



**KEYNOTE ADDRESS AT THE ANNUAL
CONVOCATION AND AWARD OF DEGREES
BY HIS EXCELLENCY, JULIUS MAADA BIO,
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA
LEONE AND CHANCELLOR OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF SIERRA LEONE. FREETOWN,
SIERRA LEONE, 16 FEBRUARY 2019.**

Honourable Vice President

Ministers of Government present

The Pro-Chancellor, University of Sierra Leone

The Pro Chancellor, Njala University

The Vice Chancellor and Principal, University of Sierra Leone

The Vice Chancellor and Principal, Njala University

The Deputy Vice Chancellor, Fourah Bay College

The Deputy Vice Chancellor, Institute of Public Administration and
Management

The Deputy Vice Chancellor, College of Medicine and Allied Health Sciences

The Senior Academic and Senior Administrative staff of the University of
Sierra Leone.

Students

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen

Good morning

I am delighted to be here today to perform my statutory duty as Chancellor of
the University of Sierra Leone as provided for in The Universities Act of 2005.

But I am even more delighted to be here to witness each of you fulfil your dreams. I therefore congratulate each graduate, hardworking parents, siblings, extended family members, partners, and all loved ones for fulfilling your dreams. Congratulations. Let us give each one of you another round of applause.

With the fulfilment of these dreams, I also see the beginning of a promise – the promise that tertiary education will generate a skilled workforce, a highly motivated entrepreneurial cohort, and a crop of young people committed to our national development. Among you today, I see teachers who will serve our free quality education. I see engineers who can construct roads, build bridges to ford our rivers, or the assembly plants that will start local manufacturing and packaging or support mineral exploration and extraction. I see agro-business producers and extension workers. I see young entrepreneurs and innovators who will develop ICT penetration and deploy big data to develop nation and make governance even more effective. I see doctors and nurses who will provide accessible and quality healthcare. I see food scientists, lawyers, social workers, policy-makers, soldiers, police. . .well, and even politicians. Above all else, I see promise – the promise that each of you will give abundantly of your individual talents to develop our nation, our Sierra Leone. We may no longer be the Athens of West Africa but we can become an incubator of new ideas, a hub of innovation, a driver of bold entrepreneurship, and a centre of excellence.

That is the new Sierra Leone that each of us must be committed to building. Let us be the change that we want to see in this land that we love, Sierra Leone.

In the last eight months, my government has put in place the strong fundamentals for a disciplined and well-managed economy. We have streamlined revenue mobilisation. We continue to clamp down on corruption, waste, fraud, and abuse. We are implementing growth-friendly and investor-friendly policies and processes. We have invested heavily in human capital development through free quality education at the basic and secondary school levels, quality healthcare, and we are working hard on various food security initiatives. This is because we believe that human capital development promotes comprehensive national development. Our development partners and multilateral agencies have acknowledged and are supporting our robust progress toward building a resilient nation. We are determined to make Sierra Leone a better place for us all. PAOPA we will make Sierra Leone a better place.

My government acknowledges progress made by the university in the last eight months. The BADEA funded rehabilitation of Fourah Bay College has started again in spite of the now usual questions about transparency associated with the past government. We have turned the sod for a new \$50 million campus of the Institute of Public Administration and Management at Bureh Town. The University of Sierra Leone has launched its first ever ICT portal that will support education and research. The benefits will eventually cascade down to

practical applications and outcomes that will drive national development in the areas of governance, healthcare, commerce, business, and agricultural extension work. The University has also registered the University of Sierra Leone name and logo and those of its constituent colleges as trademarks. The University has also registered the University Business centre in line with one of the functions outlined in The Universities Act of 2005.

The university is also set to start exploring possibilities in research and commercial services. It is also finalizing its review of university policies that will enhance the governance and general processes at this university. We are making strong progress. Let us be proud of ourselves.

Nin months ago, I said in not so many words that it is not the business of central government to govern the university. Universities should select their own leadership by taking into account that leadership's respectability and standing within academia and its ability to be proactive and communicate effectively.

The university leadership must also be committed to efficiently managing and developing the university through a transformational strategic vision, overhauling institutional structures and processes in innovative but rational ways, introducing disciplined financial management, and looking for new and sustainable funding streams. We will continue working on amending the Universities Act of 2005 and I will step down from the Chancellorship of the

university once that is done. That is a commitment and I keep all my commitments.

But in addition to the issue of selecting progressive and transformation leadership for the university, my government believes that the current funding model for the university is not sustainable and it does not assure access, quality, and continuous improvement.

We must address the question of infrastructure with regard to library and ICT facilities, lecture rooms and laboratories, student hostels as well as faculty housing, better on-campus medical facilities, improved water and sanitation facilities, as well as sports and recreational facilities for the university community.

We must remove the burden of quality tertiary education from parents, guardians and loved ones. We must give every Sierra Leonean who works hard to meet the requirements for admission a fair and equal chance to pursue university education. College must be affordable and accessible to all Sierra Leoneans. Clearly, government subsidies and grants in aid are not enough for new critical investments in tertiary education in Sierra Leone. We must address funding gaps that have led to delayed salaries, strike actions, lost class time and lost academic years, and poor teaching, research and service at our university.

