



**STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY, DR. JULIUS MAADA  
BIO, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE,  
AT THE FORMAL OPENING OF THE DR. KADI A. SESAY  
GIRLS' SECONDARY SCHOOL, PORT LOKO. 8 OCTOBER  
2020.**

Honourable Vice President,  
Honourable Minister of Government,  
Members of Parliament,  
The First Lady of the Republic of Sierra Leone,  
Our revered Paramount Chiefs,  
Distinguished ladies and gentlemen:  
Good afternoon.

Let me start by thanking Mercury International and Mr. Edwin Michael in particular. His singular act demonstrates in deed the spirit and letter of a powerfully evocative line of the third verse of our national anthem: "so too may we show forth the good that is ever in thee."

There is inherent good in Sierra Leoneans who associate with a clear leadership vision that prioritises education and especially the education of the girl child. Education is the single most potent enabler that has developed nations and transformed lives. Thank you again, Mercury, and thank you, Mr. Martin Michael.

For me, some things are above politics.

Campaigning tirelessly right across Sierra Leone against early marriage; against discriminatory cultural practices and attitudes to the education and safety of girls; against negative perceptions on and attitudes to menstruation, is above politics. Protecting every girl in the community from sexual and gender-based violence; ensuring tougher penalties for rape; creating one stop centres for rape; instituting sexual offences model courts to fast track trials; registering a higher conviction rate for SGBV in a few months than in the preceding eleven years; and, supporting survivors of SGBV, are all above politics. Creating safe spaces for girls in schools; providing free teaching and learning materials; providing school buses, providing nutritional support; ensuring equity in education right across board, are all above politics.

Giving every girl, including pregnant girls, access to free quality school education; reinforcing positive role models for girls; and creating the enabling environment for every girl to succeed and be all she can be, is above politics.

Creating future pathways for girls in education through scholarships for every girl studying STEM disciplines at University and expanding access to vocational education and entrepreneurship are all above politics.

Every law, every policy, every action of my Government in the last two years to protect and ensure a future of equality and opportunity for the girl child has been done not because of politics but because we believe that national development can only be sustainable when it is fully inclusive and every Sierra Leonean regardless of gender or ability is afforded the opportunity to be all he or she can be.

For my Government, education is a right. We are committed to narrowing gender-gaps and providing opportunity for under-served communities. We believe, as a Government, that we must maximise the multiplier effects of investing in the education of girls. That belief aligns with our Medium Term National Development Plan, the Sustainable Development Goals 4 and 5, and other international human capital development agenda. This event is about ensuring that girls, irrespective of ethnicity and place of origin, are empowered to contribute their fair share to the development of this nation. So, coming three days before the International Day of the Girl Child on 11 October 2020, this opening and naming of this school the Kadi A Sesay Secondary School is most auspicious.

It is even more auspicious because the person after whom we name this school today dared to be and has been unique for her exemplary achievements in academia, her commitment and proficiency in public service, her humility in leadership, her belief in what is right and doing what is right, and her perpetual inspirational presence. She is a veritable role model for me and for millions of Sierra Leonean boys and girls who believe that they can achieve the seemingly impossible and

that ceilings are meant to be broken and barriers are meant to be breached.

Her assuring presence, counsel, and energy when the odds are stacked against her are the very stuff that success is made of. Her vision of education and for the education of women in particular cannot be captured in words. But she represents three things:

1. That the girl child cannot and should no longer accept artificial cultural and other limitations;
2. That education is transformative for women and that an educated woman is an agent of change for herself, her family, her community, and her nation; and
3. That education is an opportunity for the girl child to be better, make her community and her country better, and give back to her country.

So as we name this school after this icon of excellence, let me encourage all the girls who have been selected to aspire to becoming and attaining all that Dr. Kadi A Sesay represents. While also thanking Mercury International, let me also encourage other private sector players to complement Government's investment in education and support the flagship vision of human capital development. Ultimately, human capital development expands, deepens, and benefits business and the private sector the most.

In The New Direction manifesto, we committed to develop a robust policy and legal framework for Public-Private-Partnership in the education sector. To our minds, the enormity of the challenge to improve education in our country does justify a need to work closely with the private sector. We believe that productive partnerships with the private sector can augment and enhance Government's capacity to improve education.

As a Government, we have identified improving access, inclusion, safety and nutrition, innovation in learning, learning outcomes, and completion rates as core targets for our free quality school education flagship.

Our interventions and delivery on education infrastructure, WASH and nutrition programmes; leveraging innovation in pedagogy and school management; expanding professional development for teachers and administrators; supporting health services and safety; and using data to shape and review education policy are all well-focused.

We believe that the private sector can work with us, as Government, to deliver these targets and expand these at all levels of education throughout the country. We should therefore develop a regulatory policy that promotes collaboration and sustained engagement that lays out realistic timelines, establishes affordable capital and operating costs, and identifies measurable key performance indicators. Consistent with our fight against corruption, that relationship should be free of graft, special interests, and favours. We also strive for continuity and flexibility of the relationship. Contributing once should not mean that a company should not contribute a second time. Companies that have never contributed can always start contributing. There is always a first time.

Private sector players should not hesitate to invest at scale and in accordance with their capacities in capital, expertise, or technology. Every little investment counts. Ultimately, we have a shared interest in the outcome – to improve and make our educational system fit-for-purpose in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century global economy.

Mercury made its commitment at the launch of the Free Quality School Education programme. They identified school

infrastructure. Cabinet had endorsed the setting up of Learn Act Build (also known as LAB) Schools. These schools will use our newly developed Basic School Education curriculum framework that focuses on the 5Cs: Civics, Critical Thinking, Computation Thinking, Comprehension, and Creativity. The focus will be on STEM disciplines and pedagogy will be uniquely innovative. This school marks a fulfillment of our manifesto pledge to girl child education, to providing relevant education for our children, and to establishing "secondary schools of excellence for STEM disciplines in every region" This is the first! It is a pipeline to STEM education and training at tertiary and TVET institutions.

Mr. Michael and the Minister of Basic and Senior Secondary School Education have given details of the project. What this demonstrates is what we can do together within a very short period. This sets up a model for future relationships. So let me conclude my statement today by again thanking everyone who has made this event possible. I strongly urge the community to stay actively engaged in supporting this school and ensuring that it serves and exceeds its mandate to truly become a hub of academic excellence for girls in Port Loko. Let me also particularly encourage and challenge the girls who have been admitted to this school of the two-way challenge that they and we (as Government) should meet. It is at the centre of two generation equality hashtags campaigns by UN Women.

For us as Government, the nation, and the people of Port Loko in particular, "It's time we encouraged girls to pursue their dreams, uplift their self-esteem and celebrate all their talents." For the girls at this school and girls all over Sierra Leone, "Girls who are part of #GenerationEquality choose to break boundaries and challenge gender stereotypes that limit them from achieving their greatest potential."

Let us all ensure that the illustrious legacy of Dr. Kadi Sesay persists throughout the history and the achievements of this new school. It is with great pride therefore that I formally open and name this school the Dr. Kadi A Sesay Secondary School for Girls.