



**STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY DR
JULIUS MAA BIO, PRESIDENT OF THE
REPUBLIC OF SIERRA, TO THE 'CIVIL
SOCIETY AND PRESIDENCY
DIALOGUE FORUM' , STATE HOUSE,
FREETOWN - 20TH MAY 2020**

Courtesies

1. I have personally invited representatives of civil society organisations today to talk frankly about the relationship between government and civil society. Let me state our regrets from the outset that social distancing rules in this era of Corona dictate that we cannot have every civil society group present here today. That would have been our best wish. Your absence here today is not because you are less of a voice but because we cannot have everyone here today in the same room.
2. But rest assured that beyond this meeting, we intend to continue hearing you out and staying engaged with every voice in the civil society space. That is because we believe, as a government, that each and every voice matters and each and every voice makes our democracy better and stronger.
3. So I thank you all for honouring my invitation and I also thank those who are not present here for closely following our deliberations here today.
4. I want to thank members of Civil Society for their diverse support to the Government's response to COVID-19 through

direct support and other initiatives, advocacy, social mobilization, and also reiterating Government's appeal to citizens to adhere to all Covid-19 healthcare and other directives.

5. We have strengthened healthcare systems and implemented measured policies to prevent, protect against, and curtail the spread of COVID-19. Of course, we recognise that we should do more and we will continue to do more to manage and eventually defeat COVID-19 in Sierra Leone.
6. In spite of the ongoing measures to address the pandemic, government is still running. The Presidency continues to oversee the operations of government, hold virtual cabinet meetings, oversee the fight against COVID, and maintain all aspects of public service.
7. Development projects across the entire country in the areas of food production, water, energy, roads, and education, continue apace.
8. Government has already implemented a Quick Action Economic Recovery Programme (QAERP) that is aimed at sustaining the supply of essential food and other commodities and bolstering the economy through the COVID period.

9. We anticipate that with these common-sense measures, our economy will remain relatively buoyant through this period and be well-positioned for take-off in the post-COVID-19 phase.
10. Government has moved swiftly to contain and fully investigate recent spates of violence at Pademba Road, Lunsar, Foredugu, and Tombo. We take our responsibility for protecting the lives and properties of every Sierra Leonean very seriously. We believe that security sector reform and other well-thought-out measures to address structural imbalances will lead to a longer-term fix and greater security.
11. We thank civil society for condemning the violence outright and taking the strong view that violence is inimical to peace, stability, and development. We note the sundry concerns around the issue and we will work on recalibrating next steps accordingly.
12. As I look around the room, I see a diversity of interests and views represented – from governance to women’s issues, and from human rights to youth and disability issues. What we have here and beyond is a broad civic space and

great opportunity for more citizen engagement and more engagement with a diversity of views and positions.

13. Government wants a stronger relationship with civil society. As a Government, we do not believe we should simply impose our own understanding of governance on citizens. We need the voices of citizens.
14. Our Government and Civil society want similar outcomes for Sierra Leone and for the future of Sierra Leone. We therefore want a relationship that is not one of mistrust and suspicion, not one of fear and dread, not one that is adversarial but a partnership built on mutual trust and cooperation; one based on a shared aspiration to ensure that the right things are done at the right times, for the right reasons and with the right impact for our peace and development as a nation.
15. We believe, as a government, that the partnership is good for consolidating and strengthening democracy and good governance.
16. So, our motives are clear. We are looking to engage citizens who advocate ideas (not incite dissent or foment discord).

17. We are looking for what you bring to this room today – a diversity of public opinion, knowledge, experience and expertise that we can use as a Government to shape and support policy and decision making and implementation. We believe that governance is more agile, more dynamic, and more efficient when we broaden, deepen, and further enhance that shared relationship.
18. We believe a consultative relationship is right for our democracy. Civil society, we believe, should be involved in setting agenda, planning, implementation, monitoring, reviewing, giving feedback.
19. So, for instance, we believe that for planning and performance contracts, we should rationalise and evaluate performance indicators and outcomes with civil society. More accountability in governance is always better for our democracy. An extra pair of eyes keeps everyone safer
20. We also believe that civil society will help us test the Whys of our key policies and commitments as well as provide us feedback in structured and predictable loops. This will make it easier for civil society to test and support our commitments and policies.

21. Governance can be arduous. We were left with numerous structural imbalances either deliberately because the previous government gained a political advantage or just out of sheer incompetence. Whether it be in constituency allocations, the security forces, the civil service, wealth distribution, social protection, the fight against corruption, census and the allocation of parliamentary seats, decentralization and local government, justice mechanisms etc. All those constitute triggers of conflict. As a Government, we want to work with civil society to identify and resolve those structural imbalances and triggers.
22. Because we take the views of civil society very seriously and we want to close the feedback loop, I have asked the Honourable Vice President, who has a rich background and great depth of knowledge of the civil society space, to serve as a focal person. He has my ears in governance.
23. So, let me conclude by stating that this is a listening and relationship forming session today. But it is just the beginning of a long process of engagement and dialogue. I look forward to hearing from each of you.

I thank you.