



**STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY, DR.
JULIUS MAADA BIO, PRESIDENT OF THE
REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE AT THE
EXTRAORDINARY SESSION OF THE
ECOWAS AUTHORITY OF HEADS OF STATE
AND GOVERNMENT, ACCRA, 9TH JANUARY
2022**

Your Excellency, Nana Addo Dankwa AKUFO-ADDO, President of the Republic of Ghana and Chair of the Authority of Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS;

Your Excellencies, Colleague Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS;

Your Excellency, Jean-Claude Kassi Brou, President of the ECOWAS Commission;

Your Excellencies, Representatives of the African Union, United Nations, and other International Organisations;

Distinguished Ladies & Gentlemen:

1. Permit me, from the outset, to convey warm greetings and the very best wishes for the New Year to citizens of our community from the Government and People of Sierra Leone.
2. Let me also express my sincere thanks and appreciation to President Akufo-Addo, President of the Republic of Ghana and the Chair of the Authority of Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS, for the high calibre of leadership and commitment he has demonstrated throughout.
3. Let me commend the warm Ghanaian hospitality accorded to me and my delegation since our arrival in Accra and for the excellent facilities at our disposal.
4. New strains of the COVID-19 virus have imposed continuing constraints on lives and livelihoods in our community. There is consensus that inequitable access to and distribution of vaccines hinder the global fight against COVID 19. We join those global voices that argue that until all of us are safe, no one is safe.
5. Our region wishes to increase vaccination rates and there is a moral imperative for vaccine equity if we are to get back on course to meeting the SDGs and fighting poverty in our region. I also urge greater cooperation within our community in this continuing fight against COVID-19.

THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN MALI

6. I would like to commend His Excellency Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, the ECOWAS Mediator for Mali, and the President and Staff of the ECOWAS Commission, for their untiring efforts to ensure Peace and Security in the ECOWAS region in general and especially in the Republic of Mali. In that sister Republic, constitutional order has been disrupted for over 18 months now.

7. My Government endorses the report of the 35th Meeting of the ECOWAS Mediation and Security Council as it contains pertinent issues that will bring complete Peace and Security to the sub-region.

8. Let me reiterate Sierra Leone's continued support for the ECOWAS position on Mali which calls for a speedy return to democratic governance through free and fair elections within the earliest possible time frame.

9. I also want to commend and appreciate the Transition Leadership of the Republic of Mali for their commitment to restore constitutional order in Mali within the shortest possible time. That commitment was demonstrated during the first week of January 2022, when I received in Freetown, Mr. Abdoulaye Diop, the Foreign Minister of the Republic of Mali and Special Envoy of His Excellency Colonel Assimi Goïta, President of the Transition in Mali.

10. During the meeting, we shared experiences with them regarding a transition from military rule to democratic civilian governance. In Sierra Leone's political history, the military conducted elections and peacefully handed the reins of power to a democratically elected Government. We encouraged the Transition leadership in Mali to think along the same lines and return the Republic of Mali to constitutional order within the earliest time possible.

11. Excellencies, without a doubt, Mali has violated the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance of 2001 by toppling the government of former President Ibrahima Boubacar Keita in 2020. It was an unconstitutional act.

12. But Excellencies, the issue before us today is what to do collectively to ensure that Mali complies with the ECOWAS norms on democracy and good governance and within the shortest possible timeline.

13. On numerous occasions, the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State has called on Mali to return the country to constitutional order by February 2022. But it is also clear to all of us, that the Transitional Leadership Malian junta is unable to do so based on communications submitted to the Chair of Authority.

14. There is an impasse. As leaders in the ECOWAS region, we need to find a solution to this impasse. We can all agree that the proposed period of 5 years is excessive especially in view of the fact that the current leadership has been in power for over 18 months now.

15. But we are not dealing with a simple and normal situation. Mali is facing serious challenges to peace and security in the form of an insurgency, terrorism, jihadism, banditry around transhumance, and other forms of criminality including ethnic conflict and land disputes. This has further complicated and aggravated the already dire humanitarian situation in the Republic of Mali. Additionally, there is an absence of government and state authority in large parts of the country.

16. While we could argue that electoral politics is possible even in the midst of a violent insurgency, we must first agree on what ecosystem should exist within which credible elections can happen. In agreeing to a time frame for the Malian junta to fully comply with ECOWAS dicta, we should therefore be mindful of the unique complexities of the Malian crisis. I, therefore, urge all of us to galvanise our collective efforts to agree on a practicable timeline with concrete checkpoints and benchmarks on an agreed pathway to returning the Republic of Mali to constitutional order within the shortest possible time.

17. Additionally, we must call on the Malian Transitional Authorities to commit to fight this insurgency to the fullest and to work with other countries within the Sahel region to ensure that peace and security is restored.

18. Let me also take this opportunity to reiterate my Government's support for the draft revised Protocol on Democracy and good governance as well as the constitutional issue of a two-term limit. Sierra Leone believes that the two-term limit must be included in the national constitutions of all Member States.

19. On the issue of terrorism, Sierra Leone appeals to all states to fight this menace. We must continue to work in close collaboration with ECOWAS to prevent, curtail, and fight any form of terrorist activities in the region. To that end, Sierra Leone's newly established Counter Terrorism Centre is currently working closely with the United Nations Office on Counter Terrorism.

20. As I conclude, let me reaffirm my Government's full support for ECOWAS in its effort to address issues that affect the region with a view to maintaining Good Governance, Peace and Stability. I also wish to express my sincere thanks and appreciation for the very successful meeting of the just concluded 60th Ordinary Meeting of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of States and Government held in Abuja in December 2021.

21. Excellencies, I wish all of us very successful deliberations as we discuss issues that will progress development, peace, security and stability in our region.

I thank you for your kind attention.