



**STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY, DR.
JULIUS MAADA BIO, PRESIDENT OF THE
REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE AT THE
DINNER IN HONOUR OF THE VISITING
UNITED STATES CONGRESSIONAL
DELEGATION, FREETOWN, PRESIDENTIAL
LODGE - 20TH FEBRUARY 2022**

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Honourable Vice President,
Madam First Lady,
The Honourable Paramount Chief Gregory Meeks,
Honourable Ami Bera,
Honourable Ilhan Omar,
Honourable Joyce Beatty,
Honourable G.K. Butterfield,
Honourable Brenda L. Lawrence,
Honourable Troy A. Carter,
Our distinguished spouses and visiting family members,
Hardworking staffers,
Ministers of Government,
Honourable Members of Parliament,
Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good evening.

1. I am truly elated, on behalf of the people of this great Republic, to welcome each and every one of you to our humble home, Sierra Leone.
2. I know you have visited a site of great pain and sorrow – Bunce Island – where you vicariously relived the pain of parting, the sorrow of being forcefully taken away, forlorn, to a distant land.
3. But what they never took away from you and from us is our common humanity, our common ancestry, our common genealogy. So, we welcome each and every one of you today to this land of rolling hills and forests, alluring sandy beaches, and beautiful people. This is Sierra Leone.
4. Our rice-growing, rice-eating Gullah cousins from the South Carolina low country would say “*Cumya can’t tell binya.*” Those who arrive (*cumyas*) can’t tell those who have been here. This may well be true on both sides of the Atlantic. But we still eat and grow rice like them. We still weave *shukublys*, wear *sehbeh*, sing ring shouts, tell trickster stories, and eat okra and chitlins like them.
5. We are they and they are us. DNA and science have unveiled this rich tapestry of history, of memory, and of lineage. In the last two years, we have welcomed home brothers and sisters from the African Diaspora. This is home for us; this is home for you; and this will always be home away from home. Welcome to Sierra Leone.
6. Welcome to the fourth most peaceful country in Africa. Welcome to one of the most tolerant nations in the world. Welcome to our democracy where we have abolished the death penalty, permanently removed all criminal libel laws; clamped down on

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corruption; made tremendous progress in ruling justly; robustly fighting all forms of sexual and gender violence; taken progressive steps to assure gender empowerment and women's equality; expanded access to justice and promoted and protected people's rights; invested in human capital development as a national priority – free and quality education, quality and accessible healthcare, and food security.

7. Welcome to the country where we believe confronting challenges from climate change, trafficking in persons, investing in science and innovation, to making institutions more effective, among others, defines a renewed spirit of purpose and nationhood.

8. So let me again welcome every member of the delegation and all our friends in the diplomatic and consular corps to this dinner.

9. America's modern diplomatic relations with Sierra Leone started in the 1950s and have intensified since then. Through bilateral and multilateral agreements and engagements, America has contributed immensely to the socio-political and economic development of this nation whether through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Peace Corps Volunteers, local NGOs, Government agencies, religious organisations, or direct interventions in communities.

10. America's footprints in areas of cooperation include food security, education, healthcare, access to justice, national and maritime security, heritage and cultural preservation, trade and investment, and more. We look forward to further broadening and deepening our relations.

11. America has led by example and America has also challenged us to be better. For three straight years, we have passed all the critical indicators on the Millennium Challenge Corporation's scorecard for ruling justly, for the control of corruption, and for investing in people. We are now compact eligible and we have identified health and sanitation and access to energy as key constraints on our development.

12. We recognise and appreciate America's global leadership in maintaining peace, security, and stability. Sierra Leone leads the Committee of Ten African nations for the reform of the United Nations and chairs the African peer Review Mechanism. Sierra Leone has been unanimously endorsed for a Non-Permanent Seat in the UN Security Council for 2024-2025. We count on your support and we look forward to working with the United States of America in solving global challenges from climate change to pandemics and instability.

13. We share America's undaunted resolve for promoting and protecting democracy, good governance, and human rights. America has been there for Sierra Leone even when dark clouds gathered over the horizon.

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14. But I am even more heartened by your commitment in your interview with Judd Devermont, the director of the Africa Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in February last year.

15. You re-echoed President Biden's policy shift towards Africa in the usual eloquent Meek way. You argued that your goal is to reset United States' relationship with Africa. Building on shared trust and mutual respect, you stated that you would rather focus on "shared challenges, expanding people-to-people relationships and exchanges, building partnerships to increase youth participation in the digital workforce, and championing a more robust presence across the continent."

16. You highlighted other possibilities of collaboration and cooperation on security; climate change (its opportunities and challenges), cultural heritage and preservation, promoting the creative industries; technical support to promote and facilitate trade, working with African stakeholders to imagine and construct a functional and fair post-AGOA world where Africa is an active participant; develop a youth workforce grounded in digital and STEM education; to support diaspora investments in Africa; and on good governance, among others. Sierra Leone looks forward to working very closely on crafting a mutually beneficial relationship that supports the goals of that foreign policy reset.

17. Paramount Chief Meeks, I am truly touched by your thoughtfulness in making this trip with your illustrious delegation. I am humbled by your kind-spiritedness, moved by your commitment, and inspired by your leadership and passion.

18. From the depths of our hearts, welcome home. A Paramount Chief never stays far away from his people and his chieftom. This is your chieftom; we are your people.

Welcome and thank you for your kind attention.