



STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY, DR. JULIUS MAADA BIO, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE AT THE FORMAL PRESENTATION OF THE ANNUAL REPORT AND STRATEGIC PLAN OF THE NATIONAL ELECTIONS COMMISSION. STATE HOUSE, 8th JUNE 2021

The Chief Minister,
Ministers of Government,
Honourable Members of Parliament,
Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps,
The Chief Electoral Commissioner
Members of the National Electoral Commission,
Our Revered Traditional and Religious leaders,
Civil Society, the Press, Rights Groups and Representatives,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,
Good afternoon.

1. Let me start by thanking the Chief Electoral Commissioner for his very comprehensive presentation this afternoon. I also thank members of the commission and other stakeholders for their great work in consolidating our democracy by ensuring free, fair, and inclusive elections processes based on clear and predictable timelines.

2. As a Government, we are also pleased that our development partners have kept the faith with us. Through their staunch support and commitment, they have demonstrated that they trust us and want to achieve the outcomes we have laid out for our elections and for our democracy.

3. Two weeks ago, Rosemary DiCarlo, the United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, who is also the United Nations Focal Point for Electoral Assistance Matters, informed my Government of the readiness of the United Nations to provide technical assistance to the National Electoral Commission for the upcoming local, parliamentary, and presidential elections.

4. I would also like to publicly thank the European Commission (EU). As the Chief Electoral Commissioner indicated in his statement, the European Union has supported elections in various areas since 2019 through the EU project, "Strengthening the Governance Sector in Sierra Leone." Thank you.

5. My Government also notes the remarkable progress the Commission has made in reviewing the 2015-2019 strategic plan, reflecting on the

implementation of that strategic plan, and proposing effective measures to address gaps and other perceived areas of improvement.

6. Ultimately, my Government is determined to ensure that every eligible Sierra Leonean is able to vote in a free, fair, and transparent electoral process, and every vote is counted. That is what enriches and sustains our democracy. To us, as a Government, democratic elections must be inclusive, peaceful, transparent, and credible, and its outcomes must be fully representative of the free democratic wishes of the electorate.

7. I note also, with great satisfaction, that for the entire duration of your tenure thus far, you have conducted peaceful, transparent, and fair elections at all levels, and that results have been widely accepted by all contestants and stakeholders.

8. Additionally, I acknowledge the work of the Elections Conflict Prevention and Mediation Group in that regard. I thank civil society and rights organisations, inter-religious leaders, women's groups, youth organisations, and the fourth estate, for collectively calling for peaceful elections and for proactively engaging all stakeholders. Peaceful elections and seamless transitions of power are indeed a sine qua non for a peaceful democracy. Let us all, as a nation, continue to pursue what is best for Sierra Leone.

9. So the theme of the 2020-2024 Strategic Plan -- "Strengthening Electoral Processes for Maximum Performance" -- particularly resonates with the outcomes my Government believes this country deserves -- inclusive, peaceful, transparent, and credible elections.

10. My Government is fully committed to supporting the capital projects -- infrastructural and logistical -- you have listed, as they are critical to further bolstering our electoral system. The National Election Sustainability Trust Fund has been designed to provide predictable and sustainable funding of core electoral programmes. I call on development partners to fully support this initiative. Thus, our electoral timetables and activities will be unaffected by funding constraints. This, and Pillar 9, ICT infrastructure and results management, are critical. Implementing the goals of Pillar 9 broadly in time

and to scale at the district levels will support more accurate, more transparent, and faster tallies.

11. With respect to recommendations and potential electoral law changes, we are committed to fully pursuing the procedure as laid out in all existing laws. We intend to be transparent and to fully communicate about every step of the process in order to avert dark rumours and unseemly conspiracy theories.

12. I want to particularly focus on Strategic Pillar 8 which deals with inclusion, participation, and equity. My Government approaches that pillar from a rights perspective – that every citizen has an equal and inalienable right to fully participate in political life, to fully participate in political debate, to be consulted, to vote, and to be voted for. Gender, sexuality, disability, age, youth, levels of literacy must not be hindrances. They must be fully accounted for in inclusive democratic elections at all levels. The views and voices of every citizen must matter on how to move this nation forward. My Government will therefore work with all stakeholders and development partners in ensuring that the future of elections in Sierra Leone is fully inclusive.

13. Let me conclude by thanking the Chief Electoral Commissioner and the entire Commission for their continuing work. I hereby formally receive the Commission's Annual Report for the year ending 2020 and formally launch the Strategic Plan for the 2020-2024 Electoral Cycle.

I thank you.