



**STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY, DR.
JULIUS MAADA BIO, PRESIDENT OF THE
REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE, AT THE
PRESENTATION OF ANNUAL REPORT OF THE
OMBUDSMAN. FREETOWN, STATE HOUSE,
4TH FEBRUARY 2021**

Ministers of Government,
Commissioners,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Morning:

1. Let me thank each of you for your contributions to consolidating our democracy. Clearly the Office of the Ombudsman is a strong pillar

of public accountability that directly supports access to justice and good governance.

2. You have laid out the mandate and functions of the Ombudsman and I acknowledge your work in providing free and fair resolution of complaints against Ministries, Departments, and Agencies. I thank you for the service delivery charter and the public statement of your commitment to delivering impartial and fair resolution to disputes. I also recognise that the Ombudsman's Office has become a lot more visible and more accessible in the last two years, thanks to the establishment of offices in hard-to-reach places including Karene, Falaba, Pujehun, Bonthe to name a few. This aligns with my vision of expanding access to your services to more Sierra Leoneans.
3. Let me also thank OSIWA for their institutional support grant that has supported staff capacity building and greater visibility. I am optimistic that the Office of the Ombudsman can explore additional such sources of more partner funding.
4. My enthusiastic support for the good work of the Office of the Ombudsman is grounded in three key governance imperatives.
 - a. **First, is a reflection on our history** – a reflection on the fact that a major grievance of young persons and much marginalised citizens has been persistent anger about a culture of impunity, unfairness, and injustice especially as there have been few or no redress mechanisms to right public wrongs.
 - b. **Second, is an acknowledgement that there are still structural inequalities that constitute governance deficits.** We should get those right.
 - c. **The third imperative emanates from a key question that informs** Cluster 4.5 "Promoting inclusive and accountable justice institutions;" and Cluster 4.6 "Building public trust in state institutions" of our Medium Term National Development Plan: -- that is, how can we get the public to trust the state more in our democracy? These clusters also align with Goal 16 of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals – "building strong institutions" that support "promoting just, peaceful and inclusive societies."

5. So, I see the Office of the Ombudsman as a key institution for strengthening and reinvigorating our democracy. Along with the other institutions like the Ministry of Justice, the Anti-Corruption Commission, the Human Rights Commission, I see the Office of the Ombudsman as a bulwark for institutional integrity and accountability. Be reminded that there may be overlaps in mandate every so often. A complaint against an MDA may constitute an offence in the ACC act or an abuse of rights for the HRCSL. So map out areas of cooperation and work closely for the good of our citizens and our democracy.
6. I am also gratified at your restatement of your values of being independent, collaborative, accessible, fair, impartial, just, transparent, reliable, and effective in resolving disputes as well as identifying and addressing attendant structural problems in public administration.
7. My Government has supported the legal rights to government information, repealed obnoxious laws that proscribe free speech, and made transparency an administrative norm. These and my Government's support for the work of the Ombudsman clearly serve the public interest, strengthen our public institutions, and further consolidate a more inclusive democracy.
8. I note the challenges you have highlighted in your presentation. I note the capacity, financial, logistical and other needs you have highlighted in your presentation and in the report. Those will be addressed because this institution is invaluable to our country's development.
9. I see additional areas of cooperation between the Office of the Ombudsman and Government. I see, for instance, a place for periodic joint assessments of the Office of the Ombudsman in order to ascertain measures that will continue to strengthen this all important institution.
10. We should also address the question of how the Office of the Ombudsman can gain more goodwill and more trust with the MDAs. This, you would agree with me, will support cooperation and compliance with the outcomes of the resolutions of disputes. Part of that engagement, to my mind, will be to reach a shared

understanding with MDAs as to how the Office of the Ombudsman strengthens systems and procedures for the good of those institutions. Additionally, the Office of the Ombudsman can also fast-track outcomes for my attention in the event of non-cooperation or non-compliance after the stipulated period. If anything, you can be assured that I will act with great urgency.

11. The Office of the Ombudsman may also consider a wider dissemination of outcomes of their dispute resolutions so that MDAs are more attentive to taking corrective action and citizens are also informed on why reporting disputes to the office can help them.
12. I also want to encourage the leadership of the Office of the Ombudsman to review the legal basis of the office and see whether the extant law accommodates all current and anticipated realities in line with best practices elsewhere. The law is not 23 years old and clearly, there are areas of improvement. Government, through the Office of the Attorney General and Minister of Justice, is ready to work with you on that task.
13. I also note that the Office has maintained data. The challenge is how do we make that data more relevant for measuring your successes and for whole-of-systems strengthening for MDAs?
14. Is it also possible for the Office of the Ombudsman to publish operational guidelines for complaints processes, dispute resolutions, other advisories, and other such information on the benefits of MDA compliance with outcomes?
15. Do we need more outreach so that more citizens can use the services of the Office? Do we need to put more into strengthening systems within targeted institutions that are seemingly non-cooperative and non-compliant? Do these institutions see outcomes as unfair and disproportionate? Does the data speak to the facts and circumstances of non-compliance? How does the office measure its successes?
16. Another element that could be enhanced is the outreach strategy. How can the Office of the Ombudsman create more awareness, more accessibility, and more engagement on their work? I am aware of radio and TV hours. But are there more exciting

and more effective ways of cascading information about your good work? Can we also leverage the benefit of upward feedback?

17. I also note your Strategic goal #4 – “to measure the Ombudsman’s impact on governance and service delivery.” I am interested in hearing more about a comprehensive, cost effective, and relevant measurement programme that my Government can see in real time on how the Office is achieving its strategic goal # 4.
18. So, let me conclude this brief response by reiterating my Government’s very strong support for this institution and its work. Together, I believe that there is a lot we can do to support the institution and to maximise its impact for our country.

I thank you.