



**STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY, DR. JULIUS
MAADA BIO, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF
SIERRA LEONE, AT THE CEREMONY FOR THE
CONFERMENT OF CITIZENSHIP. FREETOWN, STATE
HOUSE, 3 DECEMBER 2021**

Ministers of Government,
Honourable Members of Parliament,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Oona kusheh,

1. Just over a week ago, Ahmaud Arbery received justice. We, black people, across several continents, collectively exhaled.
2. Our call for justice has been unanimously re-echoed through hundreds of years of our shared history – a history of racial, cultural, economic, social, and political injustice.
3. It is a history that hearkens back to the ports of no return, the plantations, Jim Crow, the Civil Rights era, to NOW.
4. In spite of centuries of bitter separation, we have always known that we are tied together at the navel. After so many centuries, science and DNA have helped us ascertain that we have a common heritage and a common ancestry. We are all Sierra Leoneans and we have always been. Welcome home.
5. You must have read or heard Jackie Earley's poem, "1968 Winters"

*Got up this morning
Feeling good & black
Thinking black thoughts
Did black things. . . and so on and so forth*

6. But instead of the final lines of Jackie Earley's poem, "*Lawd have mercy / White Snow!*" – I am sure you have woken up each morning in Sierra Leone and said to yourself, "Lawd have mercy, bright sunshine, beautiful beaches, green hilltops, historical sites, amazing culture, beautiful people." This is home. This is indeed the NOW. Welcome home.
7. We have shed the narratives of violence and fear that were woven about us over two decades ago. We have bounced back stronger.
8. Welcome to the fourth most peaceful country in Africa. Welcome to the country that is in the top tier in Africa for religious tolerance, personal freedoms, freedom of expression, and hospitality.

9. Welcome to the country where we are investing in people and promoting and protecting rights. Welcome to the country where women's right is a passion; where radical inclusion means all and everyone; and where we are legislating a gender equality and women's empowerment law.
10. Welcome to the country where for three straight years, the US Government's Millennium Challenge Corporation has rated this country very highly for ruling justly and for investing in people.
11. In spite of constraints imposed by COVID-19, our economic fundamentals are strong and we are working to diversify the economy with investment-friendly incentives.
12. In September of this year, I met a number of African American lawmakers in Washington DC. I walked away from each meeting excited and energised about what we spoke about – the joy of working together, the possibilities, and the opportunities.
13. It is that same energy that I sense in this room today – good Sierra Leoneans like you willing to make lives better; good people like you working to make Sierra Leone a better place.
14. We have Bryon Washington, Damon Haley, Kevin Grant, and Shameka Gray, among others, who are keen to invest in technology and manufacturing.
15. We have Dori Massey-Turay, Geraldine Cheeks, Shawna Nelson, and Kiyana Horton who are interested in investing in tourism.
16. There is Ashley Johnson, Heather Roberts, Sheril McGriff, and Lakeisha Matthews who are keen to invest in education.
17. There is Marchella Vann, Dierdre Gordon, Debbie Jefferson, and Tiffany McFarlane who are interested in investing in healthcare.

18. There are the bankers Yokota Strong and Joe Jackson. There are also Bart Bundy, Norma Bob-Semple, Rodney Sarvis, and Manktwas Richardson, among others, who are interested in agriculture.
19. The list goes on and on and more so for those brothers and sisters I may not have called out. But each of you has committed to not only be part of this homeland but to actively invest in Sierra Leone. You are an integral part of the new story of this Sierra Leone that we are rebuilding.
20. As we formally handover your passports to you today, know too that your obligations to Sierra Leone are enormous. As we collectively sing in the first few lines of our national anthem:

*High we exalt thee, Realm of the Free
Great is the love we have for thee [. . .]*
21. You focus on what you love. You invest your energy and passion in what you love. You let your friends know about what you love and love what you love. You protect what you love.
22. So, let me close by entreating you to focus on Sierra Leone, invest your energies in Sierra Leone, convince your networks to take a favourable look at Sierra Leone, and protect the good name and image of Sierra Leone at all times.
23. Today, history has got it right again. You are once more what you always were. You are Sierra Leoneans.

Congratulations and thank you for your attention.