



**Keynote Statement by His
Excellency, Julius Maada Bio,
President of the Republic of Sierra
Leone at the Conclusion of the
Budapest to Bamako Rally. Siaka
Stevens Stadium, Freetown - 16
February 2020**

Courtesies

I greet you all with great pleasure and on behalf of the people of Sierra Leone.

I extend a very warm welcome to each and every one of you – all nearly 700 of you from over 80 countries, in a total of 210 cars, 52 motorbikes, and 20 trucks and buses! Welcome!

We most heartily welcome each and every one of you to Freetown, Sierra Leone.

Out of curiosity, I have gleaned the informational leaflet and I caught myself smiling at your pure, exciting madness.

“The Budapest-Bamako is a minimal assistance adventure and navigational race from Europe to Africa. The B2B is not an easy Sunday drive or picnic in the park. We have no rescue helicopters, no tow trucks, no translators, no lawyers, no tour guides. You must rely on your own luck, resources and skills”

As if that is not enough, participants are promised the following:

“Vermin and insect bites, sleeping outdoors in bivouac tents and cheap hotels, potential virus outbreaks, rebellions, coups, civil wars, ethnic tensions” and “road conditions” even ancient Romans did not traverse in horses and chariots.

But that is the excitement of this very unique Budapest to Bamako rally. It is definitely not for the faint-hearted. It is for thrill-seekers who fancy exploring, meeting, experiencing different cultures, sites, scenes, and surprises!

Here is Sierra Leone – a place of exciting surprises. So I take distinct pleasure in welcoming you to a friendly, stable, and peaceful Sierra Leone.

I note that the rally set as its objectives, “adventure, discovery, connecting to people, community, finding a helping hand, sharing stories and experiencing the local culture of communities with the goal of destroying stereotypes.”

Your presence here in a peaceful Sierra Leone proves that what is still in the popular imagination in the West and East is either not true or is in the distant past.

Here in our Sierra Leone, there is no violent war; there is no Ebola; there are no frightening natural disasters. We are a nation at peace.

You are all therefore most welcome to our Sierra Leone; your Sierra Leone.

We note that through your curiosity of the unknown, you have identified with causes that we care about too. We have identified education as a core priority and we are pleased that participants will be donating educational materials.

We are also pleased that our concerns about the effects of climate change align with the outcomes of this B2B rally.

I am informed that you have planted hardy Neem and other fruit trees around the Masiaka area that will not only provide foliage cover, improve air quality, and can be put to medicinal and other uses, they will also provide real cash for villagers for many years to come.

We are pleased to share our peaceful country with you over the next 4 days, when, I am informed, you will be here.

Let me tempt you more.

For hiking and cycling enthusiasts, we offer you Leicester peak, Regent, Gloucester Saddle, Mount Auroel, and many more jutting hills that form an unbroken chain around the peninsular of Freetown. While at that, you may want to enjoy dramatic views of the sprawling city below from East to West or look out into the vast Atlantic. Truly breath-taking!

Or you may fancy Ecotourism less than 30 minutes out. We offer the World renown Tacugama Chimpanzee sanctuary, a site associated with Dr. Jane Goodall, one of the world's foremost conservationists. You will meet friendly Western Chimpanzees in their natural habitat.

Or you may want to enjoy the serene and balmy golden sunset on one of our pristine beaches at Lakka, Hamilton, No, 2 River, Sussex, John Obey, Tokeh and more. The lazy waves and the glorious evening scapes at those beaches have been voted among the Top Ten in Lonely Planet.

Or probably dip into local culinary favourites that leave a unique taste and memory with each savoury bite. Or better still fresh seafood directly from the Atlantic Ocean to simmering fires along some of our beaches.

Or just to tickle your wild side, there are excitingly noisy evenings with everything from casinos, live bands, local acts, to club anthems at several entertainment centres along the Aberdeen and Lumley Beach areas.

Or, if you are not for partying, why don't you try new adventures by hopping on a boat to Banana Island or one of our other pristine Islands where you may either dip your feet in

clear blue waters and get lost in the mystery of our tropical islands...Or just go boating away or jet-skiing along the shallow Atlantic coastline...Or maybe do some snorkelling or fly-fishing...or just lose yourself in the serenity and the chirping birds and unique flora and fauna or even butterflies that adorn the landscape with even more exquisite beauty.

Or you may want to dive deep into our nation's history and go to Bunce Island to view the remains of a 17th century fort where slaves were held for centuries before their perilous journey across the Atlantic. See the remains of the slave fort, imprinted canon pieces, and be transfixed by curiosity about the deep secrets the Atlantic still maintains on its coastline.

Or if you fancy even more historical sites...the slave steps... or visit the historical Cotton Tree that provided foliage for the first arrivals in 1787...or the national museum just next to it... or the Maroon Church built out of hewn stone in 1808 that ties us to Jamaican and Nova Scotian maroons forever... Or the historical building in Cline Town that housed the first University in West Africa, Fourah Bay College...or Fort Thornton upon which, my office, the State House stands.

We offer history from the unique blend of modern and historical architecture in the wooden and tin-shack houses that

are unique to Freetown. We are going to preserve and maintain them. They are a unique part of what we have to offer.

Ours is a city that bustles with life. It is all yours to enjoy.

But do not forget to take home artefacts that will remind you of our Sierra Leone. We have comfortable imprinted or embroidered gara, ronko, or country cloth unique to our country. We also have artwork, beads, trinkets, and footwear that will remind you and you can also gift to family and friends as a piece of your Sierra Leone.

But we want you to come back. We have removed taxes on tickets to make them relatively cheaper than they were last year. We have visa-on-arrival now so you do not need a visa to get here. Just hop on a plane and come back. We will process your visa at the airport – no hassle.

We are six hours from Europe and closer still to South America. Fancy a hop across the West African coastline? We are one hour away from Senegal and under 2 hours away from Ghana. It is well-served by regional airlines or you can just drive the approximately 2,000 km trip. You can either do a pit stop again in Sierra Leone where we are ready to treat you like family or

you can make here your exclusive holiday destination so we can spoil you all over again.

We will be here, ready to welcome you to Freetown again, and this time, we will take you out into the provinces to Tiwai to watch pygmy hippos or birds that are unique to Sierra Leone, or the serene beauty of Lake Sonfon, and the picturesque and majestic Loma and Bintumani mountains.

And you want to experience off-road driving in the interior of Sierra Leone, we offer those challenges aplenty.

So over the next few days, enjoy our Sierra Leone and come again soon. On behalf of the government and people of Sierra Leone, you are again most welcome. To the organisers, thank you for considering Sierra Leone this year and recognising what we have to offer. I also offer our country again as a regular stop for the Budapest-Bamako rally. Please consider us again next year as a termination point.

Thank you all and enjoy Sierra Leone!