



ADDRESS
BY HIS EXCELLENCY
JULIUS MAADA BIO, PRESIDENT OF THE
REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE, AT THE
INSTITUTE OF POLITICS, HARVARD
KENNEDY SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT,
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**TITLE: Toward a New Renaissance in
Sierra Leone: A New, Bolder Vision**

I thank you for those very kind words and I am especially grateful for the very warm reception my delegation and I have received at Harvard University.

Deans, Faculty, Students, and Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

Allow me to begin this evening's conversations about Sierra Leone with two rather hackneyed expressions: a) "a bad reputation is easy to make and hard to break" and b) "a good reputation is hard to destroy."

Sierra Leone, in the popular imagination of some, has yet to shake off persistent narratives of a quaint place in the jungles of Africa, where drugged, marauding teenagers with AK-47s ran riot, killing women and children, indiscriminately lopping off limbs and razing down houses in an orgy of violence over blood

diamonds. To some, Sierra Leone is still the place of Ebola with hundreds of people dying helplessly and being buried in mass graves.

To some still, Sierra Leone is still the subject of international diplomacy about peace making, peacebuilding, and reconciliation and how the international community could get it all wrong again and how everything could go up in flames. It is further imagined as the playground of irrational warlords uninterested in the civilised norms of democratic rule waging war against a corrupt and repressive regime. Sierra Leone is also perceived as the site of activity for multiple international charities feeding malnourished babies and pouring in conspicuous amounts of money in order to save Sierra Leoneans from themselves.

Unfortunately, most people have yet to update that imagination of Sierra Leone as either just another unsafe, failed state or one teetering at the brink of failure and relapse into anarchy.

Sierra Leone continues to pay a hefty price for the failure or refusal of huge sections of the west to shake off their wrong perceptions of Sierra Leone. Insurance agencies continue to rate the country as a very dangerous place and hence unfairly levy very high insurance rates. Tourism is down to a trickle. Potential investors imagine that their businesses are safer if kept well out of Sierra Leone.

It is seen wrongly as a haven for predatory hawks, red tape, and illicit financial flows. It is seen as a place where leaders are not interested in maximising gains from their natural resources or training their population into a skilled workforce. Foreign policy analysts, some development partners, and risks analysts, in equal measure, still see Sierra Leone as an object of intense fascination and conjecture.

Then there is the Sierra Leone that some of you may have encountered in your Political Sciences or International Relations and Politics lecture halls – Sierra Leone as an

intellectual construct; Sierra Leone as a site of intellectual contestation where scholars test out “new insights” into resource curse and state collapse, neopatrimonialism and clientelism, liberal peacebuilding, truth and reconciliation best practices or hybrid justice systems for human rights, post conflict and peace-making models, ethno-politics in emerging democracies and many more.

I want to steer away from the many "Sierra Leones" imagined, constructed, and contested. I want to talk about the Sierra Leone where there has been democratic elections and three peaceful and seamless transfers of power over the last 23 years. I want to talk about the peaceful Sierra Leone that has continuously been a pluralistic democracy for the last 23 years.

I want to talk about the Sierra Leone with great potential – a youthful population, rich seas, breath-taking touristic beaches and landscape, vast arable land crisscrossed by more than 12 major rivers, very significant

and diverse mineral deposits, and with neighbours at peace with themselves and at peace with one another. I want to talk about the Sierra Leone providing leadership in the sub-region. I want to talk about the new Sierra Leone that provides every Sierra Leonean with security, access, and the opportunity to prosper in a well-governed Sierra Leone.

So, there is a strong and irreversible shift in focus from a Sierra Leone that does not define itself in terms of a distant past and imagined or real pathologies of politics but in terms of a new direction. This strategic shift is anchored on four key staples: a) good governance, b), purposeful planning and domestication of development priorities c) investment in human capital development, and d) negotiating new modes of engagement with the world and development partners with emphasis on trade and developing the private sector and not aid.

Good governance involves institutionalising best practices into norms that make our democracy resilient. So, when we clamp down

on corruption, waste, abuse, and fraud or when we stringently apply anti-corruption laws without fear or favour or institute commissions of inquiry presided over by foreign judges of great standing, we are fostering a culture of deterrence and accountability. Corruption hinders national development and social cohesion and it is a potent trigger for civil unrest.

We have undertaken institutional reforms that promote greater public financial management and more efficient revenue mobilisation. We can now track down financial inflows and outflows. We have made the price of corruption very high and in the first months of my administration alone, we have recovered over a million US dollars from corrupt public officials. We will use the recovered loot as down-payment for the first and only diagnostic and cancer care hospital that will serve all Sierra Leoneans.

We are encouraged by the Millennium Corporation Challenge's rating of our country,

for the very first time at 71 from a lowly 49. We will sustain the fight against corruption because it guarantees investor confidence and insures that public finances and resources are well-managed for the public good.

