



**STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY, DR. JULIUS MAADA  
BIO, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE,  
ON THE OCCASION OF SIGNING INTO LAW OF THE  
ABOLITION OF THE DEATH PENALTY IN SIERRA LEONE.  
STATE HOUSE, FREETOWN, 8<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2021**

The Honourable Vice President,  
Ministers of Government,  
Honourable Members of Parliament,  
Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps,  
Commissioners of the Human Rights Commission,  
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Good morning.

- 1.** Today, we have again made history. As a nation, we have today exorcised horrors of a cruel past.
- 2.** When I first proposed abolishing the death penalty in all totality for all capital crimes, there was widespread scepticism, cynicism, and outright hostility.
- 3.** Some cautioned that it was unwise to let go of the ultimate cudgel that had kept political opponents in line. Others wondered whether that was really what I wanted to do. Those who did not wish to be seen as hard dissenters made counter proposals that we could keep the death penalty for some crimes.
- 4.** My position was a hard and firm NO to the death penalty in all its forms and for all crimes. The state has absolutely no obligation to undertake judicial killings of its own citizens in order to instil law and order or for political gain. The all-too-familiar phrase of "hanging persons by the neck until they die" or "tying persons at a stake and gunning them down" is cruel, inhumane, and degrading. We are a civilised nation. We should not; we shall not; and we will never again execute any persons in this sovereign republic.
- 5.** As President, I have made a solemn commitment to good governance, justice, and to upholding, promoting, and protecting the lives and rights of every citizen. Our governance and justice sector reforms have opened up more democratic spaces, unfettered free speech, and expanded access to justice for hitherto unserved and under-served populations.
- 6.** We are investing in people through quality education, quality healthcare, and food security. We are bridging gender, social, and other structural gaps that have long denied Sierra Leoneans the opportunity to be all they can be and contribute their fair share to a sustainable and inclusive future for our nation.
- 7.** But the real heroes of today are citizens who for sixty years have cowered in real fear for their inalienable and inviolable right to life.
- 8.** I want to thank those who have lived with the pain of losing a loved one to a judicial execution. I wish to thank journalists, activists, and civil

society and rights groups in Sierra Leone and outside Sierra Leone that campaigned tirelessly for this day. I wish to thank commissioners of the Human Rights Commission for their persistence. I wish to thank ordinary Sierra Leoneans who, in their hundreds and their thousands, have urged fellow citizens to do right and remove this dastardly law. I wish to thank international partners who supported and affirmed our drive to abolish this law in its totality. I wish to thank members of Government and members of the legislature who argued, hedged, but stayed focused on passing this historic act of parliament that we are today signing into law.

**9.** With the abolition of the death penalty in Sierra Leone, we today assert our belief in the sanctity of life, affirm every citizen's constitutional right to life, and commit ourselves to a future of great optimism, social justice, and respect for all persons.

**10.** We share the core belief at the heart of all universal declarations of human rights and all international conventions and covenants that condemn the death penalty. Today, we honour a key recommendation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. We will no longer execute fellow citizens for political retribution, for deterrence of crimes, or for crimes. We believe that the act is unfair, disproportionate, and immoral. It brutalises our values, our laws, and our conscience as a nation.

**11.** So let me close by drawing our attention to the indelible recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

**12.** "53. Respect for human dignity and human rights must begin with respect for human life. Everyone has the right to life. A society that accords the highest respect for human life is unlikely to turn on itself."

**13.** The Commission then recommends the immediate repeal by Parliament of all laws authorising capital punishment. The report furthers:

**14.** "57. [. . .] The state must now set the example by demonstrating that it places the highest value on all human life. The abolition of the death penalty will mark an important and symbolic departure from the past to the future."

**15.** Twenty years on, we have completed the promise we made ourselves as a nation. Twenty years on, the death penalty is finally, and totally abolished in the Republic of Sierra Leone.

I thank you and God bless Sierra Leone.