

NJALA UNIVERSITY



ADDRESS

By

Professor Osman Alimamy Sankoh, D.Sc,

Ag. Vice-Chancellor and Principal

Njala University

at the

2021 Congregation Ceremony

**for the Conferment of Degrees and Award of Diplomas and
Certificates**

Theme: Njala University- Fostering Human Capital

Development in Sierra Leone

Venue: Bo Mini- Stadium, Bo City, Bo

Date: Saturday 10th April 2021

1. Salutations and Opening Courtesies.

- Your Excellency the President and Chancellor of Njala University
- Hon. Chief Minister
- Hon. Minister of Technical and Higher Education
- Other Ministers of Government here present
- Pro-Chancellor and Chairman of Court, Njala University
- Members of the Njala University Court
- Vice-Chancellors and Principals of USL, EBKUST and UNIMAK
- Principals of other tertiary institutions
- Deputy Vice-Chancellors of Njala University and other universities present here
- Excellences, Members of the Diplomatic & Consular Corps
- Our Revered Traditional Rulers
- Your Worships the Mayors of the cities of Bo, Bonthe, Freetown, and Kenema.
- Hon. Members of Parliament
- The Chairmen and Members of the Moyamba and Bo District Councils
- Representatives of International Organisations and Agencies
- Our Development Partners
- Alumni of Njala University
- Representatives of Civil Society Organizations
- All Staff and Students of Njala University
- Members of the Fourth Estate
- Distinguished Guests
- Ladies and Gentlemen

Today, I have the opportunity and privilege to extend special greetings and best wishes to all of you our distinguished guests and to thank you for sparing the time to come, witness and participate in the 13th Congregation ceremony of our University, Njala University.

Today's ceremony for the conferment of degrees, certificates and diplomas is a celebration of the success of a number of our citizens who have gone through an educational programme that has empowered them to contribute meaningfully to our national development goals. No ceremony of this kind can be held without the sacrifices of the families, guardians, friends and benefactors and

particularly the academic staff. I therefore thank and congratulate them all.

Your Excellency, Mr. Chancellor, Sir, my responsibility to this house of congregation this morning is to highlight our responses to your call for the Universities in Sierra Leone especially Njala University to take the lead in innovating the advancement of Agriculture, Education and Health in your flagship project. Shortly you will be presented with the graduation of a total of 4,354 (four thousand, three hundred and fifty-four) males and females' that we would be certifying as having met all the criteria for graduation.

Mr. Chancellor Sir, this is a direct manifestation of the continuous role Njala University plays in training the human resource potentials in the fields of Education, Agriculture, Health and other components of your Human Capital Development agenda and our sacred contribution as a University to the human capital agenda you so much cherish for our development.

We have therefore coined the theme of this year's Congregation as "***Njala University- Fostering Human Capital Development in Sierra Leone'***

This theme is informed by our deep conviction that your vision of innovative transformation of Sierra Leone is enshrined in human capital development hugely supported by the following three key pillars: ***Education, Agriculture and Health***, like you, we are fully convinced that Njala University will serve as a foster parent for this innovative transformation.

Mr. Chancellor, I must at the outset note here that, amidst the numerous challenges confronting teaching, learning and research in public universities in Sierra Leone including ours, we must salute the courage and resilience of our colleague academics and administrators for holding on to their sacred duty of contributing to nation building and development.

2. The State of Njala University

Your Excellency, let me now go on to give a brief update on the state of Njala University.

a. Leadership and Governance.

Let me start by thanking the Government profusely for the appointment of the current management team at Njala University, I consider our appointment as a special privilege and honour to serve Njala University at a time when Sierra Leone's higher education system is at the verge of monumental transformation. We will not betray this tremendous repose of confidence in our ability to make a significant contribution to this exercise.

Your Excellency, since assuming Office in April last year, the priority of my administration has been to quickly reform our Financial and administrative structures and make them more capable of generating and sustaining a conducive environment for learning and career development. This has led to the following:

Activation of Directorates. The Directorates of Research and Development and the Academic planning and Quality Assurance had been activated and are fully functional with the appointments of full-time directors for three years each. The research and development will be increasing the quality and quantity of research whilst the Academic Planning and Quality Assurance will develop, implement and monitor Quality Assurance Processes across the University. Njala University has quickly embraced these strategies for institutional-wide quality assurance to address outstanding quality and compliance gaps and put the university on a trajectory of continuous improvement.

