



**Remarks by His Excellency, Dr. Julius Maada Bio,  
President of the Republic of Sierra Leone at the Launch  
of the National Action Plan for Health Security and The  
Road Map for Universal Health Coverage (UHC) In  
Sierra Leone. Freetown, Bintumani, 12 September  
2019.**

The Honourable Vice President,  
Ministers of Government,  
Honourable Members of Parliament,  
Members of the Diplomatic and Consular corps,  
Development Partners,  
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen and fellow citizens,  
Good morning.

I want to start off this morning by thanking every Sierra Leonean who wakes up with a solemn prayer for peace and progress in this country. **Your prayers guide and reinforce the bold and decisive actions we have taken over the last year and half to navigate the temporary turbulence in our economy.** We are a nation at peace. The rule of law is supreme. We are determined to promote good governance and sustainable developments in all its facets.

**We have helped ourselves tremendously by reigning in out-of-control spending, articulating a clear national development plan, establishing a treasury single account, mobilising domestic revenue,** undertaking business-friendly reform to attract investments, clamping down

on corruption, investing in human capital development, and **travelling the world to tell our own story – a story of resilience, a story of great possibilities; a story of a nation ready to live up to its full promise and potential. That is our new Sierra Leone.**

So let me thank every Sierra Leonean for your continuing patience and faith in my leadership. God is good to our country. *Allah Subuhanna wa ta Allah* is kind to this country. My persistent calls and your collective prayers for national cohesion and peace, with a singular focus on developing the only land that we love and own, Sierra Leone, is being answered across this nation.

**Just over an hour ago, I met with President Ernest Bai Koroma in my office to discuss the present and the future of this nation and how we can all, collectively, make it a peaceful, united, and better country for us and for our children and grandchildren.** We both agreed that a united and peaceful Sierra Leone serves our collective national aspiration for development. I thank President Koroma and his delegation and I call on every Sierra Leonean to join us on this pathway to national cohesion, peace, and development.

**It is only by making peace that we understand what we could lose in strife.** So we are gathered here today to talk about Sierra Leone and its future of great promise.

**My Government has stated that the secret to accelerated national development lies in educated, resourceful, well-fed, and healthy citizens.** Our human capital development agenda is anchored on three key interrelated staples: education, food security, and healthcare. A more educated population makes better healthcare decisions and a well-nourished population is more enterprising and more productive overall.

**So our National Action Plan for Health Security and The Road Map for Universal Health Coverage (UHC) in Sierra Leone that we will launch today are consistent with one of our key national priorities – healthcare.** To our mind, quality healthcare is foundational to productivity and overall well-being. Healthy people are productive people. But poverty and the unaffordability of healthcare costs have led to otherwise preventable deaths.

**We have an obligation as a country to widen the social-safety net to every Sierra Leonean;** we have a chance to provide quality and equitable access to healthcare for all Sierra Leoneans regardless of gender, ethnicity, area of origin, or social or economic class.

**As a Government, we maintain a rights-based approach to healthcare as stated in our national constitution.** Our policies are driven by the provision that “The State shall direct its policy towards ensuring that— there are adequate medical and health facilities for all persons, having due regard to the resources of the State.” My government believes that every Sierra Leonean has a right to access quality healthcare that is affordable and adequate for his or her needs.

**Our vision as a government aligns also with Sustainable Development Goal 3:** “Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages” with our country’s specific focus on reducing maternal and child mortality; preventing epidemics, tropical, and communicable diseases; and, strengthening capacity and resilience in healthcare service delivery, while providing access and social protection for Sierra Leoneans across the social and economic spectrum.

**With the help of our development partners we have invested heavily in our healthcare over the last year and half. We have increased healthcare spending to 10% of national budget.**

We have increased investments in healthcare infrastructure and the provision of ambulance services.

We are recruiting over 4,000 health workers including doctors, nurses, midwives, and community healthcare workers, among others).

We are restructuring and expanding the existing Free Health Care Initiative with additional resources to cover school-going children.

We are increasing budget allocations to support the provision of essential drugs through the National Medical Supplies Agency.

We have dedicated personnel and resources to disease detection, surveillance, and control.

We are looking at leveraging innovation and technology to support healthcare delivery. In partnership with UNICEF my government (through the Directorate of Science, Technology

and Innovation, Njala University, and Civil Aviation) has signed a memorandum of understanding for a drone testing corridor that will be used eventually for the delivery of vaccines, medical supplies (including Oxytocin and blood supplies for women in labour), and other emergency needs for far to or hard to reach communities.

4IR technologies (including AI-based predictive software) will help both patients and healthcare workers make informed and timely healthcare decisions that will save lives. But we are also poised to invest in diagnostic care for Sierra Leoneans in Sierra Leone and we will soon break sod for the first diagnostic hospital in Sierra Leone.

**Our public health campaigns have targeted malaria especially with the seeming emergence of drug-resistance among some patients.** I urge patients and caregivers to give the full treatment course and use mosquito nets properly and for purpose. Mosquito nets are not fishing nets. They are meant to save lives; not catch fish.

**We are working with multilateral institutions and partners to support various innovative interventions that will strengthen our healthcare systems.** My

government fully supports the shared global aspiration contained in the Astana Declaration on Primary Health Care.

Community and school health education and public health screening services are crucial to making our healthcare system a lot more resilient. So too is our emphasis on public sanitation and cleaning which have thankfully helped us prevent virulent outbreaks of such epidemics as Cholera. Cleanliness, indeed, contributes to good health.

**Our objective as a Government is to make quality healthcare affordable and accessible for even the most vulnerable.** We are reviewing the Sierra Leone Social Health Insurance Scheme (SLeSHI) with a view to expanding coverage while reducing costs. We are exploring how SLeSHI would work alongside private schemes.

**There are innovative possibilities and models that we are open to as a government including a publicly-financed insurance pool** underwritten by a mix of beneficiary contribution and funds sourced from partners and possible reallocations or new tax or other public sources.

So distinguished ladies and gentlemen, my call this morning is simple. **Health is wealth. Universal Health Coverage has consequences for productivity, social safety and security, and overall economic development.**

The question therefore is not whether we can afford to invest in healthcare. We must, because as a nation, we cannot afford the cost of not investing in healthcare and universal healthcare coverage. It is a down payment on a fairer, safer and more prosperous future for our people and our country.

I thank you.