



**STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY, DR. JULIUS MAADA BIO, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE, AT THE OFFICIAL CEREMONY OF THE APPOINTMENT OF MRS. FATIMA MAADA BIO, FIRST LADY OF THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE, AS AFRICAN CHAMPION FOR SANITATION AND HYGIENE FOR THE AFRICAN MINISTERS COUNCIL ON WATER (AMCOW). FREETOWN, STATE HOUSE, 27<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2021**

The Honourable Vice President,  
The First Lady,  
Visiting Excellencies,  
Ministers of Government,  
Members of Parliament,  
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Good morning.

1. Let me, from the outset, welcome each and every one of our distinguished visitors to our warm and peaceful Sierra Leone. I am hopeful you have had some time to try the local cuisine, enjoyed our golden beaches, and partaken of that fabled Sierra Leonean hospitality.
2. This event is particularly significant because it is a ceremony at which a very passionate Sierra Leonean who has provided leadership for causes that have changed attitudes and life outcomes is being recognised.
3. We are especially proud of her extensive work throughout Sierra Leone with “Hands Off Our Girls.” Madam First Lady, as a result of your fervent advocacy for gender empowerment and for the protection of women against sexual and gender based violence, more girls are now safer in their communities and schools; more girls persist in school and are not forced into early marriages; more girls have access to menstrual hygiene products; and there is greater recognition of the immense potential of girls in fostering sustainable and inclusive development in Sierra Leone.
4. Equality, equity, access, and empowerment are suddenly not incidental to how girls see themselves and believe in themselves in Sierra Leone. Congratulations again, Mrs Fatima Maada Bio, Sierra Leone is very proud of this continental recognition of your selfless and committed leadership. Thank you.
5. As a country, we are also truly proud of AMCOW’s leadership in shaping continent-wide policies on water, sanitation, and hygiene. Your work is critical to our achieving a continental and global aspiration to provide access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation. It is recognised by the United Nations General Assembly as a

human right. But more importantly, we believe that it supports the realisation of all human capital development goals and it is integral to our country's Medium Term National Development.

6. I look forward to the AMCOW Secretariat's formal launch of the African Sanitation Policy Guidelines in June of this year. My Government looks forward to working with the secretariat to strengthen the enabling environment, develop infrastructure, and improve the delivery of services in the WASH sector.
7. In Sierra Leone, we believe access to safe water, sanitation, and hygiene, especially for women and girls, is critical to their everyday well-being, domestic needs, and their reproductive and menstrual health. But WASH policies, programmes, and activities have not always included the voices and needs of women.
8. As a country, we believe that should change. In their communities and nationally, we believe that women should be central to planning, designing, implementing, managing, and assessing the impact of water and sanitation interventions. This gender-responsive and gender-sensitive approach aligns with UN, continental, and our national aspirations to achieve comprehensive gender equality and empowerment for women and girls. Our recent Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Policy provides us a comprehensive framework for our work in that regard.
9. Our human capital development priorities— access to quality education, access to quality healthcare services, and food security – aim to maximise the productivity of our citizens. Clearly, poor health outcomes as a consequence of lack of access to water, sanitation, and hygiene adversely affect the quality of life and the inclusive and sustainable

development goals we hope to achieve with our human capital development imperative.

10. My Government is therefore rehabilitating dams, expanding distribution networks, installing gravity fed water supply systems, drilling solar-powered borehole systems and stand posts, and optimising water treatment and supply stations right across the country. There is also greater access to sanitation and hygiene infrastructure and knowledge. The foregoing and additional measures have increased access to potable water and reduced disease incidence right across the country.
11. But in all of this, the mobilisation of Governments and communities to prioritise equity of access to Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene is critical. Women and children should be empowered to be agents of transformation and change. As noted earlier, WASH strategies and policies should be gender-responsive and gender-sensitive for good reason. The First Lady's passion, drive, and intense commitment to changing lives will be invaluable in that regard. My Government looks forward to working closely with AMCOW and The First Lady's Secretariat.
12. Let me close by re-stating my Government's and my country's firm commitment to accelerating achievements in the WASH sector. Once more, I want to thank AMCOW and congratulate The First Lady of the Republic of Sierra Leone, Mrs Fatima Bio, for this continental recognition.

I thank you.