



**STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY, DR. JULIUS
MAADA BIO, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF
SIERRA LEONE, AT THE PRESS CONFERENCE FOR
THE FORMAL PRESENTATION OF THE REPORT OF
THE COMMISSIONS OF INQUIRY AND THE
GOVERNMENT WHITE PAPER ON THE REPORT**

Courtesies:

1. I am back from my private visit to Lebanon, and in addition to my excellent health, I also bring back the good news that the ten-year agony and suffering of 130 of our compatriots in Lebanon will soon

end. On September 21, thirteen of them arrived in Sierra Leone aboard Turkish Airlines. Further engagements with authorities in Lebanon and agencies supporting the repatriation will continue until the last of our citizens return home safely. My Government is already providing psychosocial care for the first batch and we will soon finalise community reintegration support packages including micro-credit grants and business start-up kits.

2. Their suffering and pain remind us as a Government and as a country that we should and we must do more to provide opportunity for everyone within Sierra Leone. That is why my Government has prioritised human capital development with three key staples: free quality education, accessible and affordable healthcare, and food security through domestic food production.
3. Our initiatives are bearing fruit and within the last two years, we are making steady progress. Preliminary data tells us that we are reducing maternal mortality, and saving more lives because of the national ambulance services and investments in healthcare infrastructure and services. Our significantly low to declining COVID-19 infection and death rates show that, in spite of significant resource and other constraints, our interventions have been effective. We have received plaudits internationally and countries are adopting some of our measures on re-opening airports, for instance. That said, COVID-19 is real and deadly and we must all be attentive to all healthcare directives in order to protect ourselves and our loved ones.
4. I would like to congratulate all 431,551 candidates who just completed the National Primary School Examination, the Basic Education Certificate Examination, and the West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination. This is by far the largest number of Sierra Leoneans who have had a chance to transition from one critical point of their education to another. In the last two years of my Government's Free Quality School Education policy, there has been a 74% increase in the numbers of students who have attempted public exams. Even amidst global COVID-19 school closures, our country has achieved great success.

5. Our Education Sector Partners believe in our Free Quality Education Programme and its impact for the future of this country. Within the last six months, they have mobilized about \$66 million to support education in Sierra Leone. The World Bank's recent "Free Education Project" is the largest investment in the sector. With this, we will continue to work to give access to and keep our children, especially girls, in school.
6. Our Sexual Offences Model Courts are operational and we will not relent in our fight to protect and empower women and girls and also fully include them in the development of this nation.
7. In my inaugural address to this nation, I declared three peaceful democratic wars against indiscipline, poverty, and corruption. The nexus among the three is obvious: indiscipline begets injustice and bad governance; corruption is a product of the former, and it accelerates poverty, and constrains national development.
8. As I have reiterated, corruption is a threat to our moral timbre as a nation of upstanding citizens, to our national development, and to our national security. Our only option is to confront corruption head-on and fight it boldly and resolutely. It is a fight that we must fight; it is a fight that we must win if we must survive as a nation.
9. We have made great progress over the last two years. National and international indicators have lauded our great success. We are encouraged by our successes but we must sustain the fight against corruption for our collective national good and for the future of our children and of this nation.
10. As the Attorney General and Minister of Justice has stated, the Commissions were tasked with conducting independent, fair, thorough, and impartial investigations into allegations of corruption and abuse of public office and to make relevant findings and appropriate recommendations.

