



**STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY, DR. JULIUS MAADA
BIO, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE
AT THE LAUNCH OF EQUIPMENT FOR SUSTAINABLE
FISHERIES MANAGEMENT, MURRAY TOWN, FREETOWN
- 24 NOVEMBER, 2020**

Honourable Ministers of Government,
Members of Parliament present,
Development partners
Distinguished ladies and gentlemen
Good morning.

1. This past weekend, I was in Kailahun District where I engaged with traditional leaders, local authorities, and various communities on good governance; launched skills funds for supporting women in agriculture; turned sod for, or commissioned critical infrastructure, including a fire station and a bus station; and, inspected various public service projects my government has already undertaken in the district including a 45-bed ultramodern health facility that will provide comprehensive treatment, medical supplies, potable water systems for entire towns and villages, roads, bridges, and off-grid energy in towns.
2. As a nation we have lagged so far behind in development. I have often said two things: A) development is a slow and often cumbersome process; and, B) that I am not promising quick fixes but permanent solutions. So for those reasons, what we do is all planned, thought-out, and we are working progressively every day to lay the foundation for inclusive and sustainable development in this entire nation.
3. A key pillar of my Human Capital Development priority is food security. The fisheries industry is not only key to food security but it holds tremendous promise for huge revenue generation, providing employment, and for transforming the lives of Sierra Leoneans from the coastal communities to women and youth all along the chain of production.
4. I should mention here that just last week, I commissioned 70 new boats, outboard engines, accessories, and sundry equipment that will empower youth engaged in fisheries across seven coastal districts in this country. As the first set of recipients repay only half the original costs, Government will provide more boats to more youth in the sector. That is our idea of both empowering young people

and fully supporting the artisanal fisheries sector beyond just policy pronouncements and badly managed projects.

5. As with all our inclusive development and empowerment programmes, women are at the centre of all our policies. We have introduced skills training, constructed raised platforms and improved smoke ovens in Tombo and Goderich, provided WASH facilities, and more in our fishing communities.
6. But we have been busy working hard in the wider sector too. The Minister of Fisheries and Marine Resources has laid out some of that progress and some general policy imperatives.
7. We inherited a fisheries and marine resources sector riddled with corruption and mismanagement. Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing was rife. Tax evasion, underreporting, overfishing, by mainly illegal vessels within the country's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) was destroying the country's fish stock, destroying the marine ecosystem, and depriving artisanal fishers and the entire artisanal fishing community chain of their livelihoods.
8. IUU is a national security threat to lives and livelihoods because it directly impacts the local fishing industry - an industry that employs 500,000 Sierra Leoneans. This loss of livelihoods exacerbates poverty in those coastal communities that live off fishing. It also imperils lives because fishers now have to fish farther out at sea. There are also implications for the wider economy with lower supply of fish in the local market and higher prices, and also dietary implications with fish being a major source of protein.

9. So in our New Direction manifesto, we therefore laid out, among other things, maintaining a sustainable and viable fisheries and marine resources ecosystem, good governance and sustainable management of fisheries and marine resources, and a reduction of illegal fishing. Our focus therefore is to put in place a holistic, sustainable, and permanent fix.
10. We should recognise that IUU thrives where there are corrupt national regimes. poor national and international legal frameworks, ineffective or non-existent enforcement mechanisms, and more. As with corruption, IUU thrives when risks are low for operatives and their cohorts. Like corruption, we must make illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing risky and more expensive.
11. We have made a lot of progress within two short years. I am pleased to inform you that with sound policies and practices, my administration increased revenue generation in the fishing industry to over **100.5 Billion Leones (\$10.5 million) in 2019**. Even with Covid-19, the sector has been able to generate close to **Le 78bn from January – to date, 2020. This is just** from tightening regulations and clamping down on corrupt practices.
12. We have revised the licencing regime in order to closely monitor and clamp down on possible criminal elements. In accordance with our laws and international best practices to curb IUU, we have implemented a viable and effective Monitor, control, and surveillance regime with the installation of an upgraded Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) on all licensed fishing vessels operating in Sierra Leone as well as in the international waters.

13. We have introduced sustainable regimes for the management of fish stock, and the preservation of marine ecosystem and fish resources viability. In the era of rising global demand for fish resources, fish harvesting and processing must meet minimum international sanitary standards and healthy ecosystem standards. It is not just about capture and capture even more, but harvest, preserve, protect, and minimize waste along the production and processing spectrum. This is my expectation.
14. But there is more to do and my challenge is for all of us, Sierra Leoneans, to work with the ministry and associated Ministries, departments, and agencies to do more.
15. Let us toughen up our inspection plans even more in order to weed out the falsification of vessel ownership and registration documents. I want to challenge the Sierra Leone Maritime Agency to work with the ministry to improve even more on what we already have in place on verifying and inspecting vessels as well as ascertaining their seaworthiness.
16. My Government has also invested in hard assets to strengthen the monitoring, control, and surveillance of the fisheries sector. I am pleased to announce the following:
 - Six (6) Inshore Patrol boats for patrolling coastal inshore waters and for conducting community surveillance and extension services to coastal fishing communities;
 - 23 VHF and UHF radio communication equipment for effective marine communication and daily update of field activities;
 - 2, 500 life Jackets to be sold at a subsidised rate to fishing communities at various fisheries outstations to ensure safety of life at sea;

- Tablets and Android phones for data collection
17. I particularly implore you to strengthen data collection because we can predicate sound policies, legislation, and practices only on reliable and current data. I am pleased that you are considering transitioning to a web-based data collection system and that the Directorate of Science, Technology, and Innovation (DSTI) and Statistics Sierra Leone (STATS SL) will provide the technical backstopping.
 18. I see great value in a robust catch documentation scheme and it is my hope that the Ministry can further strengthen this so Sierra Leone can reap the benefits of that scheme right across the production and processing value-chain. This will also give us valuable scientific and that my Government can use for thinking forward on better and adaptive stock management and production plans and policies. Such training of human resources is always invaluable and the Ministry should work to foster a performance-driven culture where staff practice a culture of excellence
 19. Furthermore, in your work, I expect the Ministry to also work very closely with coastal fishing communities, base decisions on community expectations, and developed community-owned plan in which those communities feel fully vested. Monitoring, control, and surveillance can be strengthened even more, ii think, with a community surveillance capacity element.
 20. I also want to challenge the Ministry to work with development partners, as in the case of Namibia, to develop an effective observer programme in Sierra Leone.

21. We argued in the New Direction manifesto that “standalone Government action has proven inadequate and ineffective to curb this menace” of IUU. My Government believes that coordinated and timely action and enforcement mechanisms across the sub-region and within international organisations in which Sierra Leone is a member, can help us wrest back full control of our fisheries and marine resources. I expect the Ministry to maintain an active presence in those international forums and to project our voices and concerns while actively seeking collaboration.
22. Before closing, let me thank the leadership and staff of the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources for their resourcefulness and hard work in achieving what we have achieved in two short years. The key strategic policy goals set by the Ministry and my Government are achievable and those outcomes will further strengthen and expand a sector that currently contributes 10-12% of GDP.
23. Kindly let me remind all of us that what we may not have in such hard assets as drones and large off-shore vessels, we are making up for with a potent and productive mix of sound policy, efficient management, technology and innovation, and international/regional cooperation. The gains we are adding today to our existing resources and hard work will further strengthen our hand.
24. it is now my pleasure to commission the six inshore patrol craft, and formally handover the communications sets, lifejackets, and tablets and android phones for the purposes I have outlined in my statement this morning. I thank you and God bless Sierra Leone.