



**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY,
PRESIDENT JULIUS MAADA BIO, ON THE
COMMEMORATION OF WORLD CANCER
DAY AT THE BINTUMANI INTERNATIONAL
CONFERENCE HALL, ABERDEEN, SIERRA
LEONE, 4 FEBRUARY 2019**

Honourable Vice President

Honourable Ministers of Government

Honourable Members of Parliament

Paramount Chiefs

Members of Diplomatic and Consular Corps

Representatives of Development Partners,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning.

Here are the grim facts: at least 3,000 Sierra Leoneans are afflicted with cancer every year. 2,200 of them die.

Of those who die, 900 are men from mainly prostate and liver cancers; 1,300 are women from mainly breast, ovarian, and cervical cancers. Our fathers, uncles, and

brothers deserve to live. Our mothers, aunts, and sisters deserve to live.

Here is what we met as a government. There were no cancer diagnostic services at any of the Government hospital facilities in the country. There were no radiotherapy services. There was no comprehensive cancer treatment hospital. There are very few trained oncologists in the entire country not because the doctors and nurses do not want to be trained, but because they lack opportunities to get trained. As a result of a severe lack of medical equipment, surgical oncology or chemotherapy services in this country are limited or nearly impossible. Sierra Leoneans spend \$1.5 million US dollars every year flying mainly to Ghana for cancer

diagnosis and care. The financial and emotional burdens are enormous for families and for the government.

PAOPA – DAT GO CHANGE.

I campaigned on a platform of change. I campaigned with a solemn promise to Sierra Leoneans that my government would invest heavily in human capital development. Human capital development involves caring for the whole of the human being: investing in the brain (through free quality education), in the stomach (through food security), and in the well-being (through escalated investments in healthcare services and infrastructure).

So as a Government, we have closely examined the problem, analysed it, and undertaken purposeful planning.

We believe that cancer is preventable and that Sierra Leoneans should be fully informed on risk factors. We also believe that because early detection and diagnosis saves lives, we must intensify awareness campaigns.

There is no place for misguided cultural notions about the symptoms of cancer or stigma for cancer patients.

This year's Cancer Day theme is a three-year impact statement that emphasizes personal responsibility and personal empowerment. It is "I Am and I Will." It is about inspiring individuals to action and urging them to take personal responsibility for themselves and for collectively mobilizing to kick cancer out. It is about

avoiding risk factors, staying vigilant and aware of early symptoms, and helping others in your community to spread awareness of cancer. Remember, “I am and I Will.”

As a Government, we also believe that cancer can be cured and treatment must be accessible locally in Sierra Leone. That treatment must also be affordable to every Sierra Leonean who is diagnosed with cancer. In addition, as a government that believes in human capital development, we believe that we must seek out and offer training opportunities to our selfless and committed oncology nurses and doctors so that we have a critical mass of dedicated medical personnel for diagnosing and treating cancer. Developing local expertise in cancer diagnosis, treatment, and care is an

important element in my Government's plans to fight cancer. Our First Lady, a very passionate advocate for making cancer history in Sierra Leone, has today announced funding secured from the Merck Foundation for training TEN medical professionals over a 12 to 24 month period in India and Egypt. Government will continue working on such collaborative engagements and actively search for funding streams and opportunities that will strengthen our technical capacity even further.

Also, as a Government that believes in purposeful planning, we will continually collect comprehensive data about cancer to help us plan for and make critical investments in cancer awareness, training for medical personnel, and safe cancer treatment and care. We

believe that cancer needs not be a death sentence for Sierra Leoneans.

So here is what we have done as a Government.

1. We have undertaken two initiatives: a) a National Diagnostic Centre, and b) a Radiotherapy Cancer Treatment Centre, through a strategic partnership with VARIAN, a US based organization that is working in various African countries.

On the 26th of September 2018, the Government (through the Minister of Health) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with VARIAN for the establishment of a National Diagnostic Centre to perform tests such as MRI, endoscopy, CT scan and other cancer-related diagnostic tests. VARIAN's Halcyon system is free

from radioactive materials. It can therefore be safely located in accessible residential areas in the heart of cities.

The Ministry of Health and Sanitation is presently collaborating with the Ministry of Lands, Housing and the Environment to identify a piece of land that is centrally located to all hospitals in the Western Area.

In order to comply with international standards for the construction of the two facilities, Government has approached the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) for technical advice on architectural drawings that meet internationally acceptable standards.

Certainly, the Government will consider other blueprints with the assistance of the IAEA experts.

The IAEA will also be fully involved in the

supervision of the construction works of the two facilities.

2. As a Government that believes in transparency and corruption-free transactions, here are the full costs and how we are going to finance it. The Radiotherapy Cancer Treatment Centre will cost 8.3 million EUROS. The National Diagnostic Centre will cost 11.5 million EUROS. The total cost is 19.8 million EUROS. Government has negotiated full financing for both projects that requires Government to pay a 15% down payment before the commencement of work and to make complete repayment within 10 years at a low interest rate of 1.7%.

3. Here is how we will fund the down payment of nearly 3 million EUROS so that construction work will commence soon. I promised the people of Sierra Leone that all ill-gotten monies recovered from corrupt persons will be given back to the people of Sierra Leone from whom the monies were stolen. We have already invested money from leakages and waste into free quality education that benefits our children and into a free national ambulance service. Last month, the Anti-Corruption Commission presented me with a cheque of over 8 Billion Leones or \$1 million dollars. I promised the people of this country that I will use that money for constructing and fully equipping a national diagnostic medical centre. I

am pleased to announce here, today, that we already have \$1 million of the down payment. As the Commissions of Inquiry proceed, Sierra Leoneans will know where more of the country's stolen money is and we will recover those and put them into education, healthcare, and food security that will benefit every Sierra Leonean regardless of party, tribe, or region. Every Sierra Leonean deserves better – full stop.

4. Finally, I am also pleased to announced that the Ministry of Health and Sanitation in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has secured funding support from the Government of the People's Republic of China to commence constructing and fully equipping units in two

government hospitals and five peripheral health units in Western Area Rural and Urban that will be dedicated to cervical cancer screening and management. As I have emphasized, early detection and diagnosis saves lives.

So let me conclude by again stating my government's determination to fight cancer through purposeful planning and strong strategic partnerships with international partners, within government and across agencies, among communities, and including all stakeholders. Widespread awareness and information campaigns about risk factors and early diagnosis will help us reduce death rates from cancer. We will soon have diagnostic and treatment facilities that are accessible and affordable in our own country. Our

healthcare workers who are going to be trained will strengthen local expertise. And we will train more. As individuals and citizens of this country, let us make a personal commitment to make cancer history in Sierra Leone. Remember “I AM AND I WILL.” I thank you all.