



**STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY, DR. JULIUS MAADA  
BIO, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE  
ON OCCASION OF THE FORMAL LAUNCH OF THE  
NATIONAL DISASTER MANAGEMENT AGENCY,  
FREETOWN, STATE HOUSE - 19 NOVEMBER 2020**

Honourable Vice President,  
Ministers of Government,  
Members of Parliament,  
Development Partners,  
Senior Government Officials present,  
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen  
Good morning:

1. The morning of August 14, 2017 was another grim reminder of our vulnerability as a nation. As I have said before, when we do not live in harmony with nature, nature has a way of registering its disapproval in very tragic ways. May the souls of our compatriots who died in that disaster and several others preceding that one continue to rest in perfect peace.
2. That sad day was an inflection point in our history. It gave us pause for thought about our vulnerability as a nation. Sierra Leone is rated as one of the most vulnerable to climate change. I am informed that 13% of the country's area and more than 35% of the population are at risk to disasters. In the last 15 years, 4 major floods have affected 220,000 people and caused severe loss of lives and economic damage. Add that to the food security and health crises, damaged infrastructure, and the forestalment of our national development, and it is obvious that as a nation, we cannot afford another disaster.
3. The incoming Director General noted earlier that emergencies and disasters impact property, critical infrastructure, the economy, and the environment. But moreover, they impact people and communities. Development is about people and a vulnerable people and nation cannot achieve sustainable development.
4. As far back as 2012, when I launched my first bid for the presidency, I saw this as a severe governance problem that had to be tackled. Disaster recovery and management was therefore central to my party's governance pledge to this nation even back then.
5. As the Chief Minister has already indicated, we further made a commitment in the New Direction Manifesto to "remove disaster management from the Office of National Security and establish a specialized national agency for disaster preparedness and management." In our Medium term National Development Plan, we made a strong case that building a resilient state is critical for sustainable and inclusive development. So our establishment of the National Disaster Management Agency was a promise made. Today, it is a promise delivered.

6. But beyond a promise kept, the National Disaster Management Agency is a permanent institution for making our nation more resilient. It is expected to be a standalone agency of experts, leaders, and policymakers on disaster management. It will help us anticipate, understand, manage, recover from, and minimise the impact of disasters on lives and livelihoods, without forestalling the long-term prospects for national development.
7. But as a nation, we need to understand the drivers of disaster risks. Unplanned urbanisation and settlement along floodplains, hills, waterways, with little to no consideration that those practices expose people and their assets to natural hazards should be curbed. Ecosystem decline due to human activities, -- including deforestation, outmoded farming cultures and practices, biodiversity loss, and more, -- must be tackled.
8. Added to this, we have not quite developed a history of anticipating and planning for disasters. We have not quite mapped out vulnerable populations and geographical areas and put in place holistic and effective preventive or mitigating measures. Inadequate funding should not be an excuse for not crafting effective regulations and risk management measures, or raising awareness among vulnerable populations. Inadequate funding is no excuse for not coordinating effectively among and across ministries, departments, and agencies when disaster strikes. It should not stop us from thinking about how to maximise close collaboration with multilateral and bilateral partners; or even developing innovative funding strategies.
9. We also do not have a history of harnessing the power of new technologies and innovation to collect data or to use that data to map, monitor, model, and therefore anticipate natural disasters. We have not developed and consistently updated hazard mapping for our entire country. Have we increased the use of satellite imagery, GIS, and remote sensing for that purpose?
10. We have not adequately used ICT for developing public information and awareness applications or tools about natural disasters. We have also not intensified its use in disaster management and recovery.

11. Due to climate change, rainfall patterns may be unpredictable. But we can put in place warning and forecasting systems that effectively capture and disseminate information about natural hazards that could result from those unpredictable rainfall patterns.
12. While we cannot stop natural hazards, they should not become disasters from which we will struggle to rebuild. All alone, as a country, we cannot afford the cost of disaster management, recovery, and rebuilding. So the tasks, or rather, expectations of this new agency are massive.
13. Remember that the state has primary responsibility for disaster risk reduction. I expect you to align your strategies with sub-regional and multilateral policies on disaster management such as the ECOWAS policy on disaster risk reduction, the African strategy for disaster risk reduction, and the Sendai Framework that is ultimately in consonance with the Sustainable Development Goals.
14. I expect you to provide leadership, generate knowledge and expertise, build global partnerships, and produce innovative thinking on disaster management.
15. The UN Resident Coordinator and World Bank Representative have suggested opportunities for global partnerships. I expect this agency to leverage bilateral and multilateral cooperation in the area. Innovative partnerships with other disaster management agencies are possible. As a country, I also believe that we can identify innovative ways of funding disaster management that will be less onerous on our limited budget. I expect this agency to develop those forward-looking and effective policies and also guide the Government on how to plan investments in disaster management.
16. Also, as previous speakers have noted, the work of this agency is essentially cross sectoral. I also believe that mitigation and climate change resilience must be done in close collaboration with communities. Communities must have a vested interest in and must participate in dialogues on disaster preparedness and

management. Youth and women must be accorded a central role in your work. Close collaboration with local Government and the private sector will be particularly useful to your work. So I expect you to develop strategies and structure well-defined and sustainable relationships.

17. I have intimated that the agency can use science, innovation, and data to predict, anticipate, plan for, and report on the full disaster management cycle. I have already identified new technologies that can be used to great effect. I am also challenging this agency to work with the Directorate of Science, Technology, and Innovation to develop a robust, Sierra Leone-made disaster management digital system.
18. Before closing, let me publicly thank the Chief Minister for his leadership in making this Agency possible. Let me also thank international partners, staff of the ONS, and all persons and institutions that have worked assiduously in making this day possible.
19. With the National Disaster Management Agency, we are confident that we can anticipate better, plan better, mitigate risks better, respond better, recover better, and rebuild better. We will protect lives and livelihoods better and protect our national development gains.

It is my singular honour, therefore, to formally launch the National Disaster Management Agency of Sierra Leone.