Resuscitation of Students Union Politics. With the suspension of student's union government of both campuses of the University, for fearing of disturbances, my administration has resuscitated student's politics with free and fair elections conducted using the revised constitutions in both campuses of the University and are fully functional.

Staff Development. Our staff profile is gradually improving with the recent completion of M. Phil and six (6) Ph.D. candidates in and out of Sierra Leone and three (3) others who had undergone successful external peer review and are now confirmed as Associate Professors while three other staff are currently being considered for external peer review. The issue of upgrading our staff profile is being given urgent attention by this administration.

Mr. Chancellor, some of the challenges I will be mentioning today should not be facing an institution that was established in 1964; almost 60 years ago! Thinking even from out of the existing box will no longer help. Consequently, we are now building a completely new one and start to think from inside it.

b. Teaching, Learning, Research, Innovation and Community Development.

Your Excellency, Sir, please permit me to provide a quick update on our core mandate as a university i.e. Teaching, Research and Community Service. I will limit these to the period since my assumption of office in April last year. In this respect, and with the current review of our curricula to meet the needs of the private sector and the demands of the Sierra Leonean society, the following activities have been undertaken for the period under review

- i. With the support of the Strategic Partnerships for Higher Education Innovation and Reform (SPHEIR) project, a total of twenty-four (24) core courses in the BSc. Agriculture General programme have been reviewed. The reviewed courses are being rolled out now to all other institutions with Njala University being the Agriculture Cluster Lead following the philosophy and principles of outcome-based education (OBE). Preparations are being made for other programmes in the University to be reviewed based on the SPHEIR template. The Assuring Quality in Higher Education in Sierra Leone (AQHEd-SL) project brought together the seven higher education institutions (HEIs) in Sierra Leone with three national and three international partners to develop the culture of quality within higher education. This is a £4m project over 3.5years, funded by the UK

Department for International Development through the Strategic Partnerships for Higher Education Innovation and Reform (SPHEIR) fund, managed by the British Council, Universities UK International and PricewaterhouseCoopers.

- ii. To meet the Government's aspiration for skills development and entrepreneurship in the agriculture sector in general, NU is working with the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, the FAO, and a number of international partners to establish the Songhai Centre Model in Njala to serve as a Centre of Excellence in agribusiness education in West Africa through the support of the Government via the ENABLE NJALA PROJECT a sub component of the Sierra Leone Agribusiness and Rice Value Chain Support **(SLARIS)** Project funded by the African Development Bank and the Government of Sierra Leone for five years (2019-2023). This Project is expected to train over five thousand (5,000) farmers in Contract Farming and other agri-business related functions and also provide an agricultural ecosystem environment to provide nutrition for our farmers and also training opportunities to enhance teaching, learning and research.
- iii. Njala University is also playing host to the nursing and cultivation of over five hundred thousand (500,000) Oil Palm Seedlings to complements Government's efforts to support farmers to cultivate Oil Palm crops in the country. This was achieved through the help of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry for the establishment of pre-Nursery of 540,000 oil palm seed lets via the **Agriculture Value Chain Development Project (AVDP)**. This project is funded by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the Government of Sierra Leone to the tune of USD 1,901,000 for a period of 2years at the initial instance. This project has employed 86 less privileged students of the School of Agriculture and Food Sciences in

- the tree planting and baby poly bag filling of the oil palm seedlings.
- iv. Currently the University is hosting the National Comprehensive Soil Survey, the second since 1974 under the Supervision of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security and the National Authorizing Office for a period of two years effective 2020. The project is funded by the European Union to the tune of 450,533 Euros through the boosting Agriculture and food security (BAFS) Programme coordinating Unit (PCU) project, National Comprehensive Soil Survey Project (NCSS). The overall objective of NCSS is to conduct a national comprehensive soil survey and generate information for the utilization and management of the soil resources aimed at sustainable crop production in Sierra Leone.
 - v. The Skills Development Fund is a Sierra Leone Government/World Bank funded project housed at the Ministry of Technical and Higher Education. Sixty-seven institutions were able to meet the benchmarks of the SDF funds and amongst them was Njala University. NU benefitted to the tune of **Le 2,226,783, 333** for a period of two years and shall be completed by **31st August 2021**, being the termination date (the "Termination Date"). The trust of this project is to train youths in the cultivation and processing of mushrooms. This will lead to the establishment of a four months diploma program for over two hundred and thirty youths who will benefit from the program in the horticulture department, school of Natural Resources Management.
 - vi. In complementing the efforts of the School of Education, we have established a national Pedagogical Centre for the retraining of teachers and instructors to enable them drive the paradigm shift from a knowledge-based, teacher-centered educational system to skills and competence-

based education across Sierra Leone. with a view to effectively handle the issue of teacher training which is critical in supporting the Free Quality Education (FQE)

