



**STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY, DR. JULIUS  
MAADA BIO, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF  
SIERRA LEONE AT INAUGURATION OF THE POST  
GRADUATE COLLEGE OF HEALTH SPECIALTIES AND  
INDUCTION OF FOUNDATION FELLOWS.  
FREETOWN, FREETOWN INTERNATIONAL  
CONFERENCE CENTRE, 29<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2021.**

The Honourable Vice President,  
The Honourable Speaker of Parliament,  
The Honourable Chief Justice,  
The Chief Minister,

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Ministers of Government,  
Members of Parliament,  
Your worship, the Mayor of the Municipality of Freetown,  
Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps,  
Representatives of Sister West Africa Colleges,  
Representatives of the Council of Vice Chancellors and Principals,  
Council Members of the Sierra Leone Council for Postgraduate Colleges of  
Health Specialties,  
Foundation Fellows,  
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning,

1. I would like to start by thanking healthcare workers. Our nation's recognition for being proactive, focused, and intent on protecting, curtailing, and now vaccinating against COVID is largely due to the immense sacrifice you keep making on the frontlines. We cannot reward you enough; we cannot thank you enough for your unwavering commitment to serving our nation.

2. Let me also thank the Sierra Leone Council for Postgraduate Colleges of Health Specialties. Together, we are making history. We are, for the first time in the history of this nation, training our doctors, pharmacists, nurses, and midwives in specialised medical fields and catering for postgraduate training for all other medical personnel. We are building up; we are building stronger.

3. As a government, we inherited and have since 2018 wrestled with poor healthcare infrastructure, poor governance and management of healthcare delivery, a weak human resource base, low healthcare financing, and more. Within three years, we have ramped up recruitment and training for healthcare workers, attended to their conditions of service, increased healthcare financing, and improved healthcare infrastructure. As I indicated earlier, we are building up and we are building stronger.

4. Our strategic objective in the Medium-Term National Development Plan is to "transform the health sector from an under-resourced, ill-equipped, and inadequate delivery system into a well-resourced and functioning

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national healthcare delivery system that is affordable for everyone and accessible to all." That is a key pillar of our nation's Human Capital Development priority which aligns with the continental AU Agenda 2063 and global Sustainable Development Goals.

5. So, when I appointed the Chairman and other Council Members of the Sierra Leone Council for Postgraduate Colleges of Health Specialties in 2019, I did so intentionally.

6. Previous speakers have outlined the overall purpose of the Postgraduate Colleges of Health Specialties. It sits well with the strategic objective outlined in our Medium-Term National Development.

7. I note the running theme of this inauguration and induction ceremony is "Quality and Access: Leadership and Excellence in medical specialty training for the transformation of healthcare delivery in Sierra Leone." Inasmuch as our country's historical reputation on the continent for academic excellence floundered somewhat as a consequence of unfortunate events and governance decisions, I vowed to the people of this country that we will work together to turn things around.

8. Our investments in quality education speak for themselves and loudly so. When I hosted the envoy of the British Prime Minister two weeks ago, I was doubly inspired to do more of what had impressed the British Government – an undaunting commitment to excellence in all spheres of education.

9. So today marks another major exclamation mark on our journey not only to rebuild this nation but to rebuild it better and stronger on all fronts. When we say education-for-sustainable-development in all sectors, health is a critical sector.

10. Our goal is simple: We want to ensure that Sierra Leoneans receive high-quality, affordable, and accessible health care. So, as we inaugurate the Postgraduate Colleges of Health Specialties – that is Nursing and Midwifery, Physicians and Surgeons, and Pharmacists -- and Induction of Foundation Fellows, I want to say that this is indeed a proud and momentous occasion for me and for the nation as a whole.

11. The Chairman of Council earlier read out the comfortless and dreary statistics of specialists in-country – most of whom are close to retirement: 2 ear, nose, and throat (ENT) surgeons to over 7 million people; 1 local anesthetist to over 7 million people; 3 dental surgeons to over 7 million people; 8 pediatricians to over 7 million people; 6 obstetricians and gynecologists – all practicing in the Western Area Urban – to over 7 million people. Add that to the scarcity of clinical nurse specialists in all areas, especially in maternal and child health units. Most Government-sponsored medical specialists who have been or are trained abroad have reneged on their commitment to return and serve in Sierra Leone.

12. With limited diagnostic and specialist care in the country, my government spends an inordinate amount of our limited foreign currency to medically evacuate our citizens to other countries in the region, Europe, and Asia for specialised medical care. By investing in training Sierra Leonean specialists in the different disciplines, we are not only providing services to our citizens, but we are also saving an incredible amount of financial resources that could potentially be re-invested in improving healthcare infrastructure and healthcare service delivery in our country.

13. So, to borrow the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, “We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. [. . .]. This is no time for apathy or complacency. This is a time for vigorous and positive action.” With this inauguration and induction, today is the day when we change health outcomes for millions of our citizens living and millions more of our future citizens.

14. Even within and beyond COVID, we believe, as a government, that specialized medical education and training is a core component of healthcare systems strengthening and resilience. As I stated earlier, we have invested extensively in recruiting and training healthcare workers who can be deployed across the country. But we also need specialists trained to very high levels of proficiency to manage complex cases, to demonstrate professionalism and work ethic, to support continuous professional development, to pursue research and build knowledge around our country’s unique disease burdens, to lead in innovation and partnerships, and to

manage and provide leadership within our healthcare structures right across the country.

15. With this program in full operation over the next five years, Sierra Leone, I am informed, will produce highly trained consultants in Obstetrics and Gynecology, Pediatrics, Medical-Surgical Disciplines, Pharmacy, Nursing and Midwifery who will be deployed right across the country to serve rural, peri-urban, and urban populations of our nation.

16. I want to challenge these specialists trained within and dispersed throughout the country, to cultivate and maintain a culture of inquiry and a deep desire to innovate, answer key medical research questions, adopt and adapt effective practices that will upgrade healthcare delivery with a strong focus on achieving improved health outcomes.

17. These Postgraduate Colleges of Health Specialties are of national strategic interest. My government shares the aspirations of the Council as articulated by the Chairman of Council earlier. I am heartened by the optimism and determination of the Council to pursue our common goal as a nation. My government will support trainees with scholarships/grants-in-aid at existing levels with a clear and enforceable commitment to serve for a determined minimum period.

18. The Council should also do some creative thinking around leveraging partnerships with well-resourced foreign institutions and working with the private sector. My government stands ready to explore sustainable financing models and work with our international partners to support the quality of instruction and facilities.

19. Let me conclude by casting the burden of hope on the Council that we will soon achieve the dream of specialist care in every District of this country. The people of this country deserve no less. For the inducted Fellows of this programme, I sincerely hope that you remain committed to your profession and continue to provide the very best in patient care that we have come to expect of specialists. For the honorary fellows inducted today, let us all continue to support the growth and development of our colleges.

20. We must believe in ourselves and in our ability to build this country the way we want it to look -- one healthcare professional at a time; one healthcare facility at a time but with an ever stronger and ever more resilient healthcare system.

I thank you.