



**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY,
DR. JULIUS MAADA BIO, PRESIDENT OF THE
REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE, AT THE
CLOSING OF THE COMMISSIONS OF
INQUIRY, SPECIAL COURT COMPLEX, JOMO
KENYATTA ROAD, FREETOWN, SIERRA
LEONE. WEDNESDAY, 25 MARCH 2020.**

The Honourable Vice President,
Ministers of Government present,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,
Good Morning:

Today, I want to first thank Sierra Leoneans for their understanding in complying with public health messages aimed at preventing a highly infectious and deadly disease, the Corona virus.

Let us be consistent in maintaining hand hygiene, cough etiquette, and social distancing. Let us also report early and act early in order to stave off community infections.

We are cautiously optimistic that if we remain vigilant, disciplined, and firmly committed to preventing that deadly disease, we will succeed in protecting Sierra Leonean lives.

It is the same vigilance, discipline, and commitment we must muster to end another deadly menace to our existence as a nation.

I have argued that corruption is a key deterrent to the development of Sierra Leone. The fraudulent conversion of

public funds and resources to private use, the waste of public funds with impunity, and the abuse of offices and authority to the detriment of millions of Sierra Leoneans, are all threats to our development as a nation.

The machinery of state and its governance institutions have been weakened by corruption and it would seem we have failed to heed the bitter lessons of The Truth and Reconciliation Commission report and the collective shame of our underachievement as a nation.

The era of lip service to fighting corruption, sham trials, backdoor acquittals, and reinstatements of public officials is over.

Ours is a steadfast and steely determination to draw a line under corruption once and for all.

We pursued the recommendations of the GTT report for (among other things) a forensic audit and judge-led Commissions of Inquiry.

As the Attorney General and Minister of Justice has stated, the Commissions of Inquiry looked at three key issues: governance processes, assets, and forensic audits. The forensic audits tracked fraudulent activities within entire chains of governance. The commission on assets examined disparities between

income or means and assets. The Commission on governance processes looked at inefficiencies and deficits in governance especially where people deliberately misused or took advantage of state institutions.

In spite of partisan wrangling over the legal instrument and very legitimacy of the Commissions of Inquiry, I am glad to report that there have been no reports of public humiliations, lynching, or even tribal wars as the political prophets of doom had boldly predicted. At the end of the day, nobody was questioned because of his or her ethnic group or his or her place of origin.

It did not end up a witch-hunt after all. Witnesses willingly participated and were represented in a transparent legal process.

I want to thank the judges whose statements affirm that the process has been independent of executive or other undue interference.

In fact, my regard for the key principle of judicial independence and my insistence to not compromise the integrity was such that even when I heard of misfortunes like the illness of Justice William Atuguba or the burglary at the home of Justice Georgewill Biobebe, I did not contact them.

It took great restraint but the independence and integrity of the judges was sacrosanct and I am glad I maintained it.

As I have maintained before, this must be the last Commission of Inquiry in our history. As a nation, we should have learned and applied the singular lesson from these commissions – that persons who hold the public trust must serve honestly, justly, fairly, and diligently; and that as a country, we must put an end to a culture of rampant thieving, abuse, waste, and impunity. So these commissions should serve as a warning and a deterrent to serving officials.

We have a duty to foster a culture of public accountability in this country. The Anti-Corruption Commission has registered great successes in the fight against corruption over the last two years.

By our own actions and public conduct, we must support and sustain the great progress we have made in our collective efforts to fight corruption. We must do more and we should do more.

The reports from these Commissions of Inquiry will give us pause to reconsider our past attitudes and conduct and collectively resolve to do better and be better as a nation.

So let me take this opportunity to express my profound gratitude to the three justices for their great patience, professionalism, unbounded thoughtfulness, and stellar knowledge of jurisprudence.

I am also most grateful for the leadership of the Attorney General and Minister of Justice and her staff and everyone who worked with the Commissions of Inquiry. We thank each and every one of you for a job well done.

Let us go away with the trenchant reminder that the fight against corruption is a fight that we must fight and it is a fight that we must win. I thank you.