We must invest in the development of tertiary education. My government is finalising a cabinet paper to introduce a Students Loan Scheme that will be

structured and run based on best practices in the sub-region and elsewhere. This will close some funding gaps and provide some relief for government.

But we also appeal to our development partners to consider escalating investments in tertiary and vocational education. Here is an argument.

Currently, a donor may spend \$3 million in financing an infrastructural project like a road. But I would argue that by investing \$3 million in the quality training and education of ten civil engineers at our universities, those donors would have provided human capital that will build more than \$500 million worth of roads, bridges, hospitals, and schools that will serve millions of Sierra Leoneans for decades and decades to come. My point is simple: we cannot delink the quality of tertiary education and quality human capital development from the nature and quality of national development and economic growth. My appeal therefore to our development partners is to invest in tertiary education if they want to help us break the poverty and aid-donor trap.

We have also done our fair bit to reduce the burden on hardworking Sierra Leonean parents. We have removed and will refund all application fees paid by students. As a government, we also believe that Science, technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) education is critical for leapfrogging Sierra Leone on the scale of development. As from this year, every eligible student who is admitted to university to study STEM related course will automatically be awarded a Sierra Leone Government grants-in-aid.

But again, I want to challenge all of us with key questions. “How do we make the University of Sierra Leone much more relevant to the development of Sierra Leone? How do we improve standards and make our students fit for purpose in the 21st century? What practical steps should we take?”

First, there must be a direct correlation between the university curriculum and the development needs of the country. Those who graduate from our universities form the critical mass of solvers of the development challenges of this country. The university must therefore ensure that it is producing quality graduates who will promote Sierra Leone’s development in all the key areas of agriculture medicine, engineering, entrepreneurship, and other key development sectors. Also, the curriculum must be driven by the needs of the private sector. We must train our students in entrepreneurship and we must encourage students to be innovative in starting new business and creating private sector jobs. It is ultimately more lucrative when one succeeds in the private sector. Graduates should not be transfixed on chasing the few available public sector jobs. My government is working hard on creating the enabling environment to new graduates to venture into the private sectors as that expands the economy and supports national development.

We must also address faculty teaching and curriculum standards. The teaching methods should promote critical inquiry and student engagement in exploring core issues in their disciplines. The university must also emphasize service-

based learning. If you are training an Agricultural extension worker, that student must do several assessed modules of actual, real life extension work over several years of university education. Ditto doctors, nurses, engineers, crop scientists, ICT students, or social workers.

Faculty conduct and discipline matter and they are critical. Faculty members must demonstrate the highest professional and ethical standards at all times. Sexual harassment, any form of discrimination, unethical practices, sexual favours for grades, cash for grades, buy-my-pamphlet-or-you-fail, are all crude and totally unacceptable. Any faculty member who engages in such a practice is not fit to be in academia. He/she must be fairly and transparently investigated and if found wanting immediately fired. On this occasion, I also propose that the faculty consider introducing compulsory, periodic, but comprehensive ethics training for all faculty members and administrators.

Faculty teaching effectiveness also matters. Faculty members should be open to new ideas and innovative teaching approaches, professional development training, and peer faculty mentoring that continually enhance their teaching effectiveness. My government emphasizes performance audits, evaluation, and service delivery. So should it be also at the university. I therefore propose that the university adopt compulsory, per-semester faculty performance evaluations by their academic supervisors, and also by the students. Student voices matter

and student perceptions of teaching effectiveness matters. These must be factored into merit-based faculty promotion reviews.

University standards matter. Admission standards must be rigorous and clear. The syllabus is a service contract and faculty members must deliver on their obligations of teaching and assessing at the highest levels. I see that academic integrity and a disciplinary process associated with academic dishonesty has been factored into the reviewed university policies. That is welcome development and it must be enforced in order to maintain the very highest standards.

But the university must also provide a clear incentive system for recognizing and rewarding outstanding faculty research and teaching. It must also provide faculty with as many opportunities for professional development as possible through strategic partnerships with other universities and professional bodies.

We must improve the overall quality of tertiary education by supporting faculty growth and development.

For you students, there is no place for cultism and cult practices at an academic institution. There is absolutely no place for gangsterism and violent conduct at this or any institution of higher learning. Cultism and the violence and intimidation associated with cultism are criminal violations of the laws of Sierra Leone. Any cult practice that violates the laws of Sierra Leone will be punished with the full force of the law. We will, from now on, be proactive and the Police

will investigate and deal with every reported case of cultism. Needless to say that I expect the university must also fully investigate, and where necessary, completely expel any student who is associated with cultism.

In conclusion, we must embrace a culture of excellence at our universities. Let me also acknowledge the overall role of the university in national development. The university provides leadership in service, research, and in the training of professionals who will develop Sierra Leone. The government will actively encourage and support university business and other initiatives that promote national development. Our country is impatient for comprehensive national development. The university must continue playing its role in national development. I thank you all.