Statement on the official announcement

of the **Provisional Results**

of the *first digital census* in Sierra Leone

–2021 Mid-Term Population and Housing Census–

By the

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Protocol

The Chairman and members of the Statistics Council; Chairman and members of the Parliamentary Subcommittee on Planning and Economic Development here present; the Development Secretary in the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development; Members of the Mid-Term Census Technical, Publicity and Advisory Committees; Development Partners present; Civil Society Organisations present; representatives of Ministries, Departments and Agencies present; partners from universities; Religious, ethnic group and traditional leaders; the Security Forces; Management and Staff of Stats SL; the media; Ladies and Gentlemen.

Good afternoon.

It's indeed an honour and a blessing to be able to speak to you today as the Chief Census Officer for the digital 2021 Mid-Term Population and Housing Census.

Acknowledgements

Chairman of this auspicious occasion, please permit me to change the order in which such statements are usually made. We would like to start with acknowledgements and there is a good reason for this.

We would like the public to value the significant contributions made by specific people and institutions to the overall success of the **first ever digital census conducted in this country** – the 2021 Mid-Term Population and Housing Census.

But first, we thank God who has made this success possible irrespective of some difficult circumstances my team faced during the implementation of the national activity.

Next, we would like to thank His Excellency the President of the Republic of Sierra Leone, Dr. Julius Maada Bio, who demonstrated leadership and confidence in my team and Stats SL as a whole, when he gave approval to the Government to take over financing the implementation of the census, after the World Bank decided to stop funding the activity, a day to the deployment of trained field staff for the main enumeration exercise across the country!

In addition to that, when Stats SL faced challenges in securing the electronic tablets the Kenyan Government had promised to provide on loan, President Bio made a special call to his colleague President Kenyatta. Thereafter, we received 20,000 tablets and 20,000 power banks from the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics. Thank you, your Excellency.

We are grateful to the Minister, Hon. Dr. Francis Kai-Kai and his team in the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development for the exceptional support provided to Stats SL during the period this census lasted. Thank you all. We had earlier on enjoyed the support of his predecessor Minister Nabeela Tunis, with whom Stats SL first presented the concept of the Mid-Term Census to the President.

The former Minister of Finance, now Chief Minister Hon. Jacob Jusu Saffa and the current Minister Hon. Denis K. Vandy and his team duly deserve our recognition and thanks for making this national activity work. We did not underestimate the pressure and difficult circumstances in which they operated. You have shown us that the generation of credible data for national development is equally an important national activity that deserves public funding. Thank you.

We are equally thankful to Hon. Musa Fofanah, Chairman of the Parliamentary Subcommittee on Planning and Economic Development and his supportive Committee members who ensured that Stats SL remained accountable throughout the process. The Committee was also part of the country-wide monitoring system we put in place and when we had issues of refusals in some communities, the committee was willing to engage.

Our gratitude and thanks also go to members of the Mid-Term Census committees – the Technical Committee, the Publicity Committee and the Advisory Committee for the diverse roles they played: The Technical Committee was composed of experts from relevant MDAs; the Publicity Committee comprised members from CSOs, universities and the media; and the Advisory Committee had very senior members of all political parties in this country.

To our various **field staff including supervisors, enumerators, IT and data quality teams**: thank you, thank you, thank you. You have done a marvelous job for your country and we are sure you feel very proud that we can announce today the results of your hard work. We thank you especially for your exceptional patience with the late payment of your field allowances. This exercise was a difficult job for

all of you. In this case of using digital technology, you had to go to your assigned enumeration areas (EAs) irrespective of their locations. We again sincerely apologise for the delay in paying some of you. We will ensure that everyone who has worked diligently for the census gets paid.

Chiefdom authorities across the country assisted Stats SL in reaching out to their people and urging them to accept our enumerators in their homes. We thank all Paramount Chiefs, Section Chiefs and their teams. Traditional rulers and heads of ethnic groups contributed to the success of the national activity. Thank you.

Stats SL is also indebted to the **National Action for Civic Education and Development** (NaCCED) which reached out to the Chiefs, Heads of various ethnic groups, youth groups, and facilitated a workshop for Stats SL's engagement with the groups.

