



**STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY DR JULIUS
MAADA BIO PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF
SIERRA LEONE AT THE LAUNCH OF THE NATIONAL
SPORTS DEVELOPMENT FUND. FREETOWN, 14TH
DECEMBER 2021**

Ministers of Government,
Honourable Members of Parliament,
Private Sector Partners,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning,

1. I am tempted, and I will draw our attention back, to what obtained for eleven years in sports in Sierra Leone before I took the reins of government in 2018.
2. Football administration was in perennial crisis; the national football league had not been played for five years; and Sierra Leone had not qualified for any major regional or continental championship.
3. Sporting disciplines of all sorts had virtually disappeared from schools. Physical Education had been eliminated from the school curriculum. There was no clear strategic plan for the involvement and promotion of women and persons with disability in sports. Sierra Leone was not competitive in athletics or any other sporting disciplines.
4. Facilities – stadiums and community fields -- had fallen into rapid disrepair. Evidently, there was a very weak policy, legal, and institutional ecosystem for the survival of sports much less the promotion and development of sports in Sierra Leone.
5. Since 2018, Sierra Leone has participated in international athletics events in all genres and won gold, silver, and bronze medals. Our para-Olympians, women swimmers and sprinters, and even judokas have made us proud as a nation.
6. In tennis, our Under-12 Tennis team won a trophy in 2020 and 5 bronze medals in an international competition. In October 2021 again, they did us proud by winning a trophy and 5 silver medals in sub-regional championships.

7. In Cricket, the women's, senior, and junior national teams have secured 10 gold and 8 silver medals. The Sierra Leone Cricket Association is among other 40 countries that takes decisions on the development of Cricket in the world. Since 2018, Sierra Leone's national cricket teams have attained T20 and WT20 International status and gained promotion to the World Cricket League.
8. Since 2018 again, the National Karate Team has, for the first time ever, won 3 Gold Medals, 12 Silver Medals and 22 bronze medals in international competitions. The national Judo team has participated in a series of international competitions and the National Taekwondo team has been globally recognised and received international instructors from South Korea.
9. Since 2018, the Sierra Leone Men's National Volleyball Team is now rated 7th in Africa and the Women's National Volleyball Team also rated 11th in Africa. Just this year, the national beach volleyball team defeated Cape Verde.
10. For the first time in the history of this country, the international Boxing Federation has constructed a Boxing Ring worth over \$150,000.00 at the Bo Stadium and the Sierra Leone national boxing team has participated in the just-concluded World Boxing Championships in Serbia.
11. I have personally reached out to sportsmen and women of Sierra Leonean heritage and established strong relationships – from my great friendship with Antonio Rüdiger to meeting with the Tiafoe family in Maryland.
12. After five years of complete gloom and stagnation, my Government provided seed money for re-organising the Sierra Leone National Premier league. The move has been described as bold and audacious and the league has lived up to its promise as one of the better-organised football leagues on the continent. We can do even better to match other powerhouses.

13. But the dividends have been swift and been a great source of national pride for all of us. Sierra Leone has moved ten places upwards in FIFA football world rankings. In June of this year, we beat Benin in Conakry to qualify for the African Nations Cup for the first time again in 25 years.
14. The ecstatic uproar of joy and national pride could not be missed. Tens of thousands of jubilating Sierra Leoneans jumped on to the streets in celebration from Makeni to Kambia, and from Kenema to Freetown.
15. What all of these achievements in less than four years show us is that there is great sporting talent in Sierra Leone to nurture. There are more international sporting talents waiting to blossom.
16. In spite of financial constraints, my Government has increased allocations to sports. We have expanded the investment base; we have refurbished facilities; we are re-introducing sports into schools; women and disabled persons are participating at the highest levels; and, we have established the necessary baseline for developing the sports industry in this country.
17. So, when we made specific commitments in our Manifesto and also in the Medium-Term National Development Plan, we were deliberate and intentional. It is because we believed then and still believe that sports is a great enabler of sustainable national development. Sports creates jobs and supports entrepreneurship. It supports gender equality and inclusion for persons with disabilities.
18. Our sportswomen have made us proud in recent international competitions. Sports and youth participation especially promote physical and mental well-being at the personal and community levels. As seen on the night of our great triumph as we qualified for the African Nations Cup and after, it unites our country. It is a great source of national unity and national pride. So, when we go to Yaoundé, Cameroon, in January 2022, we go as Sierra Leoneans united in our support for our great Leone Stars.

19. Former President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, was right when he said: "Sports has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire. It has the power to unite people in a way that little else does. Sports can awaken hope where there was previously only despair. Sports speaks to people in a language they can understand".
20. So, we have reorganised sports in this country and made the necessary legal, policy, and institutional changes to transform sports in this country. We believe we can achieve even more.
21. We are, therefore, establishing the National Sports Development Fund Account with a very clear view to supporting the overall objectives and activities of the National Sports Authority. It will support sports development, technical and coaching development, sports infrastructure development, and overall funding of sports competitions.
22. The Sports Fund Management Committee will be autonomous body that will make decisions on how funds are used transparently to support sports development and sports activities. There is a need for equal access to quality recreational services, and accessible sport facilities in schools and communities. There is a need for sports to be fully embedded in our human capital development priorities as a nation. It offers additional opportunities for career development that would otherwise not have existed.
23. With great pride and optimism, I, therefore, formally launch the National Sports Fund Account for Sierra Leone with a token contribution of Ten Billion Leones.

I thank you for your attention and God bless Sierra Leone.