



**Statement delivered by His Excellency, Julius Maada Bio, President of the Republic of Sierra Leone on the conferment of the degree of Doctor of Letters, DLitt (Honoris Causa), at the Regional Maritime University, Ghana. Saturday, 15 June 2019.**

Your Excellency, Honourable Chancellor, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, permit me to stand on all existing protocols.

I thank you for the very warm sentiments.

I also thank the Government and people of the Republic of Ghana, the Chancellor and staff of the Regional Maritime University, and all present (especially fellow graduates) for the warm and very generous hospitality accorded me and my delegation since our arrival.

Permit me, from the outset, to say that on behalf of the people of the Republic of Sierra Leone, I accept the honour so bestowed on me with deep humility and appreciation. I thank the Board of Governors and Management staff of the Regional Maritime University for the conferment of the degree of Doctor of Letters (Honoris Causa).

I am informed that all the five (5) sitting presidents of the RMU member states will be honoured as well as three (3) founding former presidents, and a former Rector. **We owe the Board, management and staff of RMU a sincere debt of gratitude. I can affirm my country's continued support as an obligation to this great institution.**

Within these hallowed halls of academic excellence, where advanced scientific research and training have been put to the service of sustainable development in our sub-region, I stand proudly today to associate myself and my country with your mission, and affirm our continued support as a nation.

Sierra Leone continues to associate with and benefit greatly from the Regional Maritime University.

**Particularly, your institution's continuing contribution to professional training and institutional capacity building of Sierra Leone's maritime sector stands out.**

The Sierra Leone Maritime Administration, the Sierra Leone Port Authority, the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources, and the Ministry of Transport and Aviation are all staffed by executive directors, captains, marine engineers, ratings, and other workers who are alumni of this prestigious university.

**Sierra Leone continues to benefit from this institution's rigorous training programmes including IMO Standards**

**of Training Certification and Watch-Keeping (STCW) and Maritime Training courses.** RMU has also trained Sierra Leonean seafarers who have served or are serving aboard various international vessels.

In line with our national initiatives at inclusive national development, we look to bridging the gender gaps in recruitment, training, and career progression in the maritime sector. **More women deserve to and must be visible in the maritime sector.**

But more importantly, there is a strong economic and political argument to make for the great work the RMU does.

**Africa, with a population and huge market of 1.2 billion, and with emerging to growing economies, is already a destination of choice for foreign investments and international trade.**

By simply improving port infrastructure and efficiency (including improved ICT penetration and other innovation in

the sector), reducing container dwell and processing times, eliminating red tape and corruption, implementing progressive policy and legislative reforms, and streamlining the process for landing or moving containers, we can reduce the cost of shipping to our countries.

Lower shipping costs obviously mean relatively lower prices for imported goods and therefore lesser foreign exchange spending on importing essential goods and machinery. Equally, there is an increase in the value of exports. That in itself becomes an incentive for value addition and small-scale manufacturing for local and sub-regional markets.

**There is also an incentive to develop intermodal transportation systems within and across borders.** With our accession to the African Continental Free Trade agreement and other sub-region trade integration agreements, possibilities and opportunities for more trade and private capital investments in agribusiness, the extractives sector, energy

generation, riverine eco-tourism, and infrastructure, among others, abound.

I am therefore encouraged that the mission of RMU and its academic and research programmes align with the objectives of the 2050 Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy. **I believe that investing in the maritime sector will help us unlock economic growth by making African ports and therefore countries more globally competitive and more attractive to foreign investment.** This will create more jobs and lead to inclusive sustainable growth and development.

Where that is underpinned with open, and accountable democratic governance, our respective countries will naturally enjoy peace and prosperity. It is this shared belief in peace, prosperity, and development for our people that propels us to do more.

**A key aim of my visit to this great University therefore is to suggest a framework for the future of my country's**

**relationship with this institution.** We believe that we can leverage and further deepen existing ties through the establishment of satellite campuses or affiliations of this university with universities and institutions in Sierra Leone. The human capital needs for the development of our maritime sector in our country are great. We believe we must train that critical mass of our citizens in preparation for greater competitiveness in the global economy. Our increased investment in education is predicated on this belief.

**We recognise also that this collaborative relationship with RMU reinforces our deeper political, cultural, and other engagements as sub-regional partners.** We have all to gain and much little to lose by doing right for the next generation. So, to you, young, bright-eyed fellow graduates, let us remember that the pomp and pageantry of today should remind you of your obligations to work diligently toward creating developed and resilient nations. I therefore wish all of you every success in your careers beyond here.

Once again, I truly appreciate the Regional Maritime University for conferring this honorary doctorate degree upon me. I will forever wear this regalia with pride and humility and allow it to serve not only as a reminder of Sierra Leone's contribution to the Regional Maritime University **but also as testament to our collective responsibility to making our countries and sub-region a place of peace and sustainable development.**

I thank you. God Bless the RMU.