11. All persons who were summoned to the commissions of inquiry were not summoned because of their ethnic group, their region, or their political party. They were summoned because they had been entrusted with the supreme responsibility to serve Sierra Leone. It is their conduct as individuals and their decisions while they served this country that were the subject of close scrutiny by the Commissions.
12. So these Commissions of Inquiry should also serve as a strong warning to serving officials that you have a duty of care to make the best decisions and act always in the best interests of citizens of this nation. When one is appointed to serve one's country, one must do so with honesty, fairness, justice, diligence, and compassion. Do not make Sierra Leoneans, especially the children, victims of your own greed.
13. Although the Anti-Corruption Commission has the statutory mandate to combat corruption and investigate unlawfully acquired wealth, particularly in the public sector, the general public hardly gets an opportunity to actively and regularly follow-up on most of the particularly high profile investigations and prosecutions because the operations of the ACC are mostly covert in execution. The Commissions of Inquiry gave an opportunity to the people of this country to ardently follow the stewardship of persons in authority and see first-hand how some of those persons betrayed the public trust that was reposed in them by the people of Sierra Leone.
14. Citizens are reminded also that they must actively but fairly question errant leaders. It is your civic duty to question unexplained wealth. But citizens are also reminded that when Ministers or parastatal heads steal or fraudulently convert state resources, they do so to make themselves and their immediate family members comfortable. When corrupt leaders build mansions and accumulate huge bank accounts, it is not for their ethnic groups, regions, or political party to live in. It is for themselves and for their immediate families.
15. We have had several Commissions of Inquiry in post-independence Sierra Leone. But Sierra Leoneans seem to have learnt

little to nothing from those past Commissions of Inquiry. We are determined to make this the last Commissions of Inquiry in this country. This is not the usual charge, convict, levy tepid punishments, and retribute or reinstate as soon as citizens turn the other way. Once and for all, we are determined to draw a line. Public officials must serve with integrity and they must be above reproach at all times. These Commissions were indeed about transparency and accountability and nothing else.

16. So let me thank the Attorney-General's office for spearheading the process; the staff who were attached to the various Commissions including investigators and security personnel; persons who appeared at the Commissions to testify and those who gave information that was helpful to the work of the Commissions.
17. I also thank journalists who covered the sittings of the Commissions in an open and transparent manner, and for the benefit of both local and international audiences. Permit me to name the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC) Television – a Public Broadcaster, and the Africa Young Voices (AYV) Television – a private-owned broadcasting station.
18. I also acknowledge and thank civil society, religious and community leaders, other stakeholders who saw these Commissions for what they are in the best traditions of Sierra Leoneans asking questions for which they deserve answers.
19. I again thank the Commissioners for carrying out thorough, independent, fair and impartial investigations into the allegations of corruption and abuse of public office and to make relevant findings and proffer appropriate recommendations to the Government of Sierra Leone for our considerations. We are mindful that time and space could not permit an inquiry of this nature to cover every single economic, financial, and administrative activity of the immediate past Government, but the commissioners did their best in the circumstances. They all served meritoriously.

20. Government has carefully looked at the reports of the Commissions and the recommendations. The White Paper documents the recommendations the Government has accepted in the interest of the people of Sierra Leone. Unlike other Commissions, citizens are assured that this Government will fully implement all recommendations. I repeat, Government will implement all recommendations to the letter.
21. The publication of the Reports is done pursuant to section 149(2) of the Constitution of Sierra Leone, 1991 (Act No.6 of 1991). The Reports of the various Commissions of Inquiry established by Constitutional Instruments Nos. 64, 65 and 67 of 2018 are officially published together with their White Papers.
22. The Office of the Attorney General and Minister of Justice is instructed to effect the recommendations of the Commissions of Inquiry - to recover all monies recommended to be returned to the people of Sierra Leone and to confiscate all assets recommended to be confiscated, and all other such penalties as recommended.
- 23.** Persons and entities affected by the recommendation are guaranteed a peaceful and transparent judicial appeals process through which they can seek relief. So let me therefore caution every Sierra Leonean that the rule of law is supreme. Those who may wish to incite or engage in unrest and violence in order to obstruct the process of implementing the full enforcement of the recommendations will be subject to the full force of the law.
24. This is not the last of investigations into corruption by former leaders. The ACC and other law enforcement agencies are mandated to investigate issues that the Commissions of Inquiry did not have sufficient time to investigate. Investigations, arrests, and prosecutions for corruption will continue as long as they are permissible in the laws of this country.
25. Let me conclude by formally receiving the reports of the Commissions of Inquiry and the White Paper as mandated by the laws of this country. I thank you.