Similarly, Stats SL thanks the reputable **Institute for Governance Reform** (IGR) for facilitating a key stakeholder meeting between Stats SL and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) on the Mid-Term Census.

We wish to thank the Security Forces who played a great role in ensuring that we conducted the census unhindered despite some unfortunate circumstances in some districts.

The Media played a fantastic role in sensitising the public on the 2021 Mid-Term Census. Thank you; we are grateful.

We wish to thank our Census Secretariat and all Stats SL staff for your various contributions to the success of the census.

This space is reserved for thanking our indefatigable and visionary Statistics Council headed by Chairman Mr Moses L. J. Williams. It is one of the best Councils/Boards that we have served. The public may not know the composition of this Council, hence we will quickly mention this:

(a) five members nominated by the Minister of Planning and Economic Development, one each from the Northwestern Region, Northeastern Region, Southern Region, Eastern Region and the Western Area respectively;
(b) persons or representatives of:- (i) the Vice Chancellors, University of Sierra Leone and Njala University; (ii) the Governor, Bank of Sierra Leone; (iii) the

President, Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture; (iv) the Development Secretary; (v) the Financial Secretary; (vi) the Commissioner of Labour; (vii) the Resident Representative, United Nations Development Programme; (viii) the President, Sierra Leone Association of Journalists; and (ix) the Statistician–General who is the secretary to the Council.

Special thanks now go to our development partners.

We thank The World Bank for financing a considerable part of the census activities, including the procurement of all the required IT equipment that has made Stats SL one of the best equipped National Statistics Offices in Africa; and also for financing the cartographic mapping exercise and the pilot census.

Many thanks to UNICEF, UNFPA, UNECA and the UN Family teams for various contributions including financing international consultants who helped with the census and those who implemented the digital dashboard for monitoring the activities. It is important to note that UNICEF, UNFPA and UNECA have continued their support.

The MRU Secretariat and the Chinese Embassy also provided items that were used for the census. We are grateful to you.

As mentioned earlier, through the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, the Government of the Republic of Kenya loaned the Government of Sierra Leone through Stats SL a total of 20,000 electronic tablets and 20,000 power banks for the conduct of the census. Stats SL is grateful to our colleague NSO in Nairobi.

Furthermore, we would like to thank our consultants from Nigeria, Ghana, Uganda, Ethiopia, Malawi and the UK, whose excellent services to Stats SL and Sierra Leone have made it possible for us to announce these provisional results of the first digital census in Sierra Leone after only a couple of months. A paper-based census would have required several more months to this event.

Mr Chairman, we are delighted to note that Stats SL **gave the opportunity to every citizen and other nationals in this country to be counted** so long as they slept in

Sierra Leone on census night. We went to the extent of announcing an official extension of the 14-day census period, and provided a mop-up period, which we again extended, just so that all those who wished to be counted could be counted.

We would therefore like to end these acknowledgements by thanking all our respondents, both those who at the outset embraced our field teams, as well as those who initially hesitated for whatever reasons, but eventually exercised their civic rights and provided responses to our enumerators. We are proud of all of you!

Setting the stage

Ladies and gentlemen, I now need to make clarifications on a few issues that were integral in the implementation of the first digital census in our country.

Why we had to go to the field

First, let me again explain why we needed to go to the field.

When Stats SL implemented the 2015 census, we had challenges with the coding of localities (settlements – towns, villages, etc.). The reason was that the cartographic mapping exercise happened almost a year before the census itself was conducted.

The delay was due to the 2014 Ebola outbreak!

As a result, there were mismatches in the cartography and census codes. These mismatches did not make it possible for Stats SL to give unique codes to about 60% of a specific type of EA; these EAs were largely spread across the country and mainly in the rural areas. Consequently, Stats SL was not able to disaggregate and tell the numbers of people living in most of those areas.

Not wanting to live with the problem for a decade until the next decennial census in 2025, Stats SL engaged the World Bank in late 2018 to address the issue. The proposal was approved and that became the genesis of the mid-term census, as it has happened between 2015 and 2025.

Let me reiterate that in that proposal, our foremost objective was to address the outstanding locality coding problem with the use of digital methodology. And since

we were to return to 60% of the problematic EAs, it became logical for Stats SL to implement the new methodology across the country.

