



**KEYNOTE SPEECH BY HIS
EXCELLENCY PRESIDENT JULIUS
MAADA BIO
AT THE INAUGURAL MEDIA
COCKTAIL DINNER
AT RADISSON BLU ON
WEDNESDAY 5TH DECEMBER
2018**

Hon Vice President
Madam First Lady
Chief Minister
Minister and Deputy Minister
Friends in the Media

We meet tonight for the first time since my election as President of the Republic of Sierra Leone. If you are worried I am going to bore you with a long speech of my Government policies and programmes tonight then I am sorry to disappoint you. Tonight, I am going to try something different, something lighthearted and humorous. I am not known for jokes but I am not as bad as Chief Minister.

Normally, journalists are referred to as men and women whose job it is to inform the public and pursue the truth. But sometimes some of the publications can be really outlandish. I don't know how many of you read a

newspaper called Awareness Times that crowned me a fake brigadier. Not even a well-written Press Release from the MOD that explained my elevation to that position could persuade the editorial board, but that's okay by me, because as the First lady always reminds me, every occupation has its hazards.

Interestingly, in September this year, I suddenly found myself in the United States of America. I was very surprised, just the same way I believe my friends at We Yone Newspaper were. But these things do happen, you know, even supposed opponents sometimes have a meeting of the minds.

I could also understand why the red brigade protesters in US were angry with me. They must have asked themselves: "Why should he get so much applause during his maiden UN speech". So I understood their anger. I was also very touched how Sierra Leoneans love their President and First Lady that our picture with President Trump and Melania

became a national debate. And I promise you it was not a photoshop.

I hope my friends from Standard Times Newspaper are here because I would want them to update me on how my business investments are doing in Ghana. I was informed that the Nationalist Newspaper has been investigating these business investments in Ghana for the past years and I look forward to the report on how much money I have accumulated. If it has not topped the 100 million dollar mark, I will reject the report and ask for a second opinion.

Mr. Vice President, don't take this personal, but I am reliably informed by the grapevine that you are the ghost news editor for Sierra Express Media, which put out a story in June this year complaining that food commodity prices were skyrocketing with the banner headline: "**Sierra Leone Turns Hell**". I really have a problem with this headline, simply because you failed to crosscheck your facts with my

friend Momoh Conteh who recently traveled to hell and back. In a press conference, Momoh Conteh told newsmen that there is no free quality education for children in Hell. He also reported that in Hell there is no distribution of ambulances to support access to health facilities for ordinary people.

Back here on earth, I am hearing whispers of the divided opinions among the print media on the establishment of the commission of inquiry. On the one hand, those newspapers that received many government adverts in the last regime hold the view that the commission of inquiry will be a witch hunt. On the other hand, those newspapers that were deprived of government adverts in the last regime hold the view that the commission of inquiry will be a call for democratic accountability. If the Chief Minister was to describe the divide, he would have said it is "egregious". Did anybody bring a dictionary to look it up? Never mind! Whichever side you may stand on this, don't you believe it

just honourable for us to hunt our monies back and use them to improve the lives of ordinary people?

By the way, what has happened to the good governance programme, monologue? I know my good friend, David Tam Bayoh went on secondment to APC in the last elections. In football terms, I was told it was a very expensive transfer but unfortunately the C4C made the match really difficult for David in Kono. Don't be too sad David, we are all in this together as I have also instructed Juldeh to write a report on how we lost Kono so badly. I understand that the C4C Leader in Parliament, Hon. Emmerson Lamina is helping the Vice President with the report.

I heard my friends in APC are not too happy with the latest Emmerson Bockarie Song "suspect". I am sorry my APC friends if Emmerson reminded you that I am not here to steal and I am President for all Sierra Leoneans. Sadly, the hole you left behind is too deep and cannot be filled by

magic. If I was to be a magician for a day, I would bring the exchange rate down. I have also heard the message loud and clear Emmerson about youth unemployment and the “grun dry”. Even though, you don’t like to hear this Emmerson but let me assure you things will soon get better.

I was also informed that the veteran journalist and Deputy Minority Leader of the APC, Hon. Ibrahim Ben Kargbo was also commending me during one of the approval sessions in parliament, that for the very first time he was very impressed with the huge number of journalists I have appointed to various positions. Thank you Hon. I.B Kargbo but just imagine if I had not appointed Sorie Fofana and Sheikh Bawoh of the Global Times Newspapers. In fact, I had to send Jonathan Leigh as a diplomat to Germany after his sad experiences at Pademba Road during the last regime.