We have commissioned a geophysical survey to help us determine the location, types, and volume of mineral deposits in our country. We have instituted progressive extractives governance policies that will guarantee transparency in that sector.

In addition to a new investment code, we have removed red tape and constituted an Investment Board co-chaired by me and the Vice President. This will be a one-stop shop for addressing investor needs and questions.

Democratic accountability works best in a milieu of trust and confidence in institutions and processes. We believe that by simplifying and making government processes predictable, we will promote trust and confidence in our governance institutions. Part of that

predictability is to use science, technology, and innovation to fast-track government processes and make them more transparent. Also, citizens must have buy-in on how governance functions. We will keep democratic spaces open and ensure civic participation and inclusion in our democratic decision-making processes.

We are finalising the repeal process and libel will no longer be a criminal offence in Sierra Leone as it is currently. A free press enriches our democracy. We have also fast-tracked devolution and decentralisation. We have also opened up spaces for civic engagement and participation and continue to collaborate with civil society and advocacy organisations on resolving some of our thorniest problems.

In mapping out our development priorities as a nation, my government has launched a medium term national development plan which is part of a longer twenty-year development plan. The priorities were determined by citizens through an inclusive,

consultative process owned and driven by us and tailored to our country's specific development needs and context. The plan also needed to be achievable, sustainable with measurable outcomes that are consistent with regional and global development targets and indicators as set in the AU Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Future annual budgets would also be fully aligned with the national development priorities.

We also laid out how we would engage our development partners in order to avoid duplicity and waste and together, we negotiated a continual relationship of continuous dialogue guided by the principles of transparency and mutual accountability. My argument is that Africa's development needs not be driven by and determined by external actors and donor countries.

Additionally, we also want to establish a robust, diversified, and effective private sector in agriculture, fisheries, tourism, energy, and

ICT among others because we believe that it will be a critical bulwark that shores up the development of our economy and therefore makes it less susceptible to shocks. Sierra Leone grants incentives that ease the establishment and the transaction of business and also enjoys duty free access for certain goods through the United States' African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) and the European Union's Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) contains incentives to spur private sector investment.

Sierra Leone wants more trade and less aid and where aid is granted it should be aligned with our national development priorities and not duplicate other external actor interventions. But just reviewing regulatory frameworks, undertaking infrastructural developments, and institutionalising democratic accountability is not enough to drive development.

As a country, we have identified human capital development as the most critical factor

in the development process. We have significantly increased investments in human capital development up to 21% of the entire budget. We have launched the free quality education programme as the government's flagship programme with five core components: equitable access and free especially for the girl-child and children with disabilities; ensuring quality and providing free teaching and learning resources; retention including providing safe spaces for girls and tackling residual cultural attitudes that scupper the education of the girl-child; completion, and strong post-completion training.

Nations that have leapfrogged in the development process have a well-educated and trained workforce and have taken advantage of science and innovation. The government has also established a Directorate of Science, Technology, and Innovation to seed, test, and scale innovations in collaboration with and in consideration of the needs of the private sector, government, and academic institutions.

In further pursuit of human capital development, we have also invested in healthcare infrastructure and the training of healthcare workers in order to provide access to quality healthcare. We are also investing in various food security initiatives. In addition to investing in human capital development, my government is working on ensuring social protection and safety for every Sierra Leonean especially women and girls.

In addition to women's financial inclusion and empowerment initiatives, we have declared a national emergency on rape and sexual violence. Thus, we can allocate resources to dealing with the emergency while reviewing all applicable laws on women's rights and eliminating all forms of gender-violence.

Within the wider sub-regional context, Sierra Leone provides leadership for the Committee of Ten for the reform of the United Nations. The singular objective is to gain Africa's rightful place in the global governance system. We argue that Africa's non-representation and

underrepresentation in the Permanent and Non-permanent categories of the Security Council is grossly unfair and unjust. We further argue that Africa makes its fair contribution to the maintenance of international peace and security and Africa is affected by the majority of the decisions of the United Nations Security Council. Moreover, Africa is the world's second-largest and second-most-populous continent and its 1.2 billion people collectively deserve representation in the Permanent category of the premier Organ of the United Nations entrusted with the responsibility of maintaining international peace and security on behalf of Member States.

Sierra Leone as a nation continues also to contribute to the preservation of world peace and security by actively participating in United Nations Peacekeeping missions in various countries in the world.

Let me close by emphasising that our vision of the new Sierra Leone is one developed on the

principles of democratic governance and accountability; one that makes informed choices through inclusive consultative processes about and drives its own development priorities; one that continues to escalate investments in human capital development and innovation; one that protects and provides equal opportunity to vulnerable populations; one that develops its economy around private sector growth and trade (not aid); and, one that continues to provide regional leadership. That is the new Sierra Leone we are building. Our mission is to develop a Sierra Leone whose reputation is hard to destroy.

I thank you.