Ladies and gentlemen, once you have updated the base maps, delineated new enumeration areas, produced census field maps, you have effectively produced a robust geographic frame for the conduct of a national census. That is what we have successfully done, using digital methods right from the cartographic mapping, through to the pilot census and the main enumeration.

This remarkable achievement owes Sierra Leonean men and women, who were adequately trained to use these technologies.

Mr Chairman, it should be noted that Stats SL has for several years before the 2021 Mid-Term Census been training fieldworkers to use electronic tablets for national surveys: We used tablets to conduct the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) in 2017; the Sierra Leone Integrated Household Survey (SLIHS) in 2018; and the Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) in 2019. We therefore have the expertise and requisite capacity at Stats SL to adequately train fieldworkers on the use of electronic tablets for the Mid-Term Census.

Sierra Leone can now be proud of having conducted its first digital census, like a few other countries have done: Ghana, Kenya, Malawi and Botswana. It is good to see that Liberia, Nigeria and several others are now following us. We are a small country but we can also lead in Africa and we should be proud of this capacity God has given us as a country.

Ladies and gentlemen, you now understand why I had to specially thank our young and dynamic supervisors, enumerators, data quality and IT teams, whose collective excellent work has again highlighted Sierra Leone's position on the map for successful implementation of a digital census.

These young Sierra Leoneans have acquired skills, which will be used for future surveys and censuses; the best among them will be identified to assist other countries.

Mr Chairman, ladies and gentlemen: we wish to emphasise that before the Mid-Term Census was conducted, Stats SL was most of the time unable to provide data to development partners and other institutions requesting specific area-based population data. Today, the results of our digital cartography and digital

enumeration will provide answers. Stats SL is proud to announce that we will henceforth be able to provide **Locality-Ward-Section-Chiefdom-District-Regional level population data** and these can be generated in a timely manner.

Also, Stats SL now has a **reliable sampling frame to support all important socio-economic surveys** for local and national development planning purposes.

A de facto census population and the influential one night in-country census migration factor

We need to stress again that everyone in Sierra Leone was counted where he or she slept on the Census Night of December 9th. So the population we report today is the **census night population**, where people slept on that night, whether or not those were their usual places of residence.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is an established fact that for various reasons, people move to their home towns and villages to be counted there. We call this phenomenon **the influential one night in-country census migration.**

We would have seen or heard before Census Night, some ethnic groups or smaller communities canvassing members of their different language communities who live and work in bigger cities and towns like Freetown, to go to their villages and be counted there. Many did.

It should therefore not be surprising that a city like Freetown lost most of its people to the influential one night in-country census migration. They travelled to villages, slept there on the census night and returned the following day. They were never counted in Freetown.

Consequently, chiefdoms, districts and collectively regions that are more successful in sensitizing their communities to spend the census night in their chiefdoms, districts and hence regions, would have more people reported in any census. And this shift is usually observable from one census to another.

Ladies and gentlemen, I would therefore like to urge you to consider the in-country census migration factor as you analyse the results we will present to you today. And that factor is also influenced by the mood of a country at census time.

Only one respondent was necessary, why others say they weren't counted

After every census there are usually many people, even among the well-educated citizens, who would say "I was not counted."

But when you ask them whether or not a census enumerator was reported to have visited their households, they would answer in the affirmative and that only the wife or the husband or another competent member of the household was spoken to.

Ladies and gentlemen, if you are among such people, feel good today that you were counted; you did not have to answer the questions yourself. One competent person of the household could answer for all members of the household.

How our digital technology put the enumerator under the mango tree out of business

Mr Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, it is not uncommon to always hear after a census that some lazy and rogue enumerators would sit in their homes or under a mango tree to fill in census questionnaires.

If that was true before, it could **not have been true** for our digital 2021 Mid-Term Census.

The electronic tablets given to enumerators and supervisors to go to their EAs or communities could only work if they were in those EAs and we could monitor them from HQ.

Secondly, the software application in those tablets could only open up if the holder was about 20 metres to the target structure. If he or she was already that close, walking further to the house was easier than looking for a mango tree.

Hence, our use of the digital technology was able to put out of business the lazy and rogue enumerators. This is why we continue to be grateful to these young men and women who braved difficult terrains especially mountainous areas in the far North and riverine areas in the districts of Bonthe, Pujehun, Kambia and Moyamba for example, that were hardly ever reached, to generate credible data for national development.