Perhaps my greatest surprise was the reaction to the appointment of the Chairman, Independent Media Commission, Mr George Koryoma. I had to feel sorry for poor "Uncle George" after reading the uncomplimentary SLAJ Press Release on his appointment but thanks to the Veterans who stood by him during those difficult times. Uncle George, let me share with you a favorable quote from E.L Doctorow: "To have the regard of one's peers is immensely moving". But like any great fraternity, I am delighted you now receive the fullest support from SLAJ. Let me also reassure SLAJ that my Government will not interfere with the independence of the IMC because we must make it respectable, fully effective and truly independent.

I have also come here tonight to thank all of you for voting for me at the last elections as your President. When I say ALL, I sincerely mean ALL of you for voting for me. But just in case you did not vote for me, you can still accept my thanks because Dr Samura Kamura is not here tonight.

As we reflect on the last elections, particularly the extraordinary role the media played in safeguarding the credibility of the elections, I would like us to remember the heroism of someone who is not here with us tonight – Ibrahim Samura, former editor of the New Age Newspaper. A brave and fearless journalist who lost his life for demanding a credible election. No election is worth more than the life of a journalist. Tonight, I will also like to mention Patrick Jaiah Kamara of Concord Times who continues to live with the scars of the beating and physical attack on his person for similarly demanding a credible election. Never again should we have a government or politicians who abdicate their duty to protect journalists and become the perpetrators of violence against journalists.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, across the country, there are extraordinary and hardworking journalists. I may not agree with everything you write or report but I Know

the success of your work is essential to the success of our democracy. You help all of us as politicians who serve at the pleasure of the people to do our jobs better by holding us accountable, demanding honesty and calling for transparency.

You could all recall that in Paragraph 147 of my maiden address at the State Opening of the First Session of the Fifth Parliament, I pledged my Government's commitment to among other things "repeal the seditious libel law" and "enhance the capacity of the IMC to enforce the IMC Act." This was in fulfilment of my manifesto commitment. We are all aware that Part V of the Public Order Act criminalizes any publication that is deemed defamatory or seditious and has been used as a regime to unduly target and imprison media practitioners and silence dissident views.

Whilst the 1965 Public Order Act may have been passed to muzzle the press, yet the wording of the Act clearly puts

every citizen's right to free speech in jeopardy. Even where justification for its retention may abound, the overwhelming and preponderant view is that criminalizing libel is no longer fanciful, and seems to import what was formerly an autocratic style into democratic governance. The good news is that we will soon be ending the breach of about half a dozen international conventions to which Sierra Leone is a signatory. When we repeal the Public order Act of 1965, we hope to open up Sierra Leone's media sector to new investment and growth, foster creativity and innovation, and support the development of high quality journalism which will in turn support good governance and democratic accountability.

The repeal of Part V of the Public Order Act does not envisage a void in the accountability matrix relating to freedom of the press and expression, nor would it imply softening the legal regime or grant a carte blanche to journalists to defame people. Journalists who churn

irresponsible statements will be held accountable through a testable, verifiable and justifiable civil process of reprimand.

Therefore, I am pleased to inform you that a Cabinet paper with full concurrence from the Attorney General is now before Cabinet for consideration. It is my honest and genuine view that Part Five of the Public Act of 1965 should be repealed and will be repealed in the shortest possible time. **THIS NA TALK AND DO BISNES!** And I am not sure what Standing Order this will be under the SLAJ Code of Ethics.

Ladies and gentlemen, you could also recall that during my campaign and in my address on the occasion of the State Opening of Parliament, I pledged to give subvention to SLAJ on an annual basis. I am pleased to inform you that it has been budgeted for and is available to access as and when you are ready without any preconditions. The ball is now in your court.

Let me at this point recognize the Women in the Media Sierra Leone (WIMSAL) for commending our efforts for appointing three women Commissioners into the IMC. Please be assured that we are committed to more women empowerment. To you WIMSAL, there are many more ways we can collaborate including working together to end violence against Women. I understand that you are also committed to that campaign and have sought funding from the Ministry of Finance in that regard. I am informed that the resources you have sought from the Finance Ministry are available for that campaign and you only need concurrence from your sector Ministry.

Also, kindly join me in commending our First Lady and the many advocacy groups campaigning against rape and sexual violence against women and girls. I am delighted with the media coverage of the "Hands of Our Girls" Campaign which shows that men who rape and sexually

abuse women would now have no place to hide. The media has an incredible power in informing the public and holding perpetrators accountable, in our efforts to combat the rape culture and sexual assault. But that power should also come with a greater responsibility so that journalists who write stories or reports about rape, sexual assault and violence against women and girls should ensure that their stories or reports will not place the victims in more danger or further victimize them. Let me be very clear, men who rape girls deserve to be jailed for life.

My friends in the media, let me leave you with this quote from the American Politician and Author, David Alan Brat: "The media does play a vital role in our democracy, and if we cannot depend on journalistic ethics, the nation is in trouble."

I wish everyone a great time at this inaugural cocktail and I look forward to working with you all in the months and years ahead.