



**STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY, DR. JULIUS
MAADA BIO, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC
OF SIERRA LEONE, AT THE FORMAL SIGNING
OF THE CYBERSECURITY AND CRIME BILL
INTO LAW. 17TH NOVEMBER 2021**

The Honourable Vice President,
The Honourable Speaker of Parliament,
Ministers of Government,
Honourable Members of Parliament present,
Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,
Good morning.

1. Our presence here this morning underscores our recognition that digital technologies are to the 21st Century what the steam engine was to the Industrial Revolution. They are truly transformational.
2. When one looks at the spectrum of crises across the world from the COVID-19 pandemic, the new global economy, global education, global communications, and the effects of climate change, one recognizes the ubiquitous and transformative impact of digital technologies in identifying, mitigating, and innovatively tackling these new global challenges.
3. Greater digital connectivity, digital automation technologies, and the harnessing and analysis of big data sets, among others, are driving everything from innovation and research, to education, healthcare, entrepreneurship, the economy, to governance and more.
4. I also see digital technologies as enablers that will accelerate and drive the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals depending on how intentional we are about introducing them, how we scale their impact, and how accessible and inclusive those digital technologies are to our populations.
5. To that end, Sierra Leone has associated with the UN Secretary General's call for developing a "storefront" for digital public goods across the SDGs, for more connectivity, and for greater international cooperation in defining governance and cooperation.
6. At the local levels, Sierra Leone has focused on developing digital technologies and expanding access to those technologies. Our young population and our investments in free quality education as well as in science, technology and innovation underline our strong aspiration that we will no longer be at the receiving end of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.
7. Since 2018 also, Sierra Leone now has wider mobile telephone coverage, more use of mobile technologies, more internet connectivity, and more access to digital communication apps and content. Communications, financial transactions and banking, access to services have all been enhanced as a consequence.
8. As we embrace digital technologies and participate in that digital space, we must also invest in digital infrastructure and introduce the

required legal and regulatory reforms to support that participation. We must tackle questions of access and inclusion but also deal with digital freedoms and rights. We must also prioritise the safe and secure uses of digital technologies so that digital technologies support inclusive national development.

9. At the sub-regional level, I agree with the ECOWAS representative that we need a holistic and coordinated approach to develop and secure our cyberspace, augment our cyber-hygiene, strengthen our cybersecurity, and thus build our cyber-resilience in the sub-region.

10. The European Union representative also acknowledges that the bill I am about to sign into law is consistent with the Budapest Convention on cybercrime, The African Union's Malabo Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection, and the ECOWAS directive on fighting cybercrime. So, our law is therefore not a standalone contrivance for shoddy political ends. As the EU representative has noted, it is consistent with the international gold standard Budapest Convention on cybercrime.

11. The EU's position on cooperation on questions of the rule of law in cyberspace especially given what he terms "shifting or unknown jurisdictions," protocols on disclosure of electronic evidence, instant cooperation in emergency situations where lives are at risk, and safeguards to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms and the protection of personal data are all agreeable.

12. Especially, the European Union and Council of Europe acknowledge that this new law provides a basis for continued dialogue and cooperation and also an imminent invitation to Sierra Leone to accede to the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime. Sierra Leone looks forward to accession and also working closely with the EU to strengthen our capacity to apply our domestic legislation and to promote effective international cooperation.

13. There are still a lot of moving parts to this, but let me first congratulate the Minister of Information, Mohamed Rahman Swarray, for his multi-stakeholder engagement in driving this much-needed reform.

14. Civil society, the press, citizens, have all contributed immensely to shaping this final product we have. Thank you for your ideas, your thoughts, and your perspectives.

15. I also thank the Honourable Speaker of Parliament and our honourable Members of Parliament for the vibrant debates around the bill and the inordinate bi-partisan support for the final bill.

16. Sierra Leone also thanks partners for not only supporting the development of our nation's cybersecurity capabilities but also for assuring us of future cooperation in mitigating cyber threats and cybercrime.

17. We thank the Council of Europe through the Global Action on Cybercrime Extended -- the GLACY+ project -- for its technical support and guidance in developing this law.

18. We also thank the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office through the Global Partners Digital for working with us to undertake the National Cybersecurity Risk Assessment and for supporting the development of our National Cybersecurity Policy and strategy.

19. We also thank the European Union through our regional body, ECOWAS, for providing support for the establishment of our first ever National Computer Security Incidence Response Centre. Thank you for supporting capacity development for our law enforcement agencies. That is indeed a key requirement for the effective implementation of this law.

20. Overall, this general cooperation demonstrates a collective and shared global interest in working on cybersecurity and crime. Sierra Leone looks forward to more cooperation, more capacity development, more resource and technical support, and more experience-sharing in the years ahead.

It is therefore a great moment of honour to sign into law, the Cybersecurity and Crime Act 2021.