



**BROADCAST TO THE NATION BY HIS
EXCELLENCY, DR. JULIUS MAADA BIO,
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA
LEONE ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF
PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES,
3 DECEMBER 2021**

Fellow Sierra Leoneans,

1. Today, we acknowledge the extensive contributions to national development by all persons living with disabilities. We also congratulate them for their great show of resilience even amidst the daunting challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic period.
2. As we continue to fight this global pandemic, I urge persons living with disabilities to follow all public health guidelines aimed at curtailing and protecting against COVID-19 and to also volunteer to be vaccinated at any of the free facilities throughout the country.
3. Our approach to working on disability aligns with United Nations policies and strategies and it is fully embedded in our country's Mid-Term National Development Plan. Over the last year, we have participated fully in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and other such international activities and funding appeals.
4. We proceed from the premise that disability is not inability. We believe that national interventions and investments must be designed and implemented only by paying close attention to the living experiences and perspectives of persons living with disabilities. Ultimately, our objective is to create a more inclusive, peaceful, and just society.
5. Our national actions have been focused on achieving disability-inclusive Sustainable Development Goals. Our radical inclusion policy undergirds the rights to education and participation in sports. Government has increased funding support for special needs education and for providing assistive learning devices.
6. Our approach to advancing rights and human dignity --especially gender and children's rights -- social protection; and poverty alleviation is disability sensitive and inclusive. I have instructed the Minister of Social Welfare to establish a public-private partnership SORIHART FUND that will provide seed money for addressing street-begging among persons living with disabilities in the country.

7. The National Commission for Social Action has expanded its Social Safety Net Programme to cover persons with disabilities. Additionally, my Government has increased budgetary allocations to the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities and we will continue to work to strengthen the institution.

8. We are expanding access to healthcare for persons with disabilities including home and clinic-based care for over 950 children with disabilities. We have also provided mobility devices to persons living with disabilities and conducted an extensive audit of access to public buildings with the objective of making public buildings more accessible to persons living with disabilities.

9. We have used an integrated community-based approach. We work with community leaders to make their communities more inclusive for all persons with disabilities. We have worked with partners to modernise and extend mental healthcare for all and to also provide psycho-social support to persons living with disabilities and their families.

10. Our incremental investments in public service delivery, food security, quality education, and skills development support our inclusive national priorities of human capital development.

11. As President, I am fully committed to doing more. I encourage persons living with disabilities to advocate more, own programmes designated for their well-being, fully participate in skills development and empowerment programmes, and to work on achieving everything any citizen can achieve. I also encourage all of us to renounce violence and take our civic responsibilities very seriously.

12. The theme for this year's commemoration - "Leadership and participation of persons with disabilities: towards an inclusive, accessible, and sustainable post-COVID-19 world" - resonates with the strategic thrust of our national action plan. We recognise that women and children living with disabilities are hardest hit and furthest left behind especially during this COVID-19 period. We also acknowledge that they are agents of change in their communities.

13. Our approach as a Government, therefore, is to continue proposing and implementing enabling laws and policies that support persons living with disabilities, undertaking public education to eliminate exclusionary social and cultural attitudes, and supporting persons living with disabilities to achieve their full potential through skills training and empowerment schemes.

14. I thank the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Population Fund for implementing disability-inclusion-related programmes. I also thank Organisations of Persons with Disabilities and local and international partners for their continuing collaboration with my government in promoting, protecting, the full participation of persons living with disabilities.

15. My government is fully committed to eliminating systemic and other barriers and to creating an accessible, just, and inclusive society for all citizens, especially persons with disabilities.

I thank you and God bless Sierra Leone.