



**TALKING POINTS BY HIS EXCELLENCY, DR. JULIUS
MAADA BIO, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF
SIERRA LEONE AT THE FOURTH PRESS
CONFERENCE ON COVID-19. FREETOWN, STATE
HOUSE, 23 JUNE 2020**

Courtesies

1. I would like us to begin this press briefing with a minute of silence in memory of young and beautiful lives that have not been allowed to blossom.

May their souls and the souls of the faithful departed rest in perfect peace.

2. Permit me to digress briefly from the purpose of this press engagement today and express both outrage and total condemnation of continued incidents of rape, sexual, and gender-based violence in this country. The depravity of sexual violence is obscene, criminal, and totally objectionable.

3. As a Government, we stand with the survivors, victims, and their loved ones, and my Government will vigorously prosecute cases and bring all perpetrators to justice. My Government is committed to providing support for survivors and the First Lady, myself, and my Government urge every Sierra Leonean to join in raising awareness, advocating, and standing up to rid this country of this menace. My Government is committed to equal protection and justice, inclusive development, and equal access to opportunity for

every Sierra Leonean especially women who constitute 51% of our population.

COVID-19

4. With the support of international and development partners, traditional and religious leaders, civil society, the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists, and various community stakeholders, our COVID-19 preparedness and response measures have been robust. We have not experienced the apocalyptic-scale infections and deaths that have been recorded in other countries.
5. We owe a debt of gratitude to our health workers, NaCovERC and COVID-19 staff, the security forces, and district and other administrators and staff, who have all worked relentlessly. To every Sierra Leonean who has complied with healthcare protocols, public-safety directives, and also communicated awareness of the virus, we thank you immensely.
6. As a Government, we acknowledge that we could have better anticipated and handled, at the outset, some lapses in restrictions on movement, care and quarantine administration, delayed payments and procurement, 117

calls, and slow district operations set-ups. We have largely resolved most of them and we will continue working harder to minimise gaps and lapses.

7. We have had high recovery and discharge rates, lower infection rates, and proportionally lower death rates three months on. This is because we have got a lot of things right over those three months. Our anticipation and timely responses, contact tracing and surveillance, well-considered economic response, social safety support, and other measures have been praised and well-supported by our multilateral and development partners. We now have greater lab capacity and more specimen collectors, more care beds, better IPC protocols and equipment, enhanced and purposeful use of digitalisation and technology to support our response, more social and mental healthcare support, a decentralised response network, and increased public messaging. NACOVERC has developed an updated National Strategic Response plan that takes into account our current needs and situation. Details will be announced soon.

Overall, we are now more adept, nimble, and confident that we will surmount challenges and continue managing this crisis.

8. As other countries worldwide and the World Health Organisation have acknowledged, COVID-19 will be with the world for probably the next one year as experts find an effective vaccine. It will remain highly infectious disease and deadly. I, therefore, strongly encourage continued compliance with all measures that will help us mitigate and suppress the spread of this virus.
9. I urge every citizen to strictly comply with healthcare and public safety protocols -- from handwashing, using face masks, social distancing, travel restrictions, and all other restrictions on public gatherings in public spaces. As a person, only you can protect yourself and your loved ones from this virus by choosing to comply with all directives.
10. We are encouraged that surveys indicate that more Sierra Leoneans are aware of the Corona virus and know what to do to prevent and treat the disease. But there is alarming apathy and a refusal to comply with protocols. Sierra Leoneans either refuse to or do not PROPERLY WEAR

FACE MASKS or practice social-distancing. That attitude is irresponsible and dangerous for citizens who continue to live in denial. Remember, only you and your actions can help protect yourself against the Corona virus.

11. In all our decisions during this crisis, we have aimed to save lives but we have also worked to sustain livelihoods, support the most vulnerable, and keep our key economic and human capital development sectors healthy. Our considerations have been driven by copious real-time data. We continue to closely monitor data and we are attentive to advice from the Sierra Leonean and global scientific community.

It is in that vein that I therefore announce the following adjustments that will ease constraints while not compromising the fight against the Corona virus.

12. Effective immediately, **the curfew is adjusted to the period 11pm to 6am.**
13. The Sierra Leone Civil Aviation Authority has held extensive consultations with stakeholders and considered developments in the aviation sector around Africa and in the world. Countries are opening their airspaces. A broad inter-

sectoral body will soon finalise rational, effective, and affordable pre-arrival and departure protocols that are in consonance with best practices elsewhere and WHO guidelines. We will also soon install technology at the Lungi International Airport that will help us monitor, test, and trace all travellers. **Once all measures are in place, commercial flights will resume in the very short run.**

14. I have initiated engagements with colleague Heads of State of the Mano River Union countries **with a view to discussing and adopting a harmonised approach and common measures on the re-opening and monitoring of our common land borders.** Once we finalise those discussions, we will open all land borders and crossing points.

15. The Inter-District Lockdown continues to be an important suppression measure. However, it has presented some constraints for Sierra Leoneans. With the following specific conditions, **I announce a lifting of the ban on Inter-District travel** starting on Wednesday, 24 June 2020. I have instructed the NaCOVERC Interim Coordinator and his team **to develop and announce enforceable infection prevention control protocols (especially the**

mandatory and proper wearing of face masks and other healthcare protocols). Only travellers who comply shall be allowed to travel on all vehicular transportation. This will be strictly enforced by the security forces. We will CLOSELY assess the data and announce further measures, if necessary.

16. The Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary School, in consultation with stakeholders, has developed comprehensive health and safety guidelines for teachers, pupils, and their communities for the sole purpose of providing a safe environment for our students who are taking public examinations at all levels. Those guidelines are consistent with best practices around the sub-region and the world. We will monitor the data and determine and scale up further actions as necessary.

Whilst easing restrictions, Government will expand testing, contact tracing, and surveillance to unprecedented levels.

Government will monitor the data and take all further necessary action. While there may be a temporary surge in numbers, this aggressive action will help us isolate and deal with pockets of community infections.

So the key take-away from this engagement today is that as we are easing restrictions and re-opening the economy and livelihoods. I urge all citizens to comply with all healthcare and public safety directives. The NaCOVERC Coordinator and Security forces will strictly enforce all measures deemed necessary to flatten the curve.

I thank you.