The People's Republic of Japan, together with United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), has on 23rd March, 2021 at the State House of Sierra Leone signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Government of Sierra Leone to promote youth employment through automotive maintenance skills training.

In her opening statement, the Director of Research, Planning and Development in the Ministry of Technical and Higher Education, Ms. Sia Fasuluku, started off by thanking the Government of Sierra Leone, especially President Julius Maada Bio, for his fruitful international trips of which the signing of the MOU is one of the outcomes. She noted that the automotive maintenance skills training is geared towards human capital development, specifically the empowerment of youths to help them refrain from being security threats to society. She lamented about the lack of certified technicians and auto-mechanics for vehicular repairing and maintenance, adding that the project is in a bid to close such gap.

UNIDO's Country Representative in Sierra Leone, Ms. Mariatu Abionor Swaray, expressed her delight for being part of the signing ceremony of a project which will help address the skills gap in Sierra Leone. She said that the drive towards a vibrant economy and economic independence of the country's youthful population have been driven by industrial skills development through the Technical, Vocational and Education Training (TVET). TVET, she noted, is at the heart of any country's structural transformation, and it serves as a catalyst for enhanced employment opportunities, higher productivity, learning and innovation and export expansion for technology spillovers. She mentioned that the project will leverage the opportunity to advance women empowerment in a traditionally men-dominated automotive sector, support the development of a system to train youths not just in technical skills but also as entrepreneurs, and also procure and install necessary facilities and modern training equipment at the institutes. She further stated that a curriculum will be developed to absorb the project benefits at the end of the process.

The Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Japan to Sierra Leone, Mr. Himeno Tsutomu, announced Japan's continued commitment to the diplomatic relationship between their country and the Republic of Sierra Leone. He noted his pleasure to have been partnering with UNIDO in most of their projects, including the automotive maintenance skills training project which is set to strengthen the capacity of youths with a view to developing Sierra Leone’s human capital.

The Minister of Transport and Aviation, Mr. Kabineh M. Kallon, mentioned his awareness of the opportunities that the automotive maintenance skills training will bring to the people of Sierra Leone, especially the youths. He expressed hope that the intervention will increase personnel who will eventually play a concrete role in strengthening the foundation of economic recovery. He assured members of his Ministry's fullest support in the implementation of the project.

Making his keynote statement, Chief Minister, Prof. David Francis, intimated members that the signing ceremony is a visible outcome of the international travels and engagements of H.E. President Julius Maada Bio. He said that the whole plan started when a delegation from Sierra Leone attended the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) summit in 2019, where he met with the Government of Japan including the Prime Minister and representatives from the Toyota Multi-Corporation, and further conveyed messages from the meetings to the Japanese Ambassador through the Ministry of Technical and Higher Education to support Sierra Leone in building the capacity for vehicle and agriculture maintenance center in the country. He mentioned with delight that the President's visit to Japan has produced the construction of 4 ultra-modern vehicle maintenance centers in Freetown, Bo, Kenema, and Tonkolili, adding that the project is worth 3.8 million dollar, which will benefit over 10, 000 young men and women within five years.