well as responsible development of mineral resources for the benefit of the people of Sierra Leone. He referenced the Mines and Minerals Act (2009), which addresses several issues, such as health and community development, not previously covered by the law; and New environmental, social and operational regulations as some of his achievements.

Hon. Dr. Manyeh, assured all that Government is about continuity, and that he will maintain whatever he finds working, even if he did not build it, but will likewise not hesitate to dismantle whatever he found not to be in the best interest of the country.

Hon. Dr. Manyeh is taking over as Minister of Mines at a time when the economy is in very bad shape, and the Government is badly in need of revenue to finance its social and development programmes. Sierra Leoneans have therefore welcomed his pledge to ensure that they derive maximum benefits from the minerals sector.

The Communications Unit

Directorate of Community Affairs, Communication and Public Relations

National Minerals Agency – Sierra Leone

New England Ville – Tel. +232 79 250 702

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