- vii. We are also pleased to report to this house of congregation, that the University has expanded its educational services to a number of Districts including Pujehun, Bonthe, Kono, Bo and Moyamba through its Distance Learning Programmes under the School of Education with a student population of over one thousand for the 2020/2021 academic year
- viii. A new programme of the Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) training has been infused into the curriculum starting with our School of Community Health Sciences to be rolled out by all other Schools especially the School of Agriculture and Food Sciences.
- ix.** Njala University is set to host the second Medical School in the country as inscribed in the Universities Act of 2005 and as amended in 2014 and also a School of Public Health. This is to increasingly support Governments Human Capital Development programme especially in the health sector by providing the human resource needed for the proposed National Public Health Agency.
- x. The Integrated Disease Surveillance and Response Module by the WHO was successfully integrated into the curricula of the Nursing Department, Environmental Health Science Department and Community Health and Clinical Studies Department. This will significantly help in public health preparedness and response.
- xi. Discussions have been completed with the Sierra Leone Law School to send the first set of Law students from the Njala University Law Program since its commencement in the 2017/2018 academic year. Thus, improving wider access to the study of law programmes.
- xii. In this day of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), we have tried, to posit ICT at the very core of our research, teaching and learning activities. Efforts in this direction include the Procurement and implementation of

Web-based MIS (online admissions and Registration portal and financial software system). In this vein, I am happy to report to this house of congregation, Mr. Chancellor Sir, that Njala University was selected by the MTHE to pilot a UNESCO funded project in Sierra Leone to support distance learning/e-learning in all higher Education Institutions in the country and was successfully done. The Title of the Project is: Creation of E Learning Platform with Moodle for the continuity of the course during COVID-19 crisis. This support covered amongst others, the Creation of a Moodle platform for delivering the courses, configuration of the platform to make it operational the registration of all students, all research professors and the local administration of the platform, and the implementation of the course and its configuration.

- xiii. **Management Information Systems.** Your Excellency, the Ministry of Technical and Higher Education and other Development Partners are consistently building the capacity of HEI's in Sierra Leone through the development of Management Information Systems and other eLearning platforms with a view to supporting effective teaching, learning and research. Our Undergraduate and Postgraduate programmes are now being reviewed and increasingly being tailored to address the emerging 21st century issues and to also provide the requisite manpower to support other critical sectors of the nation's economy.
- xiv. In Community Engagement, Mr. Chancellor sir, The current Njala University Administration has succeeded to dialogue with Authorities of the intervening Chiefdoms, and lasting peace and confidence building with the Local Authority of Korie Chiefdom and the Community stakeholders; long-standing grievances that spanned 2014. The propensity to remain together and deal primarily with issues bordering on the peace and tranquility between the University and the host communities has been usefully agreed. Apologies were registered on behalf of the University Administration

of the past for all the wrongdoings to the host communities and in the recent past and there was an assurance that the current leadership at the University is determined to turn to a new page for positive change

Njala University has continued to make significant contribution to scientific knowledge through the research efforts of our staff. Our research activities in the university have continued to gather momentum through local and international partnerships and funding.

In 2020 alone, staff of this great institution including myself, your Excellency, have published more than thirty articles in good international peer-reviewed scientific journals. These journals include the world-renown The Lancet Global Health, Journal Nature, Nature Medicine, British Medical Journal, Annals of Epidemiology, Malaria Journal, International Letters of Natural Sciences, International Journal of Fisheries and Aquaculture, and Emerging Infectious Diseases, to name but a few.

