



**STATEMENT BY H. E. DR. JULIUS MAADA BIO,
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE
AT THE 2021 UN HIGH LEVEL MEETING ON HIV
AND AIDS, JUNE 8, 2021**

Your Excellency, Mr. Volkan Bozkir, President of the General Assembly,
Your Excellencies, Heads of State and Governments,
Your Excellency, Mr. Antonio Guterres, Secretary General
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen;

1. I commend you, Mr. President, in keeping with the mandate of the General Assembly, to organize this High-Level Meeting on HIV and AIDS. Sierra Leone fully supports the Political Declaration adopted today -- "Ending inequalities and getting on track to end AIDS by 2030." Sierra Leone is fully committed to its full and effective implementation.
2. The Global AIDS response over the last three decades has largely reduced AIDS related deaths and prevented new infections. More community engagement; greater use of innovative technology; and the introduction of new medications have contributed to that progress.
3. But most countries have missed the 2020 Global 90:90:90 fast track prevention and treatment targets. The COVID-19 pandemic has deepened inequalities and reversed economic progress in many countries. Women, girls, and vulnerable key population groups continue to suffer sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and human rights violations that increase their vulnerability to HIV and AIDS. Addressing those gender and structural inequalities within the context of human capital development is therefore critical.
4. My Government has strengthened sexual offences laws, fast-tracked prosecution, and established one-stop centres for rape. The First Lady has led a vigorous nationwide advocacy campaign, "Hands Off Our Girls," that addresses SGBV, child marriage, teenage pregnancy, and menstrual hygiene, among others.
5. WASH interventions, comprehensive sexuality education, and reversing the ban on pregnant girls in school have all contributed to higher retention and completion rates for girls. A gender equality and women's empowerment policy and a national male involvement strategy have also been developed to address gender inequalities.
6. Excellencies, without predictable investments, we risk reversing progress made over the last three decades. This is the time for global solidarity, shared responsibility, and accountability. We must increase domestic and other financing and sustain investments for the global and national AIDS responses. We cannot afford another upsurge of new HIV infections and related deaths.
7. We must also address major barriers to HIV prevention and access to treatment services including stigma, discrimination, and human rights violation. We must work together to remove all structural, legal, and operational barriers that limit access to HIV-AIDS services by vulnerable populations.
8. I believe that ending AIDS as a public health threat by 2030 is possible. The time to act is now.