



**STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY,
DR. JULIUS MAADA BIO, PRESIDENT OF THE
REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE
AT THE INVESTITURE CEREMONY FOR
VISITING HEADS OF STATE. STATE HOUSE,
FREETOWN, 27TH APRIL 2021**

Excellency, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, President of The Republic of Ghana and Chairman of ECOWAS;

Excellency, Professor Alpha Conde, President of the Republic of Guinea;

Excellency, George Manneh Weah, President of the Republic of Liberia;

Excellency, Adama Barrow, President of the Republic of The Gambia;

Excellency, Nuno Gomes Nabiam, Prime Minister, Republic of Guinea Bissau;
Excellency, Professor Yemi Osinbajo, Vice President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria;
Excellencies representing Colleague Heads of State;
The Honourable Vice President;
Madam First Lady;
The Vice President of ECOWAS Commission;
Speaker of The ECOWAS Parliament;
Speaker of the House of Parliament;
My Lord Chief Justice;
Chief Minister and Ministers of Government;
Members of Parliament;
Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps;
Our Revered Religious and Traditional Leaders;
Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

1. In memory of our dear brother, His Excellency, Idriss Deby Itno, may we kindly observe a minute of silence in his honour. May Allah Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala forgive him and welcome his soul with grace.
2. Let me, on behalf of the Government and people of the Republic of Sierra Leone, warmly welcome your Excellencies, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, to the commemoration of our 60th Independence Anniversary.
3. Your presence here, even as the world is battling the COVID-19 pandemic, is a demonstration of profound solidarity. For that and more you have consistently demonstrated, we are immensely grateful for your kindness.
4. May I also extend my gratitude to other Colleague Heads of State who cannot be present here today for their kind consideration in sending congratulatory messages on my nation's historic commemoration.
5. Permit me also to congratulate His Excellency President Addo and His Excellency President Conde on their re-election. I look forward to working closely with each of you to foster peace and security in the region. I will continue working closely with you in our shared aspiration to foster mutual cooperation and prosperity for our people.

Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

6. I am sure you may not have had sufficient time to absorb the historical, scenic, and cultural beauty of Sierra Leone, but we extend an open invitation for a return visit whenever your Excellencies and delegations may wish.
7. Our nations in the sub-region are tied together by geography, a common history, shared values and shared interests, and a common future.
8. Edward B Rust Jr., an American businessman, defines a good neighbour as someone to be trusted; a courteous, friendly source of help when help is needed; someone you can count on; and someone who cares. In every way, each of you present has been a good neighbour and your presence here today is most appreciated by the Government and people of the Republic of Sierra Leone.
9. At several points in our country's sixty-year journey, each of you has been a good neighbour when our very existence as a nation was threatened. Sierra Leone benefitted from the ECOWAS security infrastructure and Sierra Leone is most grateful for the extreme sacrifice made by our neighbours in contributing troops, hosting our displaced citizens, and brokering and supporting peace in Sierra Leone.
10. Sierra Leone continues to be a beneficiary of the ECOWAS conflict resolution and prevention framework and Sierra Leone will continue contributing to that mechanism. We face similar peace and security threats and we must stay collectively vigilant in protecting our common homestead.
11. We share other common threats. Climate change and fragile ecosystems threaten biodiversity and food security in the sub-region. A burgeoning youth population is a threat insofar as irregular migration, crime, drug trafficking, and threats of a restive and marginalised population are concerned.

12. In Sierra Leone, we see a growing youth population as an opportunity, hence our investment in human capital development – quality education and skills development, quality healthcare services, and food security. Sierra Leone identifies with the inclusive and sustainable development focus of ECOWAS' Vision 2050.
13. We have also collectively stood together even in the face of the global health threat of COVID-19. Together, we have called for a structured and coordinated global response to preventing and curtailing the spread of the virus. We have also stood together for a common call for vaccine availability and vaccine equity.
14. Together also, we should plan and implement our post-COVID-19 economic responses. If we should rebuild better and stronger, we must harmonise our economic measures, strengthen health information and healthcare systems, and develop enabling infrastructure that supports new growth across borders.
15. Intraregional cooperation is possible and we can achieve our shared aspiration of renewed economic growth and integration by easing cross-border trade and investment barriers, adopting similar corporate governance structures, harmonising tax regimes, sharing infrastructure, and enhancing technical cooperation. Fiscal policy harmonisation can also further our mutual economic interests.

Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

16. So, this investiture ceremony is a recognition of each of your country's immense contribution in lending Sierra Leone and a helping hand when it mattered most. It is also a commitment by Sierra Leone to working ever so closely as a comity of nations to advance our shared values and mutual interests. Sierra Leone will be there whenever needed.

I thank you.