Publishing in these journals do not only earn points for the researchers but more importantly it contributes to strengthening the global image of the university and hence builds up its institutional score among other institutions. Given the not very favourable research environment we currently have at Njala University, I personally congratulate my colleagues on their successes. I have appointed a capable Director of Research and Development and I intend to support the Directorate so that it can provide efficient research services to our colleagues.

c. Partnerships:

The University have also maintained vibrant partnerships with several number of international and local institutions, organisations, agencies and centres.

Let me at this point acknowledge the generous donations the University has received from many of our partners – perhaps too many to name. Let me, however, single out a few: Africell, Sierra Leone Commercial Bank, SALCAB, University of Illinois, USAID, Chinese Embassy, NASSIT, The Moyamba District Council, the

Seawright Mining Company, NAYCOM and the National Malaria Control Programme to name but just few.

e. University Infrastructure, Teaching and Learning Facilities

Infrastructural development in the University has been modest, to say the least. However, we continue to provide gradual facelift across our campuses, using funds generated from donations, overheads on projects, and other internally generated revenue. The situation with furniture has improved significantly with the support of our partners, the Njala University Alumni Association and the Chinese Ambassador.

Two- Storey Education Building, Bo Campus.

His Excellency, the University administration through the MTHE handed over the keys of the newly refurbished two-story Education building funded by the Government of Sierra Leone through the Ministry of Technical and Higher Education (MTHE) to the School of Education at Towama location. This shows how committed the Government of Sierra Leone is on improving the teaching and learning situation in the University with a view to harnessing effectiveness in learning outcomes.

Fire incident at the (Matturi Hall 'G) - Njala Campus.

Mr. Chancellor, Sir, I regret to inform this House of Congregation that Matturi Block "G" one of the male student hostels situated at Njala Campus was engulfed by fire on the night of the 24th October, 2020 at about 2200 hours. This building is a two-story structure comprising of forty (44) rooms, a toilet, two stores both "in" and "exit" entrances and was housing eighty-eight (88) students. The fire raged on and and devastatingly left many students displaced and their property burnt to ashes. while attempting to escape from the fire, some students got injured and the Senior Medical Doctor had to attend immediately to those with minor injuries and those who sustained major injuries were referred to Bo for further treatment.

The Physical and Plant Services Directorate immediately made an assessment of the damage and submitted a BOQ on the burnt building to the MTHE and the estimated cost to refit the building was **One billion and fifty-seven million, nine hundred and fifty-four thousand and forty leones (Le 1,057,954,040)** and we yet await to hear from government in this regard.

However, Mr. Chancellor, Sir, an emergency government response was coordinated by the Ministry of Technical and Higher Education and the Office of the First Lady of the Republic of Sierra Leone and Njala Campus saw the fastest emergency response in history with the provision of Le 3,000,000.00 each to the two hundred affected students to help regain lost property and assorted food items for subsistence. On behalf of Court and Senate of the University, I want to thank you for that immediate response that saw Njala Campus became the fastest emergency recipient.

3. Finance And Investments

Your Excellency, your Government contributions in the provision of the much-needed support to the Higher Educational Institutions and the Basic and Senior Secondary Education is immeasurable. The allocation of 21% of the national budget to the Free, Quality Education and other colossal sums of monies to the HEI's in the last three years are immeasurable.

On behalf of the Senate and Court of Njala University, I wish to express my profound gratitude to your Government for the recent increment of 75% in salaries of all HEI Staff and the commitment to pay all Sierra Leone Grant-In-Aid backlogs and 2nd and 3rd quarter 2020 outstanding subventions to all public Universities. This is a clear manifestation that your Government is committed to advancing the general welfare of staff across HEI's

Your Excellency, permit me to provide a quick update on few of our stringent financial measures introduced since my assumption of office.

Closure of all Financial Payments over the Counter

CASUAL WORKERS of the University have for the first time received their wages NOT OVER THE TABLE but through their bank accounts ending payments of all types even for sitting fees for meetings over the table. Everyone is adjusting to this new transformation of prudence financial management financial reality to not taking cash over the table at Njala starving off mismanagement of the meager resources.

Internal Controls

All transaction undertaken by the University are now verified (pre-audited) by the Department of Internal Audit before payment. The internal Audit Unit of the University has completed 9 internal audit reports/ investigations in a single academic session in recent memory with recommendations addressed by my administration. This unit has become the busiest since my assumption of office

Payment of other Allowances

All other allowances to the tune of over of Le 1,200,000,000 is being paid by the Institution every month (mainly funded from students' fees collection and subvention) as part of honoring the MOU signed with the Ministry of Finance midwived by the Tertiary Education Commission. I am happy to inform this house of congregation, the University has not failed to honour this monthly obligation since I assumed office in March, 2020. This has been largely due to the stringent internal financial control measures introduced.