The Processes that led to the success of the 2021 Mid-Term Census

The locality verification exercise

Mr Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, we wish to remind the public that to start the processes of the 2021 Mid-Term Census, we conducted a locality verification exercise. We went to all district authorities, engaged them and prepared together a revised list of localities.

The digital cartographic mapping

Using the verified locality list as a guide and latest satellite imagery financed by the World Bank, we implemented an effective digital cartographic mapping exercise across the country. We used a new software that guided our trained cartographers and assisted in the delineation of the EAs.

The Pilot Census

Mr Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, guided by efficient international consultants recommended and financed by the World Bank, UNICEF and UNECA, Stats SL generated the representative sample of EAs for the Pilot Census. A first group of Sierra Leoneans were adequately trained to provision or configure the electronic tablets and another group was adequately trained to use the tablets for the pilot enumeration. The pilot census was successful, its report published on the website to give the public access to it, and that initial success gave Stats SL the confidence to move to the main enumeration.

The Main Enumeration

Mr Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, the training for the main enumeration was done at district level, where recruitment of census staff was also carried out. This was in response to local authorities who wished to have their 'sons and daughters' work in their local areas. We are therefore delighted to report that these young men and women demonstrated exceptional willingness to enumerate their own people, irrespective of the challenges with the terrains.

The Results

Ladies and gentleman, we have now come to the section of our statement that deals with the provisional results of the 2021 Mid-Term Population and Housing Census.

Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, we will now move to the population figures.

For the purpose of provisional results, we will limit to providing the **total population figures by sex at the \District and Regional levels**. More details of these provisional results including chiefdom level population will be provided at the official launch.

Starting with the **Eastern Region**.

Kailahun District has a total population of **545,947** with *267,586* males and *278,361* females.

Kenema District has a total population of **772,472** with *374,183* males and *398,289* females.

Kono District has a population of **620,703** with *311,832* males and *308,871* females.

For the **Northeastern Region**:

Bombali District has a population of **387,236** with *186,824* males and *200,412* females.

Falaba District has a population of **166,205** with *83,622* males and *82,583* females.

Koinadugu District has a population of **206,133** with *102,364* males and *103,769* females.

Tonkolili District has a population of **557,257** with *282,127* males and *275,130* females.

For the **Northwestern Region**:

Kambia District has a population of **367,699** with *188,560* males and **179,***139* females.

Karene District has a population of **290,313** with *147,124* males and *143,189* females.

Port Loko District has a population of **528,038** with *253,790* males and *274,248* females.

For the **Southern Region**:

Bo District has a population of **756,975** with *366,346* males and *390,629* females.

Bonthe District has a population of **297,561** with *149,555* males and *148,006* females.

Moyamba District has a population of **346,771** with *167,836* males and *178,935* females.

Pujehun District has a population of **429,574** with *213,242* males and *216,332* females.

For the **Western Area**:

Western Area Rural has a population of **662,056** with *331,334* males and *330,722* females.

Western Area Urban has a population of **606,701** with *289,938* males and *316,763* females.

Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen.

The **Eastern Region** has a total population of **1,939,122** with *953,601* males and *985,521* females.

The **Northeastern Region** has a total population of **1,316,831** with *654,937* males and *661,894* females.

The **Northwestern Region** has a total population of **1,186,050** with *589,474* males and *596,576* females.

The **Southern Region** has a total population of **1,830,881** with *896,979* males and *933,902* females.

The **Western Area** has a total population of **1,268,757** with *621,272* males and *647,485* females.

Consequently Mr Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, the population of Sierra Leone from the 2021 Mid-Term Population and Housing Census is **7,541,641** with **3,716,263 males** and **3,825,378 females** making a **sex ratio of 0.97** in favour of females.

There are **109,121** women more than men in Sierra Leone.

There is a total increase in the population from 2015 to 2021 of **449,528** which is 6% more than the 2015 population.

Mr Chairman, ladies and gentleman, I wish to emphasise that this is the population of people who slept in Sierra Leone on the night of December 10th in the various localities, chiefdoms, districts and regions.

We have provided Table 2 for the district population numbers. More details and analysis will be provided when we launch the provisional results.

Thank you and God bless us all.