In a bid to lessen our dependence on government support, and leverage our capacity for generating our own revenue, the University has embarked on the following to mention just few.

Expansion of the Research and Development Directorate

The functions of the Directorate have been expanded to include "Business Development". The expansion of duties and activities will result in two sub-directories;

- Research Services and Development – increasing the quality and quantity of research and attracting research grants to the University.
- Business Development – ensuring non-academic activities are financially self-sustaining. This had been approved by Court as the University Business Enterprises and the Board of Directors formed. The Positions of Business Mangers had been advertised.

The expansion of this directorate will enhance a global brand value of Njala University, increase our national and international visibility, as well as our global ranking

Public-Private Partnerships

In order to address the perennial challenges of student’s hostels, Housing for staff, payment of benefits to retirees and decessed colleagues, electricity and water supply, and other welfare issues, my Administration has turned its attention to the Public-Private Partnership Arrangements. We have engaged a number of private sector players and they have committed to undertaking credible investments in staff and students’ hostels and welfare issues, improvement of classrooms and provision of teaching and researching equipment

4. Challenges

Mr. Chancellor, Sir, we recognize that while we are on the right direction to put the University in its sound financial trajectory, there are still a number of challenges ahead of us. I will only name three key ones because my Administration is trying all we can to address the other challenges:

Funding from Government has been limited and slow in coming. This situation has put a lot of pressure on the Administration to carry out activities it wants to embark on to meet staff needs and improve the quality of life for students. Both the student grants-in-aid and the quarterly subventions have never been paid on a timely basis. The implications of this perennial payment delays include eroding

the university's budget credibility and its moral authority over its employees; undermining its capacity for effective teaching and research services resulting in industrial actions.

Your Excellency, The University is still using and relying on Thermal Power to generate electricity and water needs of our staff and students on the Campuses. This has a very huge financial burden on the University with its limited resources. We spend over two hundred million Leones (Le 200,000,000.00) monthly to generate water and electricity on our various campuses and since the establishment of the University in 1964 Njala University has never benefitted from the national grid, especially in the main Njala Campus. We are calling on your Government's intervention.

Finally, your Excellency, our roads on our main Campus at Njala are in a terrible and abandoned state and our staff and students continue to traverse through the dusty roads as they conduct the business of the University. It is not a secret that many of them have developed acute respiratory and health problems due to the condition of the roads. We were quite hopeful when we saw Njala University mentioned in a Government document last year that these roads would be tarred. Sir, we are still waiting and would want to crave your personal intervention this time.

5. Closing Remarks

Mr. Chancellor Sir, I will not conclude my speech if I fail to report on my one-year stewardship to the University since appointed as a caretaker Vice Chancellor and Principal exactly a year ago. I have superintended over a very transparent and accountable Administration with the unflinching support of the Njala University Court and members of the Administrative and Academic staff.

Njala University has remained relatively quiet as my administration has adopted a dialogue approach with my colleagues in the Academic wing but also in the Administrative wing.

Mr. Chancellor, I have been able to institute very stringent reforms to effectively manage the meager resources of the University in tandem with your Government Anti-corruption reform agenda. These strong and transparent reforms have yielded positive dividends in the University and in also taking other key decisions. This has been made possible by the introduction of the “Bongology” mantra as a way of life to be driven in a (FIAT) car. This car is made up of Fairness, Integrity, Accountability and Transparency. The mantra means making use of the little we have for the betterment of all and putting Njala University first over personal interest.

I want to also use this opportunity on behalf of the University Court to officially welcome our New Minister of Technical and Higher Education, Professor Alpha Tejan Wurie who also as a matter of fact is not new to the Ministry. As the architect of the University Acts, we operate on. We hope to tap from his rich experience in dealing with the sector.

Let me now conclude by assuring you that Njala University remains committed and would continue to devise strategies to support the Governments flagship programmes in fostering human capital development in Sierra Leone and in enhancing our capabilities in absorbing the graduates of the Free Quality Programme.

I THANK YOU ALL.